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TC: Richard Nixon's Triumph
Before the Fall

Lead: In January 1972, Richard Nixon was inaugurated for a second term after winning one of the greatest triumphs in U.S. presidential history. Then it all came crashing down.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

C o n t e n t : D e f e a t i n g a n incumbent President of the United States is tough. It can be done, as

Herbert Hoover, Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush found to their regret, but it is no easy task. Circumstances, political and otherwise, have to work perfectly to the advantage of the challenger. The economy must be wrecked and with no foreseeable relief in the offing. The sitting President should not be weakened by a significant challenge from within his own party. If the nation is at war, and the war is no longer supported by the electorate or is perceived as a lost cause, the President is often blamed. And, if a major third party candidate is floating around out there snipping at the Presidential heels, taking votes from the incumbent, that too helps

the challenger. Finally, the pretender must be perceived by the voters as a clear improvement on the current occupant of the White House. If all or most of these factors are in play, then it is possible, in colloquial terms, to throw the bum out.

In 1972 Richard Nixon had none of those conditions. If not particularly popular and if widely perceived as personally flawed, he was generally regarded as a competent Chief Executive who had strengthened not undermined the domestic and social policies of his Democratic predecessors. He had some outstanding foreign policy successes with his trips to

the Soviet Union and China, and was winding down the unpopular and clearly lost cause of the Vietnam War.

And he had a terrible opponent in South Dakota Senator George McGovern. Nothing worked for the Democrats that year, who were still licking their wounds from the disaster that was 1968. McGovern finally triumphed over a field of no less than 14 candidates revealing the deep divisions with the Democratic Party. He was a lack-luster campaigner and that was before he fired his running mate, Senator Thomas Eagleton, for the latter's theretofore undisclosed history of mental health problems.

Nixon simply ignored McGovern and, in November, cleaned his clock. The President received 18 million votes more than his challenger, the largest spread in U.S. Presidential history, 60.7% of the popular vote. The electoral vote was 520 to 17. And then, it all collapsed in the scandalous, corrupt, swamp that was Watergate. Less than two years after an unprecedented electoral sweep, Nixon resigned in disgrace.

In Richmond, Virginia this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

HYPERLINK "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

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