

The Victory...

The astonishing feature of President Nixon's re-election victory is its uniformity. Not since President Roosevelt's sweep of all but two states in 1936 has a national candidate attracted support so clearly in every region and from virtually every segment of the voting population.

The Nixon majorities were greatest in the South but the million-vote margin in New York and the sizable victories in 49 of the 50 states were equally impressive. That contrasts with the Johnson landslide of eight years ago when the Deep South went counter to the trend in the rest of the nation. Mr. Nixon held his own among young voters and fared really badly only among black voters and the very poor.

The only defect in the President's remarkable political achievement was the relatively poor turnout. Unlike General Eisenhower's victory in 1952, for example, which was accomplished on a rising tide of greatly increased voter participation, Mr. Nixon won in the smallest turnout—percentagewise—in twenty-four years. The total vote was far smaller than the growth in population and the enfranchisement of 18-to-21-year-olds would have suggested.

President Nixon's diplomatic overtures to China and Russia clearly helped him with many voters. The bombing of North Vietnam combined with the aggressive and increasingly visible conduct of peace negotiations evidently found favor with the majority. On the domestic front, Mr. Nixon's intensive Keynesian pump-priming meant huge budget deficits but recharged a sluggish economy. In political terms, it did not seem to really matter whether these foreign and domestic policies had internal inconsistencies or even whether they produced tangible results. What mattered politically was that Mr. Nixon was seen to be active and—as many voters put it—“doing his best.”

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The one exception where immobility paid off for Mr. Nixon was on the racial front. His do-nothing and sometimes regressive policies on school integration, on Negro voting rights in the South, on housing for the poor, and on income redistribution as well as his abandonment of his own welfare reform proposal helped rather than hurt him. Many voters in the North as well as the South, if they do not want to turn the clock back to segregation, do want to call a halt to the drive to achieve substantial black equality with whites.

In a broader context voters were, in effect, signaling that they are tired of change. After the long, emotionally exhausting national quarrel over Vietnam, after the black rebellions in the slums, the campus demonstrations, and the rapid alterations in lifestyle brought about by the counterculture in recent years, there is a natural desire for repose. Mr. Nixon was triumphant because his unorthodox amalgam of “pragmatism” in foreign affairs, reversal in economic policy and cultural conservatism apparently seemed to most Americans to offer the better chance for achieving peace, prosperity and social stability.

... the Defeat ...

In defeat, Senator George McGovern remains an admirable and respected figure. He waged a gallant and often lonely campaign, never losing confidence in his own prospects or, more important, in the rightness of his vision of America. Scorned by his opponent who refused to debate him or even to respond to most of the issues he had raised, Mr. McGovern nevertheless continued to hammer away on his major themes, of which he spoke so movingly as he acknowledged defeat late Tuesday night.

In practical political terms, his candidacy was a disaster since he won only in Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. The sources of this debacle are easily traced. By his own reckoning, Mr. McGovern at the time of his first ballot nomination in July was the first choice of perhaps only 30 per cent of his fellow Democrats. The party's most liberal elements had united behind him while their opponents fragmented and mismanaged their strength.

Senator McGovern, a skillful organizer in his own state of South Dakota and an astute political strategist in winning his party's Presidential nomination, seriously underestimated the difficulty of reuniting the party after the Miami Beach convention. The A.F.L.-C.I.O. hierarchy and many party regulars proved far more recalcitrant than Mr. McGovern had anticipated or than his over-all public record as a liberal—not a radical—justified.

With his candidacy crippled from the outset by party dissension, he was knocked off stride at a critical time by the truly tragic Eagleton episode. Equally harmful was his identification with the unpopular side of such issues as abortion, amnesty and the legalization of marijuana—issues hardly central to the nature of Presidential leadership in the next four years.

Because his political base was too narrow, his party enemies too obdurate, his social outlook allegedly too radical, Mr. McGovern lost. But the moral force of his challenge will, we believe, have lasting impact. He spoke to the conscience of America on the cruel and senseless war in Vietnam. If the majority of the nation seemed not to respond to this challenge, he did at least courageously bear witness within the two-party system to the sense of outrage which millions of Americans do feel about the war.

His plea for a foreign policy based on a genuine internationalism rather than on national egotism and the obsolete balance-of-power doctrine, his denunciation of corruption, his deep sense of compassion, his call for a Government more open and more respectful of individual liberties, and his effort to evoke a healing, reconciling spirit between the races and the generations—these basic elements of the McGovern message square