



President Nixon's Place in History

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WELL-MEANING PEOPLE are pleased to believe that, for the sake of his place in history, President Nixon will project himself during his second term as a focus of national unity.

But the forces now shaping American history are not all that benign. And Mr. Nixon is a serious figure — not one of the Rover Boys.

To be sure, the basic thrust of American domestic affairs for most of the past century has been benign. Government has assumed responsibility for managing the economy.

Regulation and taxation have increasingly curbed the arbitrary power of the plutocracy. Ordinary people have benefited from federal payments for education, health and old age, and from policies fostering the growth of trade unions and cooperatives. From Theodore Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson, in short, there has been practically steady progress towards a welfare state.

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BUT THESE policies have become vested in an enormous, entrenched federal bureaucracy, dedicated to its own self-preservation. The most recent effort to help people in trouble — The Great Society — proved to be a failure.

Moreover, the character of people in trouble in this country has changed dramatically. Before The Great Society, government programs were aimed mainly at helping those who required only an opportunity to help themselves. In contrast, The Great Society focused on people who needed more than an equal opportunity — not-

ably the urban blacks. It tried to help people who, because of weighty cultural disadvantages, needed special favors.

The change in the nature of those in trouble has been matched by a change in the nature of the great majority — the group I have called Middle America. Full employment has tended to dull the edge of sympathy for the minority without jobs.

The net result is a widespread bias against the federal bureaucracy, against its social programs, against their supposed beneficiaries. The central fact of national life at present is that the majority will not accept higher taxes to pay for more federal programs to help the disadvantaged.

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NOBODY is more alert to that fact of national life than Mr. Nixon. He is President not because he was "sold" to the country but because he is instinctively at one with the ruling values of the American majority. He shares the majority's faith in the virtues of industry, thrift and the regular life. He deeply dislikes the welfare state. He is prepared to see those who do not do well in life's race — whether Vietnamese peasants or urban blacks — pay the penalties for failure.

So Mr. Nixon's place in history does not lie in continuing the work of his predecessors. It lies in winding down the federal bureaucracy, in cutting out the old programs, in passing the authority from Washington back to the towns and suburbs and states.

I have no doubt that Mr. Nixon is now moving to seize that historic chance.