

The President

Richard Milhous Nixon

NYTimes

NOV 9 1972

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE Jr.

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 7— During a campaign stop in Greensboro, N. C., last week, Richard Milhous Nixon, bothered by heckling from a small group of antiwar demonstrators, paused in his speech and asked the television cameramen to train their equipment on the group so that the country could “see the kind of people who are supporting our opponents.”

Then, with an imperial wave and a triumphant smile, he directed the cameras to the vast sea of white, middle-class faces who made up the rest of the crowd so the country could see “the kind of people who are supporting us.” Suitably aroused, both by the presence of the protesters and the injunction of their President, the audience erupted with a loud, almost visceral roar of approval.

It was an instructive moment in the 1972 campaign, not only because it revealed that four years in the Presidency had not diminished Mr. Nixon’s zest for combat or his capacity to inflict political punishment. What was even more revealing was the response of the crowd, for in their roar lay all the evidence anyone will ever need of the remarkable symbiosis that Mr. Nixon has been able to establish between himself and the millions of voters in middle America who propelled him to victory Tuesday.

In the literature that attempt to describe this elusive man—a man who has probably invited more amateur psychoanalysis than any other politician—certain words tend to recur: persistent, drab, clever, ambitious, ad lucky. Mr. Nixon has been and remains all of these. But what brought him to power four years ago, shaped his first term in office, and has now given him a second, was and is a shrewd understanding of the aspirations and complaints of the middle American.

A Certain Irony

There is, of course, some irony in the fact that the man who turns out to have been understood and exploited through stirrings and strivings and discontents of the majority has himself done everything possible to rise above the mass. His closest friends are silent and loyal millionaires. He has never been comfortable on the po-

litical stump, mingling with the “people,” his low-visibility campaign this year perfectly suited his aversions and instincts. And despite his frequent references to his humble beginnings in the little California town of Yorba Linda 59 years ago, the simple frame house there stands unattended and unvisited by its former occupant, who now lives in a large Spanish villa in San Clemente.

There is further irony in the fact that it was not Mr. Nixon but George McGovern who was supposed to have capitalized on the “new populism” of the mass.

In any case, it was Mr. Nixon who emerged in the end as the champion of not only Republican voters but also a goodly number of Democrats. But the President himself was not surprised. Some weeks ago, a public opinion poll suggested that the serious complaints about Mr. McGovern’s early schemes to increase inheritance taxes and distribute cash grants to the populace came from ordinary workingmen and their wives who wished to preserve for their children the opportunities offered by the American dream that they themselves had never been offered.

Mr. Nixon sensed the outcome of the poll before it was taken, and campaigned accordingly, portraying himself as a guardian of those who had won the race and those who had yet to run.

The President understood these aspirations, in part, because he had lived them. Much has been written—and whether it is accurate, nobody knows—about how Mr. Nixon as a child would lie awake in Whittier, where he moved nine years after his birth on Jan. 9, 1913, in Yorba Linda, and dream of getting out and getting ahead. But what is verifiable is that he soon showed a capacity for work and a driving ambition and an uncanny sense of timing which, together propelled him onward to honors in college, through nights of drudgery at Duke University’s Law School, to Congress in 1946, to the Senate in 1950, and on to the national Republican ticket as Vice-Presidential nominee two years later.

In between his political forays, Mr. Nixon served in the Office of Price Administration as an attorney and in the Navy during World War II. Earlier, while trying out for an amateur play in

1939 at Whittier College, he met Thelma Catherine Patricia Ryan, a teacher who, like her future husband, had grown up on a small farm. They were married on June 21, 1940. Their two daughters, Julie and Tricia, are married respectively to David Eisenhower and Edward M. Cox.

The President’s most celebrated qualities — ambition and a sense of timing—helped him survive difficult defeats. When Mr. Nixon won his party’s nomination in 1968, it occurred to those who watched him accept that honor that by all the usual rules of logic he should not have been there at all.

Few men have been written off as “finished” in American politics more often than he. In 1948, friends predicted disaster when he set out to pursue Alger Hiss, a State Department official later convicted of perjury in a sensational Congressional investigation involving charges of domestic subversion.

Overcame the Odds

In 1952, when he was involved in controversy over a secret “fund” raised by friendly businessmen, his chances of political survival were conservatively estimated at 100 to 1.

And 10 years ago Tuesday, following his defeat by Edmund G. Brown in the California race for Governor, Mr. Nixon himself seemed to have accepted the inevitability for permanent political exile when he told his famous “last” news conference: “Gentlemen, you won’t have Nixon to kick around any more.”

Yet he not only survived and captured the nomination in 1968 but won the election as well, helped as much by events as by his own perseverance and tactical shrewdness: Gov. Romney’s hapless campaign, Governor Rockefeller’s uncertainty, Lyndon B. Johnson’s decision to withdraw, Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination, Hubert H. Humphrey’s inability to shake the legacy of Vietnam. As President, he continued to benefit from the unexpected. Notably George C. Wallace’s near brush with death and subsequent withdrawal from the 1972 race.

Tailored the Office

But Mr. Nixon’s re-election Tuesday was hardly the result of happenstance alone. Carefully and systematically, he tailored the style and substance of the Presidency not only to his convictions and habits but also to his desire to run and win again.

In terms of style, Mr. Nixon stressed order, which he thought he could impose, rather than charisma, which he knew he could not project. His ambition, he once said, was to restore “respect” to the Presidency.

With countless option papers provided him by a staff that prided itself on its efficiency, he made many of his most important decisions in private, consulting few outsiders. Publicly, meanwhile, he presented a sober and largely colorless facade, resenting and resisting the continuing efforts of some members of his staff to turn him into something he was not.

Mr. Nixon tried on occasion to compensate for his lack of charisma with flights of rhetoric, describing each achievement with superlatives. The phrase, "historic first," proved to be his favorite. But even this turned out not to be his kind of theater and, besides, his penchant for careful planning and surprise produced achievements that did not require verbal embellishment.

The most prominent of these occurred in the field of foreign policy, which Mr. Nixon has long considered his "strong suit." In the campaign of 1968 he spoke of the need for negotiation and conciliation, but neither the capital nor the country was prepared for the spectacle of Richard M. Nixon, inveterate anti-Communist, banqueting in Peking and agreeing to a mutual limitation of armaments with the Soviet Union.

Ending the war in Vietnam on a basis satisfactory both

to him and the country has proved more difficult. The question at the beginning of his Administration was whether he would succumb to his political antennae, which told him the nation was tired of involvement, of his residual cold-war instincts to punish Communist aggression.

Chose Middle Course

He chose a middle course, withdrawing ground forces while escalating the war in the air and sending his national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, on a seemingly endless series of diplomatic rendezvous with the North Vietnamese. On Election Day, a negotiated settlement seemed near but Mr. Nixon's pledge to end the war on an "honorable" basis remained unfulfilled.

Despite his profitable balance sheet overseas however, future historians may well conclude that it was Mr. Nixon's domestic policy that accounted for his margin of victory. "Policy," of course, may be the wrong word; what captured those who voted for him was not so much a systematic or programmatic strategy for dealing with the nation's problems—although he did, indeed, submit many conventional programs—but rather his responses, rhetorical and real, to its grievances.

Building and expanding on the strategy he had used to outflank the Wallace threat in 1968, responding not just to Southerners but to a vast army of restless and confused suburbanites, he invested big new sums in the war against crime, denounced radical protesters, dispatched Vice President Agnew to condemn the press, honored his pledge to appoint "constitutionalists" to the Supreme Court, wooed parts of labor with his Vietnam policy and Roman Catholic voters with promises of help for the struggling parochial schools and a tough stance against liberalized abortion.

He quietly desegregated Southern schools, as required by the courts, but when the courts went faster than the country wished them to go he offered to Congress and to his admirers in the nation legislation designed to slow busing and preserve neighborhood schools.

Underneath these tactical responses to periodic problems lay a basic perception: A majority wanted "orderly change," to use Mr. Nixon's own words, but not "radical" change. Whether this strategy could have succeeded against a centrist Democrat like Edmund S. Muskie will never be answered. But the President's luck held: The Democrats nominated George McGovern, who seemed to symbolize all those dangers—principally elitism and revolutionary change—against which Mr. Nixon had been warning for four years.

Given the chance to draw a "clear choice," Mr. Nixon campaigned accordingly. Mr. McGovern had hoped to make Mr. Nixon's personality and character a major issue; the President remained in the White House, wore his Presidential mask (or hat, as he preferred to call it), and watched as Mr. McGovern's personality became the issue.

Stuck to Themes

In his rare public appearances and utterances, he stuck to the themes he had been developing for four years and which Mr. McGovern's presence made all the more salable: the work ethic, law and order, national security, busing, traditional "values."

Mr. Nixon's friends insist that the positive aspects of his domestic strategy—revenue-sharing, welfare reform, tax reform, programs on crime and education and health—have been ignored or underrated.

His critics, and even a few of the friends, believe that he has too often substituted symbolism for a clear presentation of those programs and that, as a result, the vast majority of Nixon supporters are vocal only to his negatives. If so, his task in a second term will be to construct the intellectual base that alone could commit the voters to his party.