

David S. Broder
**Soft Words from
George Wallace**

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Boston

WHEN A SMALL GROUP of reporters was leaving George Wallace's hotel room here the other morning, the Alabama governor made a curious remark. "You see," he said, "we left Boston at peace."

It was a revealing comment, because the night before, at his kickoff rally for the Massachusetts primary, Wallace had laid into the Boston Globe and those other symbols of Eastern liberalism, the New York Times and the Washington Post. And his crowd — dominated by foes of the court-ordered busing plans that the Globe has insisted editorially must be obeyed — lapped it up.



But by the offhand comment to reporters from these same papers in the hotel room, Wallace seemed to be saying, "I'm not coming here to stir trouble in Boston. I'm not an agitator."

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IN TRUTH, NO ONE could find a word of incitement or a call to diehard resistance in his speech. Wallace advocated a "freedom of choice" constitutional amendment on schools and criticized federal judges "who think they know better than you parents what's good for your children."

When he was reminded of his 1963 inaugural speech pledge of "segregation forever," he said, "I never considered that a racist speech. I was raised under a system — like I was raised on the Bible — and I believed in it. But that system is gone. Legal segregation is gone . . . You couldn't go back to it now and no one wants to."

Wallace's disinclination to demagogue what remains the most divisive issue in American life — the issue of race — has the most important political implications. It brings into question the assumption that he will inevitably run as an independent candidate for the presidency if he is blocked again from the Democratic nomination.

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THIS QUESTION HAS long divided Wallace's circle. His political staff, of course, is gungho for another third-party race. But those who are close to Wallace without being on his payroll have been expressing doubts for some months about Wallace's willingness to "go it alone" again.

They see him as a man who is seeking influence, vindication and acceptance in about equal degrees. They think he would very much like to be included in the circle of party leaders who will be on the platform when the Democratic Convention closes.

There are, of course, strong elements in the Democratic party and not a few of the candidates who view any accommodation with Wallace as immoral.

But the fact that this one-time "disturber of the peace" now takes pride in the fact that he left Boston "at peace" adds another intriguing human element to the unfolding drama of 1976 politics.