1984: 'Watershed' era reminiscent of '60s

The upcoming election has been termed "a critical referendum for the future" by most concerned parties and individuals. The Mondale-Reagan presidential campaign, Ballot Measure 2 and various other races all hold keys to how our future will be affected perhaps for years to come.

It seems like we consider each election year a "watershed" period for com-munities and states, America and the world as a whole. But the fall of 1984 may truly go down in history as such a time - as did the fall of 1964.

Commentary

Pres. Lyndon Johnson was waging a pitched presidential election battle against Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater. Goldwater was painted as the warmonger in that battle, a man who would jump at the chance to wage war - conventional or otherwise. Johnson, on the other hand, was the "peace candidate."

But during the summer before the election, LBJ requested and obtained from

Congress a resolution calling for action against the North Vietnamese, who allegedly had attacked U.S. vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin. Despite Johnson's campaign claims to the contrary, the stage was set for the introduction of American combat troops into Southeast Asia - half a million by the end of the

One woman later observed, "I was told that unless I voted for Johnson, within six months we'd be at war. I did - and we were.'

Johnson's rhetoric of peace and restraint helped carry him to a landslide victory over Goldwater. LBJ's euphoria was short-lived, however. The most divisive conflict in American society since the Civil War lay ahead.

In his role as candidate, Johnson had little to be concerned about. As president, the opposite was true. Perhaps two of the most gnarly happenings on the world scene that year occurred within days of each other, in mid-October.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khruschev had fallen into disfavor with the ruling Politburo and the Communist Party after Pres. John F. Kennedy stood him down in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. A harbinger of future trouble came to Khruschev the first week of October when his son-in-law was removed from the editorship of Soviet periodical

On Oct. 15, Khruschev resigned perhaps of his own accord, perhaps not. The reigns of Soviet leadership were transferred to Alexei Kosygin and Leonid Brezhnev. The largest military buildup by one nation in world history lay ahead.

The following day, as the world contemplated the change of leadership in Moscow, the People's Republic of China joined the world nuclear fraternity. The Chinese atomic bomb test in Sinkiang province was viewed with fear and suspicion by the West and by the

China's entry into the nuclear age and its deteriorating relations with the USSR may have helped contribute to the diplomatic overtures by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger nearly eight years later - "Playing the China card," some termed it - and to the eventual normalization of Sino-American relations.

Meanwhile, back in the United States. the elections drama played on. And several actors who made their debuts on the political stage that year eventually helped re-write social and political scripts for years to come.

In Oregon, a Portland television newscaster named Tom McCall was elected secretary of state. Before Mc-Call's ten years in statewide office were finished, his name and The Oregon Story would receive national recognition and provide a springboard for change and, in particular, for environmental awareness in other states.

To the south, a television and B-movie star hit the hustings in support of Goldwater and right-wing politics. So effective was his delivery, so well-received his message, that several Southern California business and political interests sought to groom him for elective

Thus embarked Ronald Reagan on a road that would take him to Sacramento and, ultimately, to the White House.

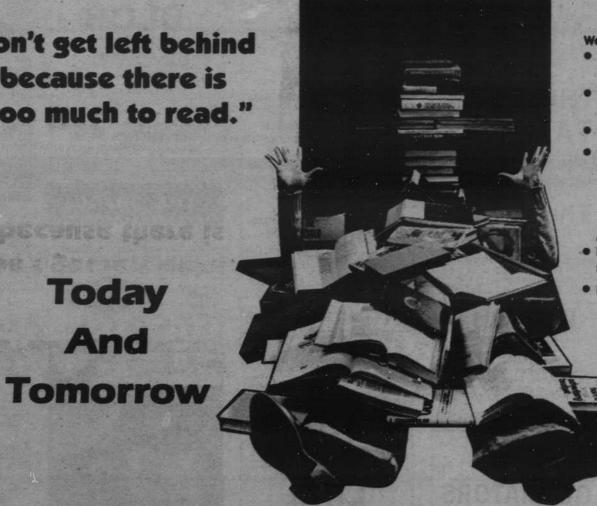
Writers of future history books could cite the fall of 1984 as a "watershed" period. And it would earn that designation in part because of the events of fall

By Mike Sims

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