

Two good men square off in bid for White House

WASHINGTON — Political campaigns, like the comic mirrors at the amusement park, often distort a candidate's image.

I have known Richard Nixon and George McGovern, for example, since they were obscure congressmen fresh from the hustings. Neither is what he appears to the public to be.

Several bruising campaigns have given Nixon the image of a cold and crass and

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calculating politician without compassion. He is not like this at all.

The real Nixon, as a 23-year-old law student at Duke University, used to carry a crippled classmate up two flights of stairs. The classmate, Frederick Cady, had been deformed and dwarfed by polio at age 9. Four schoolmates told my associate, Les Whitten, they remembered young Nixon regularly lugging Cady up the stairs of their boarding house. Some recall that Nixon carried the student in his arms; others remembered that Nixon and another classmate locked arms and formed a cradle to lift Cady.

The real Nixon is a warm, rather shy, basically decent human being. He put a black medical student and a black architectural student through college without their knowing that their tuition and expenses had been paid by the President of the United States. Only a few intimates, among them our source, were ever aware of this very private charity by a very private Richard Nixon.

Patriotism before politics

The President also has the image of a politician who puts politics ahead of principle. On the contrary, the real Nixon is a patriot who would sacrifice his tremendous political ambition for the sake of his country. He demonstrated this in 1960 after he lost a close election to John F. Kennedy. The Republicans began gathering evidence of massive election frauds in Illinois and Indiana — evidence that could have thrown the election into the courts. The partisans around Nixon urged him to challenge the election.

When he called upon Kennedy to pay his

respects, Kennedy said: "Well, I guess the outcome is in doubt."

"No," said Nixon. "The outcome is not in doubt. You are the winner."

His biographer and close friend, Earl Mazo, had researched a series of 12 stories on the election frauds. Nixon made a personal appeal to him to stop the series. The defeated presidential candidate explained quietly that he would not be a party to creating a constitutional crisis for the United States.

For the ambitious Richard Nixon, this was a sacrifice second only to giving his life. He was willing to lay down his political life in 1960 for his country.

McGovern's principles

George McGovern, likewise, has come out of the campaign with a warped image. He has been portrayed as a political radical who can't make up his mind. The truth is that no one in politics has been more consistent than McGovern.

At age 24, he denounced those who placed "military pride" above "human life," who put "financial return" ahead of "human welfare." He has never, in all his political career, deviated from this theme. If he has changed his position on the details, he has never wavered in principle.

Indeed, McGovern is such a thoroughly decent and compassionate man that it sometimes hurts him politically. When Tom Eagleton's psychiatric problems first came to light, aides say that, to their astonishment and dismay, McGovern was more concerned over the effects of the disclosure upon Eagleton than upon his own campaign. They had to use all their powers of persuasion to get McGovern to drop Eagleton. The long agonizing, meanwhile, was politically disastrous for McGovern.

Even now, aides have told us, McGovern is still withholding aspects of the Eagleton story that would help him out of concern that it might hurt his former running mate.

Does he have radical, left-wing leanings? He is a solid, sound, somewhat simplistic midwesterner, rooted in the rugged individualism of Middle America. A prairie preacher's son, he briefly entered the ministry himself. His favorite scripture, which he often quotes, is Christ's admonition: "Whoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it."