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## Kennedy's Courting of Gov. Wallace

Ted Kennedy's July visit to George Wallace in Alabama lights up the political landscape like a roman candle.

It identifies the swing vote in the country and marks the issue which most deeply affects the party realignment. It shows that the national majority is still up for grabs between the two big parties.

The big swing vote in the country—as James Sundquist points out in his new book, "Dynamics of the Party System"—comes from the group Sen. Kennedy is courting in Alabama. Gov. Wallace, running as a third-party candidate in 1968, won nearly 10 million votes. He took more than 13 per cent of the national total—the largest figure for a third-party candidate since 1924. He carried five states in the south and did surprisingly well in the border states.

In 1972, before the assassination attempt cut short his campaign, Wallace did even better. He won Democratic primaries in Michigan, Maryland and Florida and finished second in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Indiana, Oregon, West Virginia and New Mexico. The shift of the Wallace votes to the Republicans in the general election is what made a landslide for President Nixon. So it is not surprising that Sen. Kennedy went down to Alabama to woo the Wallace vote.

Initially, the Wallace vote formed itself as a protest within the Democratic Party on three major issues. There was race, where the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were taking an activist stand on behalf of integrationist policies. Gov. Wallace was the man who stood in the schoolhouse door and said no.

There was law and order, where at least some Northern Democrats were taking a permissive stance. George Wallace was for running over demonstrators.

There was Vietnam, where many Northern Democrats stood for withdrawal on any terms. Wallace was for bombing the other side into submission.

The last two of these issues have dwindled to almost nothing. The American part in the war is ending, and Democrats and Republicans are now joined together in the compromise which ends even bombing on Aug. 15. Whatever was left of the law-and-order issue after the Democrats began hardlining it in 1970, has now been totally erased by Watergate.

The subordination of Vietnam and law and order is evident in yet another feature of the Alabama encounter. Gov. Wallace has remained a Democrat.

But there remains an issue which could continue to split off the Wallace followers from the Democratic Party. That issue is race which now takes its most visible and abrasive forms on the practice of busing to achieve school desegregation. The Wallace followers remain diehard opponents of busing. He carried the Michigan primary with over 50 per cent of the vote precisely because busing was the big issue.

But national Democratic leaders, including Sen. Kennedy, can make accommodation with the Wallaceites on race only at great peril. For something



like a quarter of the Democratic vote now comes from blacks. They are militant on the race issue, and only a very special Democrat, indeed, can conciliate both the blacks and the Wallaceites.

Ted Kennedy comes closer than anybody now visible to being that Democrat. He can almost certainly have the nomination if he wants it. His lead is so pronounced that none of the party's promising younger men—for example,

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Sen. Walter Mondale of Minnesota or Gov. Jack Gilligan of Ohio—are even pushing themselves forward. The field is left to Kennedy and the familiar names from the past—Humphrey, Muskie and Jackson.

In these circumstances, the Republicans can definitely not be discounted. Even after Watergate, the right Republican could combine the Wallace vote with his own party's strength for a victory in 1976. Only the odds are heavy

that the right Republican will come from the conservative side of the party—will be an Agnew, a Reagan or a Connally rather than a Rockefeller or a Percy.

Thus neither party starts with an overwhelming advantage in the quest for the swing vote represented by the Wallace followers. The party system is in flux, and the new American majority has not yet been formed.