

# The Legend of Saint George McGovern

By Patrick J. Buchanan

"There are few men in public life one could call too good, too simple and trusting, too bound by the Puritan ethic to engage a Godfather in battle. But George McGovern is one of them. No nice guy ever finished a more heart-breaking last."

—HARRIET VAN HORNE  
The New York Post

WASHINGTON—The first steps toward beatification have already been taken. McGovern staffers reverentially whisper of their fallen leader, "Actually he's just too good to be President." Mary McGrovy suggests the sentence be carved as his epitaph. Columnist Tom Braden celebrates that "sense of innocent uprightness" that proved a "flaw" in the rough-and-tumble of Presidential politics.

At the Virgin Island retreat of incense-burner Henry Kimmelhan, Mr. McGovern moves the martyr line to visiting pilgrims of the press. "I know I'm right . . . I had a long history of principle," he reminds The New York Times; and to The Star-News, "My views were too progressive . . ." and, "I don't see myself as the real loser in 1972. I see the country as the loser." Before the legend of St. George enters our political mythology, let the record show that Mr. McGovern and his frenetic accomplice ran just about the dirtiest, meanest Presidential campaign in this nation's history.

To those of us charged with working up the winter book, preliminary research and early scouting reports seemed wholly at variance with the prevailing consensus about the "only decent man in the U.S. Senate."

Well before the summer of 1972, Mr. McGovern had shown himself possessed of passions other than saintly. Of his 1960 Senatorial opponent, Karl Mundt, McGovern had said, "I don't know how he felt about me . . . but I knew I hated his guts

. . . I hated him so much I lost my sense of balance." Of the Republican candidate in 1964, Mr. McGovern had said, "I regard Mr. Goldwater as the most unstable radical and extremist ever to run for the Presidency." When, after a half century of service, J. Edgar Hoover died in his sleep, Mr. McGovern summed up his sentiments thus: "Hoover had lived beyond the normal years, so I couldn't feel the pathos I would for a young man. I could feel nothing but relief that he was no longer a public servant. I thought he had become a menace to justice." And when his Democratic colleague and primary opponent Henry Jackson spoke out against forced busing, the great healer was there to charge him with "embracing racism."

(Thus, when Mr. McGovern cut loose on the credentials committee decision as an "incredible, cynical, rotten political steal," and on conservative columnists as "jousy, bitter, paranoid, despicable, obnoxious propagandists who . . . write nothing good about any candidate more liberal than Genghis Khan," his outbursts came as less of a surprise to his political adversaries than to his traveling companions.)

But if Mr. McGovern's past fulminations merited censure, there is no precedent for and no defense for the slanders and contumely he visited upon the character and Administration of the President. What follows is but a sample.

During the fall, Mr. McGovern described the President personally as a "blob out there," "of no constant principle except opportunism and political manipulation," a man "up to his ears in political sabotage," who was "afraid of the people" and regularly favored the "powerful and greedy" over the public interest. The President's defense programs were "madness"; he had "degraded the Supreme Court" and, on three occasions at least, Mr. McGovern drew parallels between Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Reich.

As for the Nixon Administration, it

was the "most morally bankrupt," the "most morally corrupt," the "trickiest, most deceitful . . . in our entire national history," and the Republican party he publicly compared with the Ku Klux Klan.

But nothing rivaled in maliciousness his characterizations of the President's policy of ending in honor a war into which Mr. McGovern's party had led the United States. Again, a sampling: "He [President Nixon] has descended to a new level of barbarism . . . to save his own face and to prop up the corrupt regime of Thieu." . . . the re-election of Richard Nixon in 1972 would be an open hunting right for this man to give in to all his impulses for a major war against the people of Indochina." President Nixon is making draft evaders the "scapegoats for his murderous and barbaric policies in Southeast Asia."

"He has killed more innocent people than his predecessors." And his Administration is "even willing to surrender the most precious ideals and values of this country by bombing and napping defenseless people including thousands of little children . . ."

A week after the campaign was over, Mr. McGovern, poolside at Kimmelhan, was still yowling on to The Times and Star-News about the President's "sinister plots" and "massive crimes" and "murderous . . . barbaric policy" in Asia.

His second running-mate, Mr. Shriver, proved himself an apt understudy. In two months of campaigning, he managed to condemn the President as the "nation's biggest slumlord," a "psychiatric case," who was "power mad" and playing the "reformed drunk" in a world where the President was the "number one warmaker" and the "number one bomber of all time . . . and that includes Julius Caesar." (One imagines that last epithet caused more anguish in the history departments of Canterbury School and Yale than in the oval office.)

From Mr. Shriver's evaluation of the President, the questions emerge: How

could a man of his obvious principles have allowed himself to serve as Ambassador to Paris through 1969 and, indeed, reports have it, to be seen as late as 1970 padding about the West Wing in search of employment "at the pleasure of" such a tyrant?

Many reporters, columnists and publications that would not list themselves as Mr. Nixon's admirers nevertheless did not disguise their disgust and contempt as the "new politics" degenerated into remorseless billingsgate. But some did. Some ignored and excused and indulged the Democratic ticket.

And if one will compare the tolerance accorded by these latter to Messrs. McGovern & Shriver to the ferocity with which they fell upon Governor Agnew in 1968 for his "fat lap," "Polack" and "if you've seen one slum, you see them all" verbal missteps—one can gather an understanding why belief in a "double standard" of the national media is an article of faith to millions.

Enshrined in the conventional wisdom of the American left is the conviction that a quarter century ago Richard Nixon was a political brawler, with but a nodding acquaintance with the Marquess of Queensberry. But no student or researcher of those campaigns has ever found anything suggested or stated to compare remotely with Mr. McGovern's allegations that this President was some sort of Hitlerite warmonger, guilty of crimes ranging from the murder of innocent children to near genocide against the people of Asia.

And if his acolytes in the media succeeded in having George McGovern remembered before history as the Francis of Assisi of American politics, then the rest of us will just have to take consolation in a remark attributed to Voltaire: "History is a pack of lies, agreed upon."

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