

Where to From Here?

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Nov. 7—On the morning after an American Presidential election, the winner has almost more problems than he can handle, and the loser more regrets than he can bear. Maybe, then, we should pause about now to consider the human efforts, accidents, triumphs and tragedies of this campaign.

No sensible book publisher would have risked much money a couple of years or so ago on a political novel with a story as fantastic as the facts in the Presidential campaign of 1972. In fact, no professional novelist, no matter how imaginative, would have dared write such a melodramatic script with such an unlikely cast of characters or such strange twists of history and human caprice.

There was, to begin with, the death and tragedy on the bridge at Chappaquiddick, removing from the drama in the first scene Edward Kennedy, the main hope of the Democratic party and the logical Presidential successor to his two murdered brothers. Even Edgar Allen Poe, drunk or sober, wouldn't have dared begin one of his dramatic tales with such a startling event.

Add to that the tragedy of Gov. George Wallace of Alabama, taken out of the race just when he was beginning to make progress in the North and hold the balance of power between the two major parties, wounded by an assassin, who had been hounding not only Wallace but the President.

Then, of course, there is Hubert Humphrey, yearning for one last chance, but cutting up both Ed Muskie and George McGovern in the process, and the poignant history of Senator Eagleton, and Muskie crying in the snow on the steps of The Union Leader in Manchester, N. H., and all that hanky-panky with millions of Republican dollars and grain and milk deals, and the Watergate burglars caught bugging the Democratic headquarters, and Martha Mitchell being attacked and drugged by her own security agents and finally forcing her husband, the Attorney General and head of the Republican campaign, to retire from the struggle.

The only possible explanation of all this is that it must have been arranged by Teddy White as material for another of his remarkable books on "The Making of the President." As a scenario for a reasonable Presidential campaign, it makes no sense at all, but as factual material for a book on the Presidential campaign of 1972, it is a writer's and a publisher's dream.

Fact has arranged itself in this election in the form of fiction. The election results came in precisely ten years to the day, almost to the hour, of Richard Nixon's farewell to politics on the morning after he lost the Governor's race to Pat Brown of California in 1962. And the men who were in the Presidential suite of the Beverly

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Hilton Hotel with him then (Suite 724)—Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Finch, Klein, Ziegler, when he gave his "last press conference" and announced his withdrawal from politics—are the men who are with him now in the White House, still nursing their wrath against the wicked press and Democrats.

Why the American novelists do not move to Washington I do not know. Even the details of this human story are astonishing. Julie and Tricia Nixon were children in 1952, when their father was Vice-Presidential nominee and fighting for his political life and for President Eisenhower's confidence in the Checkers speech over a Nixon "secret campaign fund" that now seems almost innocent compared to this year's Republican "secret fund" of millions. But here is Julie Nixon married now to President Eisenhower's grandson, and Trica married to a handsome, modern Harvard type, and the whole Nixon family standing for the President and Republican "respectability."

It would be hard to overestimate the political influence of the Nixon family in this campaign. I can remember asking Mr. Nixon at Christmas of 1967 why he was going to run again and whether his wife wanted him to do it. He said she preferred to disappear into private life, but would go along with whatever he wanted to do. And since then, in China, the Soviet Union, and out in the country, she has struggled against her own shyness and, like most wives, supported her guy and obviously helped his ambitions.

The same thing can be said about the McGovern family, only under much more difficult circumstances. Eleanor McGovern has not only been a partner but a critic of her husband's campaign. She has gone out on her own and argued the issues, even more directly and bravely than those two other remarkable Democratic wives, Eleanor Roosevelt and Ladybird Johnson, and has driven herself in the process to the point of physical exhaustion.

Accordingly, it would be a pity on the morning after the election merely to deal with the mathematics, tactics, strategy and dirty tricks of the campaign, and not recognize the human accidents, struggles, devotion and even love of the candidates and their families and workers in the struggle.

No doubt this is a sentimental point, for many unworthy and even vicious things have been done in this election; but back of it all there has been a lot of human accident, goodwill and tragedy, and now that the problems of the election are all over, the problems of the nation remain, and we are going to need all the generosity and compassion we can get to deal with the problems of the future.