

"Politics is the systematic organization of hatreds."

— HENRY ADAMS

"We are America. Those other people are not America."

— RICH BOND

1992 Republican National Committee Chairman

Twenty years ago, Hugh Sidey writing for Life magazine of Richard Nixon's landslide reelection in 1972, wrote, "These are the days when the ghosts of Jefferson and Lincoln and the other great American presidents walk through the American mind. Who really is this man we have in the White House for four more years?"

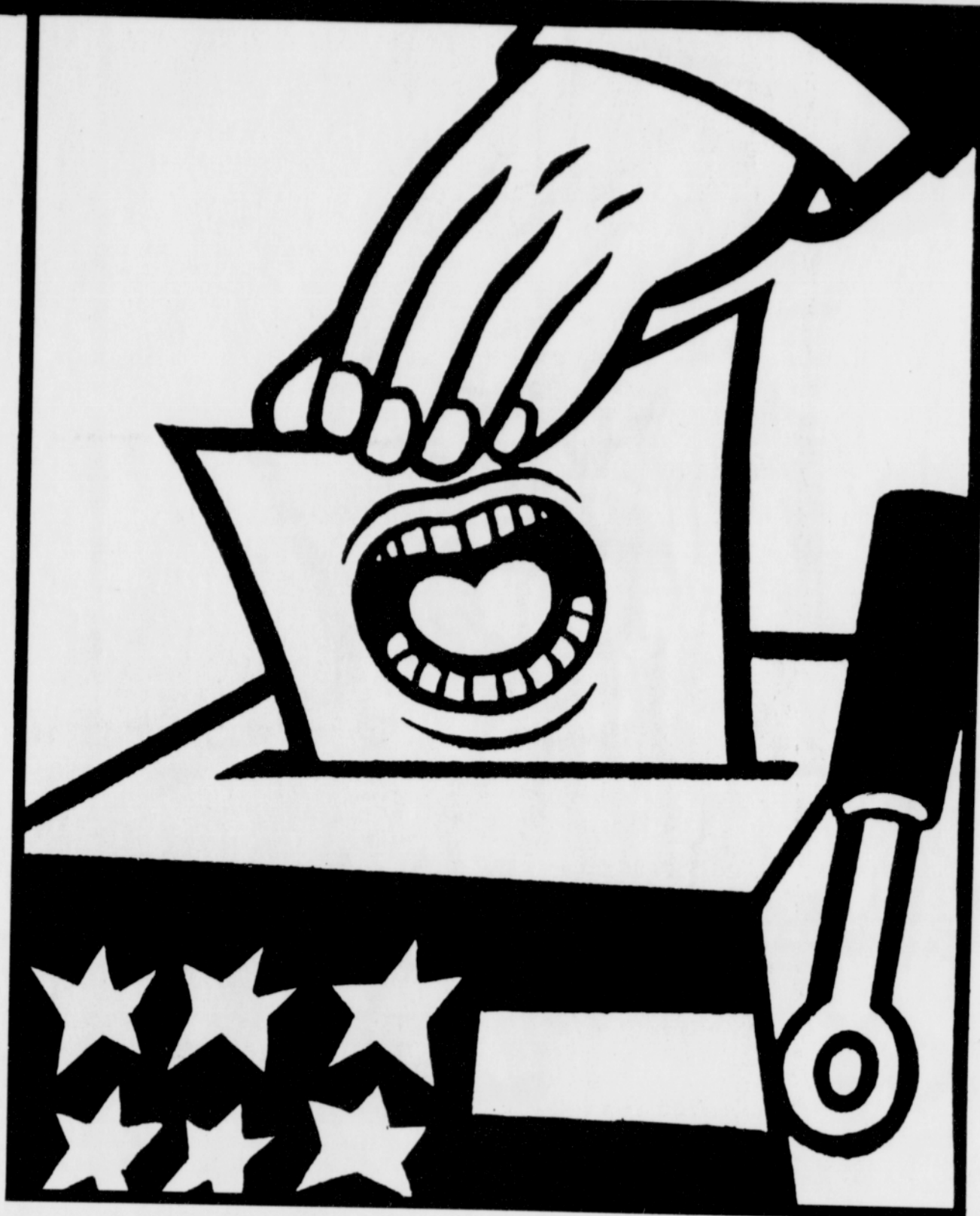
With Sidey's Nixon, we can address the campaign and character of George Bush who ardently desires to be reelected president this year. Bush, like Nixon, "plainly does not possess the range of talents of a Jefferson, whom a contemporary described as a person who could 'calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a cause, break a horse, dance the minuet and play the violin.' Nor does Bush, as Sidey wrote also of Nixon, 'have the mastery of language that historian Benjamin Thomas calls 'the ultimate factor' which made Lincoln successful. There is little of Teddy Roosevelt's exuberance" to be found in Bush, "nor is there Wilson's deep philosophical strain. The joy of life that was part of Franklin Roosevelt's remarkable ability to capture and hold the public esteem emerges seldom... (and) the public rarely sees signs of the human grace that John Kennedy revealed."

Sidey wrote that Nixon's talents seemed to be "stamina and control and a visceral identity with the vast majority of people who live beyond the range of the New York Times and the Ivy League." Nixon's ability to make so much of his mundane talents, which gave him in 1972 one of the largest majorities of any presidential candidate was, Sidey wrote, "itself a virtuosity."

George Bush possesses even more modest talents. "The famous thick resume of Bush is less a record of achievement than the back and forth trajectories of a man used as a shuttlecock by others more convinced of what the Republican Party was becoming and could do," Garry Wills wrote in the New York Review of Books. Gore Vidal, himself a self-described "government child," wrote that Bush "has no known political principles or even opinions other than how to master the stage business necessary for him to take the temporary lead in a play he knows by heart but has not, perhaps, taken to heart." Vidal, grandson of a U.S. senator, remarked of Bush, son of a senator, that "it is bad for your character to spend all of your life running for political office. And if you don't have character before you run for office, you'll never get it. Look at Nixon!" And George Bush, who presents himself to the nation as its "moral compass."

Nixon at least "achieved a philosophical identity with some deep American values," Sidey wrote in his 1972 article, "but he did not have enough faith in the people to be candid with them."

Bush would like to be thought of as Harry Truman, who is enjoying a periodic fluctuation of high regard for his honesty and candidness, though not quite so much for his policies (Vidal, and others, blame Truman for the loss of the American republic when he imposed "the national security state"). Bush might pay more attention to the 33rd president's opinion of the Republican Party when he invokes Truman's



MILAN TRENC

NOVEMBER NIGHTMARES

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

1948 longshot triumph for reelection. The reason Truman would win against long odds, bad polls and a hostile press, he said, was because "the people know the Democratic Party is the people's party, and the Republican Party is the party of special interests, and it always has been and always will be."

How would Bush answer Truman when he asked, "Is the United States going to run in the interest of the people as a whole, or in the interest of a small group of privileged big businessmen?" (whom he called "gluttons of privilege" and "bloodsuckers with offices in Wall Street").

Can Bush claim with candor as did the feisty Truman, "We told the people the truth. And the people are going to win this election?"

When asked about his 1948 victory, Truman said, "Labor did it." But so did farmers, blacks, ethnic minorities and a then as yet unacknowledged voting bloc, women — the old Democratic

coalition that Reagan and Bush have broken but whose disrepair was noted as early as 1964 and which was capitalized on by Nixon in his successful presidential campaign of 1968. Garry Wills, writing in the New York Review, suggested that Barry Goldwater's 1964 loss to incumbent Lyndon Johnson was the Republican Party's "founding defeat" and that Nixon in 1968 "profited from insights... (that) even running against a southerner, Goldwater had won five southern states." The formerly Democratic "Solid South" was falling apart under pressure of the civil rights movement, "the backlash of white supremacists and defecting white Democrats to traditionally Jim Crow Republican Party locals."

George McGovern, who lost to Nixon in 1972, said his humiliating defeat was the result of a "so-called Southern strategy" welding Republicans with white flight Democrats. Nixon, McGovern said, "really tapped the seeds of racism, the fear of change, the fear of the young, the fear of the black."

A "Confederate bloc" contained in 1968 almost 40% of the electoral votes necessary for the Republicans to win the presidency — in 1992 it contains half. Nixon built on that base in 1968 and 1972, as did Ronald Reagan and George Bush in the 1980s.

Jimmy Carter, whose single term Democratic presidency was squeezed between fourteen years of GOP control of the White House, lost his 1980 attempt at reelection to Bush's predecessor and mentor, Reagan. Carter accused Reagan of being both a warmonger and a racist. Under Reagan, Carter warned, "Americans might be separated, black from white, Jew from Christian, North from South, rural from urban." Buzz words such as "states rights," he said, really meant segregation.

Reagan made it clear from the start that he intended to be an "FDR of the right," and he immediately began dismantling "the welfare state" built during the Depression of the 1930s by Roosevelt's "New Deal." He reduced federal spending for social services while drastically increasing defense spending and stepping up the arms race with the Soviet Union, and lowered taxes, especially for the wealthy. He rolled

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