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1968: Presidential Election - I

Lead: *A Moment in Time, 1968: A special series on the 40th anniversary of a year of upheaval, in a world seemingly out of control.*

Content: In a year fraught with so much turmoil, it is hard to imagine that American Presidential politics would be spared. They were not. In both parties there was upheaval afoot.

Republican politics post-1960 was dominated by the fascinating emergence of modern movement conservatism. Heralded in its early stages by Senator Joseph McCarthy,

chronicled by young William F. Buckley, Jr., and led by Senator Barry Goldwater, early modern conservatism was an interesting alliance of vigorous anti-communists, Roman Catholic moralists, and country-club business interests with a streak of anti-government libertarianism.

After Goldwater's crushing defeat at the hands of Lyndon Johnson in 1964, party leadership seemed to be up for grabs, but it really was not. Governor George Romney jumped in first but jumped out the night before the New Hampshire primary. Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York said he was "ready and willing" to run if called upon, no one called.

Despite the defeat of 1964 party machinery was now firmly in the hands of conservatives and this meant that Romney, Rockefeller and other so-called eastern liberal or establishment Republicans were prevented from leading a Party increasingly dominated by southern and western interests. The conservative darling, Ronald Reagan, had just been convincingly elected governor of California, but was thought to be too new on the scene for Presidential aspirations. That left Richard Nixon.

Though he had long been associated with establishment Republicanism, he recognized the southwestern and rightward drift of

the Party and moved to cultivate southern and conservative leaders. His alliance with Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina sealed the deal and despite a spirited effort by Reagan at the convention in Miami, Nixon won nomination on the first ballot.

Next time: Democratic chaos and Wallace the spoiler.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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