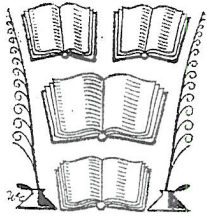


World of Books



Nixon -- Promise And Performance

John Barkham

THIS BEING a Presidential election year, Richard Nixon is doubtless prepared for the critical drumfire he is receiving from Democrats. What he is probably less prepared for is an even-tempered but damaging thrust from a loyal Republican who served as one of his principal speechwriters. Richard J. Whalen's "Catch the Falling Flag: A Republican's Challenge to His Party," is a study of Richard Nixon as the President he promised to be and as the President he actually became.

It was Mr. Nixon who invited Whalen in September 1967 to become his "Press man." As Mr. Nixon put it: "I want you on any basis and whenever you want to come." This recognition of Whalen's political acumen and rhetorical expertise will probably be shared by the reader. "Flexibility," added candidate Mr. Nixon, "is the first principle of politics," and this, too, he demonstrated before, during and after the election.

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IN THE FIRST chapters Whalen covers on a higher level what Joe McGinniss described in "The Selling of the President," namely, the remaking of the Nixon image as a "two-time loser." Where McGinniss wrote as a reporter, Whalen writes with the regret of a Republican watching principle give way to expediency. He reprints several of the memoranda he submitted to Mr. Nixon during the campaign. They reflect the losing battle he fought to keep the candidate from wavering.

In a book so rich in revelations perhaps the most startling is the manner in which Mr. Nixon came to make his now historic election promise to get the U.S. out of Vietnam. He made it without consulting his campaign staff. "I pledge to you," declared Mr. Nixon, "that new leadership will end the war and win the peace in the Pacific." According to Whalen, "nothing lay behind the pledge except Mr. Nixon's instinct for an extra effort of salesmanship when the customers started drifting away." Whalen concludes that this "impulsive" act was very much part of Mr. Nixon's character.

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HAVING BEEN inside the Nixon inner circle, Whalen is able to quote the misgivings of other insiders on the President's performance in the White House. His account of the manner in which Dr. Henry Kissinger won the President's confidence is enlightening.

But the real gravamen of Whalen's charge is more serious. The Nixon Administration, he asserts, took office empty handed and has been forced to make "wholesale borrowings" from the Democrats. He accuses the President in effect of sacrificing principle for opportunism, of ignoring the "silent majority" who elected him because they felt ignored of failing to follow through on promises and of leaving the American situation of 1967-68 "essentially unchanged" (Houghton Mifflin: \$6.95).

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