

The Nixon question: What will he do with his 60s?

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NEW YORK—It was a spectacular personal victory for Richard Nixon, 10 years to the day, and almost to the hour, after his most humiliating defeat by Pat Brown in the 1962 election for the governorship of California.

Beaten by John Kennedy by the narrowest of margins in the presidential election of 1960, beaten again for the control of his own state in 1962, finished with American politics by his own angry proclamation exactly a decade ago, here he is now, not only vindicated but triumphant in one of the most decisive victories in the history of American presidential politics.

A few days before he takes the oath of office for a second term as President of the United States (Jan. 9), he will be 60 years old. His 30s were a political surprise, even to himself, his 40s were an agony of controversy and self-doubt, his 50s were a struggle and at the end a triumph. What now will he do with his 60s? This is the question that even his most intimate associates in Washington cannot answer.

Remaining tasks

In the world, he has to achieve not only the cease-fire, but the "peace," he has promised in Vietnam, the "reconciliation and cooperation" with Peking and Moscow that were so central to his victory, the truce in the savage struggle between Israel and the Arab States, and some kind of new economic and political relationship with Japan and the Common Market countries of Europe, who are

now challenging the American economic leadership of the modern world.

At home, Nixon has to deal also now with the minorities he defeated in the election: the poor and the blacks who have been left behind in the general prosperity of the nation, the young in the universities who have been over-run but not persuaded or convinced, the old who are in despair about rising prices and inflation.

It is a formidable agenda. Having won, he must now try to govern with a Democratic Congress, which resents the tactics of his victory, and will now be seeking a leader to inherit the wreckage of the Democratic party.

How was it possible?

Meanwhile, the question is how he achieved this startling victory? How was it possible, with a three-to-two Democratic registration against him, did the President overcome the doubts of the electorate and win this astounding victory?

Partly, and obviously, it was a failure of his divided opposition. Increasingly, George McGovern looked like a decent man who stumbled out of the minor leagues into the seventh game of the World Series, but there was something beyond that.

Probably the decisive thing in the election was that the President made a more accurate judgment about the mood of the majority of the voters than McGovern. The senator dramatized, in the primaries, the convention, and the campaign, his alliance with the militant blacks, the welfare poor, and the intel-

James Reston

lectuals on the university campuses, who were demonstrating against things as they are.

Nixon's judgment

The President made a different judgment. He decided that the majority of the American people were not black, or poor, or young, or militant, but white, middle class, middle-aged or older, reasonably comfortable, worried about the militant blacks and intellectuals, and sympathetic to his brand of pragmatic change and compromise in Vietnam, Moscow, and Peking abroad, and his economic compromises and controls at home.

For example, the political historian, Clinton Rossiter could write only a few short years ago, "The Democratic party exercises a near-monopoly of political allegiance in the South because this (Democratic party) system appears to be the stoutest bulwark of white supremacy." But now, it is a Republican President who is arguing against busing school children to create a racial balance in the schools, and arguing for conservative judges on the Supreme Court, so that the South now seems to have switched and has apparently concluded that the Republicans are now "the stoutest bulwark of white supremacy."

Question of race

Also, this question of race apparently helped to erode, if not destroy, the Dem-

ocratic domination of the blue-collar workers in the North. For the union property-owners in the last generation, now feel threatened by the militant blacks, and tend to support Republican policies of lower taxation, law and order and protection of property values.

But mainly, the President dealt with Peking and Moscow, cooperated with them, but defied them by bombing their ally in Hanoi, and mining the North Vietnamese harbor of Haiphong, and ending up with an announcement out of Hanoi that a compromise "peace" had been arranged.

Kissinger's announcement

All this can and will be debated endlessly, as a shrewd deal, or an election fraud. But there is little doubt about the political effect of Dr. Kissinger's announcement, just before the voting, that "peace is at hand."

Part of the tragedy of the last decade is that there is such doubt about the integrity of official announcements from the White House under both Presidents Johnson and Nixon, that even news of genuine compromises about the war seem false.

And this may be the President's major problem after his victory: Somehow, after this deceptive but victorious Republican campaign, even the President's closest advisers agree that he must restore some kind of trust with the people he has defeated and a Congress still controlled by the opposition Democratic party.