



• And the winner is . . .

historical perspective

*"Law and order has become
the major issue of the election
. . . the candidates are running for sheriff,
not president."*

— C.D. Hart

But in the final days of the last presidential campaign...

But in the final days of the last presidential campaign of the 1960's all of the forces mentioned above are factors of importance. As a result, the American political system is in a state of disarray not seen since the troubled years a century ago. And campaign '68 has offered little hope for the immediate future.

Leading in the race for the White House, and certain of victory barring a complete collapse, is that old Cold War warrior and refugee from the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Richard M. Nixon. Although many Americans still remember him as "Tricky Dick", the hatchetman of the Eisenhower administration from whom they would never buy a used car, there is no doubt that the former Vice President has fashioned one of the great comebacks in American political history. Moreover, it is clear that the "old Nixon" mellowed considerably during the years in exile; now much less partisan, he has moved a long way on foreign policy, as even the Russians have grudgingly admitted. Although a painful admission for the liberals who remember only too well the young Nixon of the 1960's, the leader of a newly vigorous and united Republican party is probably the only politician active in 1968 who can hope to bring the badly fragmented nation together.

Certainly Hubert H. Humphrey, carrying the tattered banner of the discredited Democratic party, could not. Once the leading liberal in the land, he is a tragic and bewildered figure no longer in touch with the forces of liberalism, a relic from a political era long past. Finally receiving the nomination after years of striving for the golden fleece, the Humphrey of 1968 is the creature of Lyndon Johnson, not the battler for civil rights and medicare decades before these became popular issues. After years of working with Johnson the conciliator in the Senate and the White House, trapped by the policies and failures of an administration for which he was a major spokesman, Humphrey has become too anxious to please, too quick to weep, too talkative and too intensely partisan. Relying on the support of the old interest groups and party bosses which are hangovers from F.D.R.'s day, Humphrey cannot comprehend why so many members of the party to which he gave his best years now reject him and mourn for a Robert Kennedy

or Eugene McCarthy.

Finally, there is George C. Wallace, former segregationist governor of Alabama, and self-appointed candidate of the American Independent party, the most significant third party since the Populists of 1896. His are the politics of frustration, nostalgia, and fear. What makes George Wallace run is difficult to say, for he can never win, not even if the unlikely happens and for the first time since 1876 there is a disputed election. But round and round he goes, giving his one speech that attacks Big Government, pseudo intellectuals, Communists, beatniks and vietniks, rioters (that is, Negroes) and any other groups which are rocking modern society. He talks about state rights, individual liberty, law and order, patriotism, and how good things used to be. The majority of Southerners lis-

ten and applaud, as does a scattering of supporters elsewhere in the country. Historians of the future will undoubtedly give much attention to "the Wallace factor" in 1968.

In addition to the candidacy of George Wallace, historians of the Election of 1968 will be concerned with the breakdown of the Democratic party in the battle of the Chicago stockyards; with the illogical way that both candidates of the major parties wooed the Southern vote at the convention; with the way in which the Viet Nam issue, the dominant one in American history for the previous four years, was kept out of the campaign. But the appeal of George Wallace and law and order (or crime in the streets) will obviously dominate accounts of the election.

To whom does George Wallace appeal? In the South, the only region

where he will possibly win states in the Electoral College, he appeals to the basic racism which is part of the legacy of the Lost Cause. Additionally, there is the old hatred of strong central government (except, of course, when federal funds are being dispensed), and the refusal to accept change, especially when change is sponsored by outsiders. In the North, Wallace also appeals to the racial feelings which have never been far from the surface. But of great significance outside the states of the Old Confederacy is the appeal to rural conservatives, the uneducated, and the workers who do not understand the reform methods of the 1960's and who fear that the material gains they have achieved in the last decade are challenged.

The Wallace appeal is far from unique

The Wallace appeal is far from unique in American history. For there was an American (or Know Nothing) party during a similar period of political upheaval in the 1850's which appealed to the long-standing prejudices against foreigners and Catholics. Although eventually submerged in the political revolution which was party to the antislavery movement, the Native Americans enjoyed some success, in the North as well as the South. Other political movements have appealed to the baser instincts of man to at least the same extent, and Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi, who has been in the Congress for three decades, makes Wallace look like a liberal on the race question. In brief, the Wallaces and Goldwaters come and go, but the Eastlands really run the show; in the context of the past, the Wallace movement is not really alien

to American tradition.

Issue of the election, although at times it has seemed that the candidates were running for sheriff, not president. For in this issue one can see the convergence of the frustration, anger, and lingering idealism which influences American civilization of the later 1960's: the frustrations of the war in Viet Nam; the hatred and fear of communism; the decline of middle class values; racism; Negro militancy; violence; the problem of the city; rural distrust of urban settlement; the alienation of classes as portrayed in the battles between lower class police and middle class protestors; the constitutional conservatism which demands the head of Earl Warren; the breakdown of the old Democratic coalition; and the conservative reform tradition which demands a rest period after every few years of pseudo-liberal activity. Un-

fortunately, the presence of a demagogue like George Wallace, along with two old school politicians, has distorted the debate and made the present election campaign appear to be something that it really is not.

On election night of 1968 Richard M. Nixon, a politician in the mainstream of contemporary American politics, will finally get the call he has so long awaited. Possibly, the "new" Nixon will discover capabilities not previously suspected and will preside over an era of optimism and hope like that of the early 1960's. More than likely, the Nixon years will be a holding operation until the arrival of the young leader who is willing and able to break with the traditions of the past as represented in campaign '68. If anything, this election year has shown that the conservative tradition is no longer good enough.