



## The Making of the President 1972

*Theodore H. White*

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**The Making of the President 1972** Theodore H. White

End of the Postwar World

Solitary Man

Road to Cedar Point

From the Liberal Idea to the Liberal Theology

View from Key Biscayne

Blue Collars and Bread-and-Butter

Democratic Primaries

A Party In Search of Identity

McGovern's Army

Web of Numbers: A Message from the Census to Politics Confrontation at Miami

Eagleton Affair

Richard Nixon's Campaign: 'Out There'

Power Struggle: President versus Press

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## The Making of the President 1972 Details

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# From Reader Review The Making of the President 1972 for online ebook

## TrumanCoyote says

Ted is quite a purple guy, but if you like your political reading to be filled with snow-covered slopes and pigeons cooing, this is the book for you (personally, all that shimmering/glimmering stuff just makes me hearken back rather unfortunately to the song "Julia"). Actually, I maybe could've put up with those little touches, but it was his constant big-picture pretensions that really started to give me a headache. I suppose White imagines that his sonorities are eloquent, but too often for me they were just schoolmasterish and hokey...it was kind of like being forced to listen to some awful assembly put on by the faculty at junior high (like those two music teachers played by Ferrell and Gasteyer on SNL), and then having to applaud with everyone else at the end (as you all roll your eyes toward the ceiling). Also his liberal bias got pretty annoying after a while. Slow reading--I mean, even slower than politics usually is--navigating the mountainous and windy terrain of his style, and moving in vertiginous, roller-coaster-like swoops from one imponderably sententious assertion to another. Still, there were quite a few interesting tidbits to be found; if only he had devoted less time to background and philosophy and more to observation and anecdotes, it would have been a far better book.

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## Dan Cohen says

The last book in the series, and entirely in line with the quality and insight of the preceding 3, this book was written at a difficult time. The author chronicles the election as he had the previous 3, but in this case, events whose significance only surfaced after the election also take significant space in the book. I was surprised at how good a take on Watergate the author managed with the constraint of writing so soon after the events (and, no doubt, under pressure to get the book out as soon as possible after the election).

I found the self-destruction of the Democrats strange to read, but it only mirrored the similar self-destruction of the Republicans in 1964 under Goldwater. For a Briton, it was surprising to see 2 such episodes in 4 presidential elections, when I had assumed that the similar behaviour of first Labour and then the Conservatives in Britain in the 80's and 90's/noughties was a feature of our less professional approach to politics. Not so, clearly.

Anyway, as with the others, this book is an essential read. I recommend reading all 4 in order, with only small gaps between them to freshen the palette.

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## Davefg1 says

If you are expecting a look a la Game Change or Double Down you will be sorely disappointed. The book barely covers the basics of the 1972 campaign, instead it focuses on the social and political evolution up to the election.

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## **David Bales says**

Interesting read in the Theodore White series of presidential campaigns. McGovern's 1972 campaign was only possible after a revolt in the Democratic party during the interim years since 1968, the bosses being overthrown by a group of Young Turks who didn't really understand how politics work in the United States. The old guard was disgusted and humiliated, and Nixon rolled over the ticket in an 18 million vote landslide. Still, McGovern's campaign was revolutionary in its support of women, gays and the poor, and Senator McGovern's legacy as opposing the Vietnam War as being immoral had a sincere basis. One of the best people never to be president. Nixon's campaign correctly preyed on every prejudice the American people have, and McGovern bravely tried to present a different version.

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## **Aaron Million says**

White's fourth - and final - installment of his Presidential election chronicles. He seemed to have a much better grasp on most of the various and complicated elements of this election than he did on the 1968 election. White is especially prescient and forward-thinking on the - at that time - growing disaster that was Watergate (the book was written in the spring of 1973). In fact, his analysis of the deed and the ramifications that would result from it is very much on the mark. He anticipated that this could well bring Nixon down, as it did a little over a year later.

White's strength in this and the other books is his behind-the-scenes access to all of the major players in the campaigns. He speaks to everyone, and gains access to rooms where crucial decisions are made. He develops somewhat of a grudging respect for President Nixon as he shows the strains and stresses that are placed on Nixon, while also giving him ample credit for his great foreign policy accomplishments. He gives sympathy, but also a fair share of criticism, to Senator George McGovern for trying to be the good guy and talking about peace, yet remaining incredibly out of tune with the American people and what they wanted. Also, McGovern's handling of the Eagleton, O'Brien, and Salinger affairs leaves plenty of room for someone to question his ability to occupy the White House.

One flaw that I found in this book, as in the 1968 book, was the superficial treatment of the George Wallace campaign. White mentions it from time to time, and only glosses over the assassination attempt that left Wallace paralyzed from the waist down. White should have devoted a chapter to Wallace's movement and to the details of the assassination attempt.

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## **Hubert Han says**

White is often too comfortable in rambling narrative and therefore never really nails his colours to the mast in terms of how (rather than when) the election was won. A reflective dimension is missing, but it provides an adequate and enjoyable overview of the 1972 election.

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## **David says**

Richard Nixon's victory over George McGovern wasn't just predictable. It was such a sure thing that political reporters could have written their articles a week or more ahead of the election and simply left a space to fill in with the number of states and electoral votes won by the Republican ticket. Richard Nixon never would have volunteered a comment to a reporter, even at the moment of his greatest triumph. White was one of the few journalists who could have access to Nixon, and his conversation with Nixon aboard Air Force One is what makes this book so intriguing. On that day, Nixon wasn't thinking about Watergate -- and the great unspoken irony of that is that Nixon and his staff obsessed over Watergate more and more after the election.

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## **Wardo says**

For the ultimate view of the campaign that signaled the true end of the '60s, read this along with Hunter Thompson's "Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72." Really. I'm going to blog about this someday. [www.dailywardo.blogspot.com](http://www.dailywardo.blogspot.com)

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## **Erik Graff says**

The 1972 election was the first time I could vote and the only time I have voted for the candidate chosen by the Democratic Party: George McGovern. Although I had done some campaigning for him in Des Moines and Grinnell, Iowa, I had also attended one Chicago rally for Eugene McCarthy who was running a quixotic campaign himself. That was probably my most memorable experience of the race as it was the only time I ever personally spoke to Phil Ochs or ever heard and saw Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary.

The choice was a hard one. I had read many of McCarthy's books, had worked long and hard for him in 1968 and agreed with his critique of the powers of the executive branch, but the issue of 1972 was the war and McGovern entered the campaign with a chance of winning. To his credit, he had campaigned himself for Henry Wallace in 1948, so I hoped he was truly a man of conscience.

My failure to vote for Democratic Party candidates since has not been because of some principled devotion to another party or a wholesale rejection of the Democrats. Usually there is someone in the primaries to support, but, with the exception of McGovern, they never win. Consequently, I end up "voting my conscience" for some hopeless write-in or third party candidate.

Interestingly, a major reason McGovern won his party's nomination was because of the presidential nomination rule changes which were instituted after the 1968 convention and which he substantially guided. These changes materially undercut the power of local party organizations and increased the influence of primary elections.

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## **Dan says**

Here is a quote:

"From the founding of the country on, the central instinct and pride of the American liberal has been to keep opportunity for individuals open. For two centuries the wars of American liberals--against King George, against the banks, against the slaveholders, against the railways, against the trusts, against the bosses--have reflected a doctrine which is more than politics, a doctrine which is of the essence of the culture of the nation: No man must be locked into or hammered into a category from which he has no opportunity to escape."

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### **Jon Smith says**

The last of White's stories about the four presidential election, 1960-72, this one is stunning because of his summation of Richard Nixon, subject of two of those books. The book also is interesting and contemporary due to its discussion of the 1972 primary campaign (there were 22 that year) and how they were used by Edmund Muskie, George McGovern and Hubert Humphrey. As White drafted the last few chapters of this book, the American television audience was first seeing congressional hearings investigating Watergate. The "enemies" list was not yet known; Agnew had not yet resigned. And perhaps missed by years of movies and gossip is just how entertaining Teddy White's writing style continued to be. But its a remarkable tale about how thoroughly evil people can be elected President of the United States.

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### **Doug says**

Long, exhaustive account of Richard Nixon's landslide re-election campaign. It spends too much time on procedural aspects (like credentials at the parties conventions)and steers away at times too much from the center of the book Nixon. McGovern was just not quite as interesting a candidate and his sections only come alive when dealing with the disasters of his campaign (Eagleton affair). Could afford to lose about 100 pages, but still a good read for political junkies like myself.

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### **Edward says**

This is probably the best of White's election chronicles. His coverage of 1960 was heavily biased in favor of the Kennedy campaign, and I found both '64 and '68 to be less engaging. In "The Making of the President '72", White's conclusions pretty much stand up to the test of time, and are generally valid today. He makes it clear that McGovern simply was unable to convince the public that he could do a better job than Nixon. White notes that McGovern's campaign staff ran a brilliant operation in winning the nomination, but forgot that there was a whole "other" Democratic party outside of the convention. They were simply too inexperienced. He alienated the very people who might have been able to have gotten his message across to the rank-and-file, such as Pierre Salinger.

Growing up in a rabidly New Deal Democratic household, at the time of the election I fully bought into the charges that the Republicans had engineered McGovern's triumph because they knew he would be "easy to beat". But as White demonstrates, McGovern won the nomination masterfully, with his hard-charging and fast-reacting staff. The deft management of his floor captains during the convention was awe-inspiring. Of course, alienating huge blocks of his party didn't help in the long-run, but that is another story.

White also correctly noted that McGovern held very strong principles, but in face-to-face encounters, he

could be very deceitful. For example, his treatment of O'Brien and Salinger. McGovern waffled on too many questions, which lost him a great deal of credibility. Eagleton later remarked that if McGovern had simply called him immediately and said that he needed to step down for the good of the party, Eagleton would have done so gladly. Just reading McGovern's outright denial of sending Salinger to Paris to meet with the North Vietnamese gave me shivers, and not good ones!

Lest I be perceived as a McGovern-basher, I'll add that in 1972 I was 12 years old, and my family was one of only two in the small Florida town where we lived who supported McGovern. The other was our Episcopalian minister! Old ladies in the congregation continually begged him "Reverend, PLEASE take that McGovern sticker off of your car! It's EMBARRASSING!" 1972 was the last Presidential election where I feel that voters were given a clear and truly different choice. But I believe that McGovern was simply moving too fast, and was a bit ahead of his time on most social issues.

White says that "The full nature of the Nixon mind was probably known only to three people...Kissinger, Ehrlichman, and Haldeman." His portrayal of Nixon as a "solitary" man goes far to explain the slow descent of the Nixon administration into the pit that became known as "Watergate". At the time, I furiously argued with my Republican classmates that "Nixon KNEW" and gave the orders, but as an adult I gradually came to realize that he truly did not. This was, in many ways, more terrible, because he strove to coverup something that he himself admitted was "stupid". This bunker mentality destroyed his presidency, and has resulted in the good points of his record, i.e. women's rights, Native American rights, etc. to be obscured. Nixon out-liberaled the liberals on many issues, a tactic that Clinton was to successfully repeat against his own opponents much later.

In summation, as White says, Nixon both deserved to win in 1972, and in 1974 he deserved to be driven from office. White has been accused of "going soft" on Nixon, but bear in mind that his book was written while the Watergate investigation was still in progress. His subsequent book "Breach of Faith" does not hold back any punches.

For me the 1972 campaign was the most visceral and gripping election of my entire life. Both McGovern and Nixon were fascinating men, who I never tire of reading about. With McGovern's recent death, I felt as if an era has ended. White's "The Making of the President 1972" is a crucial work for people interested in that election or the two protagonists.

Interesting fact: McGovern voted for Ford in 1976!

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## **Omar Halabieh says**

I recently finished reading *The Making of the President 1972 - A narrative of American politics in action* - by Theodore H. White.

Below are key excerpts from this book that I found to be particularly insightful:

He recognized best, and spoke most clearly, for how Americans chose to live at home in their neighborhoods-or, at the very least, he persuaded an astounding majority of Americans that he understood their emotions and needs better than his rival. With his victory, he believed in all sincerity that he had been

given a mandate to reorganize the American government to make it more responsive to what the voters had shown they wanted. The after-fact that this genuine mandate might be denied him by Watergate, by the frightening way he had let his own appointees use his purposes to flout law—that is a story this book will inescapably, later, come to. But the book begins with how the people saw their leaders, and how the leaders saw them: people, in America in 1972, when the postwar world was coming to an end—and how the people chose Richard Nixon.

Roosevelt had come of the patricians and rarely soiled himself with the nitty-gritty of mechanical politics. Roosevelt campaigned in another time, almost in another country. Large of vision, buoyant of spirit, steeped in history by family and blood, the lordly Roosevelt left it to his lieutenants to deal with the wards, the townships and regional power brokers, then pasted up his electoral votes, as he did the stamps his dealers brought him, in his album. It was quite clear always to Roosevelt what he was dealing with and what he had to do—and he did it easily.

The world of the 1960's—which the liberals had dominated in America—was changing so rapidly that by the beginning of the 1970's America—was changing so rapidly that by the beginning of the 1970's change had created a climate of schizophrenia in liberal thinking, almost a civil war among thinkers who came of the same tradition. Always, since the time of Washington and Jefferson, three great permanent issues have dominated American politics—foreign policy; the clash of the races; and the managing of the economy. In the 1960's, however, a liberal administration had accepted the war in Vietnam - and its unfurling had then split liberals from top to bottom. Liberals had championed the Black Revolution—and been unable to cope with its results. Liberals had masterminded the great boom of the 1960's—and not foreseen its effect on manners and morals.

Well, Mr. Nixon liked Andrew Jackson—Jackson took on the banks. He liked Lincoln—Lincoln took on slavery and the cause of the Union. He liked Grover Cleveland—Cleveland took on the Congress, and restored the power of the Presidency which had been lost by Andrew Johnson. And Teddy Roosevelt—he had taken on the trusts and vested interests. And Wilson—Wilson took on the Senate and the isolationists. And Franklin Roosevelt. The common denominator, said the President, was that they accepted controversy and they made things move, they wanted progress. "There's a role in life for men like McKinley, good men," said the President. But he, Nixon, didn't want to be like McKinley, nor like Eisenhower. He wanted to be a leader.

Statistics had once been a clearly marked area of scholarship, where economists, sociologists and planners held intellectual squatter's rights. Now the numbers were a new staple of journalism. The Bloody Thursday figures fitted into the middle pages of the newspapers, as did the numbers on traffic, schools and tobacco use. But the high-impact figures —unemployment, prices, crime—were front-page news everywhere, as well as natural stories for the television evening news. Slowly, one tried to explore the numbers, for they had become the fashionable way for politicians to demonstrate a grip on reality. And one learned that there are real numbers and phony numbers.

Each decade in American life has a Sacred Issue to which all politicians must pay lip service. In the 1950's, the Sacred Issue had been Defense and Anti-Communism. In the 1970's, it seems certain that it will be the cause of Environment. In the 1960's, however, the Sacred Issue was Education—and the Census of 1970, reporting on youth, Issue was Education—and the Census of 1970, reporting on youth, measured the mania for education which had swept American society in the previous decade.

One could best explain the nature of this struggle in 1972 by making an imaginary diagram of the American power structure at the turn of the century and comparing it to the American power structure as the postwar



world came to its end. In 1900, as William McKinley prepared for his second term, the American power structure could be described in pure Leninist. At the pinnacle of power was Wall Street-finance. Wall Street centralized American national action—it decided where mines would be opened, railways built, what immigrant labor should be imported, what tech-railways built, what immigrant labor should be imported, what technology developed. At a second level was the Congress of the United States—doing the will of the great financiers, enacting the necessary laws, repelling the raiders of prairie discontent. On a third level was the series of largely undistinguished men who until 1900 had held the figurehead office of President of the United States for thirty years; their chief power, beyond the expression of patriotic piety, was to deploy a minuscule professional army and navy against Indians and Spaniards. The American clergy exercised some moral power, best expressed in such issues of national political importance as temperance. Behind came all the other power ingredients—a decorative Supreme Court, the early labor unions, the corrupt big-city machines, the universities. Then the proprietary press—for the press was then a proprietorship, something owned by businessmen for making money. By 1972 the power structure had entirely changed. The most important fall from power had happened to finance; businessmen might get fat, as they still did in 1972, by wheedling subsidies from national or state governments, but they were now a lobby that came hat-in-hand before a legislature and executive to whom once they had dictated. Labor, big labor, had risen to almost equal political power. The clergy had declined in power even more than big business. Congress, too, was a major loser in the power game—seventy years of domination by vigorous, aggressive Presidents had reduced its self-respect and, even more critically, the respect of the public. The Supreme Court had reached a peak of control over the national agenda in the 1960's; but its power was beginning to fade again as the seventies began. Universities were among the big gainers in the power hierarchy—universities now were among the big gainers in the power hierarchy—universities now. But the two greatest gainers in the reorganized power structure were the Executive President and his adversary press, or, as one should more properly phrase it in modern America, the "press-television complex." Both tried to operate under what they considered traditional rules, but American life had made that impossible.

The story of Watergate was only one of a number of major stories in the election of 1972. As it unraveled, it was to become a story of 1973 and would fit better, someday when all was known, into a story of the use and abuse of power in a modern state. The elections of 1972 were determined, basically, by the record Richard Nixon had written in the understanding of his people—and his chief adversary was not in the understanding of his people—and his chief adversary was not understood and spoke for the people better than he did himself. On this immediate level of contest, Richard Nixon won. The people preferred Richard Nixon.

The Watergate affair is inexplicable in terms of older forms of corruption in American history, where men broke laws for private gain or privilege. The dynamics of its irrationality are compounded further by stupidity. The men involved were involved at a moment, in 1972, when history was moving their way. They were trying to speed it by any means. History was moving their way. They were trying to speed it by any means, that, as history may record, compounds their personal felonies with national tragedy. For it would be no less than national tragedy if men came to regard the election of 1972 as fraud; or attempted to reverse the verdict of the people at the polls on the technicalities of a burglary, in a spasm of morality approaching the hysterical.

The Democratic Party, which called itself the party of the future, had become, in their eyes, the party of the past. They turned instead to Richard Nixon, affirming the change of direction he declared he was giving to government—a restraint on the power and reach of the Federal state into daily life. However his use of the power of state may be defined in the months or years to come, use of the power of state may be defined in the months or years to come, for this time, they preferred to live their own lives privately—unplagued by moralities, or war, or riots, or violence. In the alternation of the sequences of American history, in the cycle

between poetry and pragmatism, in those generational shifts of mood characteristic of the adventure in democracy certainly the ideas of the minority who voted for McGovern would come into then: time again. Those ideas still stirred in the spirit of the nation. But until those ideas had new form, new shape, new perspective, the majority of Americans would not be called out to march in their cause. Such was their mandate in 1972.

An educative read on American history and politics.

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## **Greg Talbot says**

Writing the book when two Nixon aide's were on trial, and executive office was stained from Richard Nixon's abdication, White's account of Nixon's shattering success in 1972 is remarkable. The book takes us from through the post-war world. The American ideas about the Great Society, the involvement in Vietnam, and the social issues of identity and civil rights.

With the exception of Roosevelt, no other president had a larger footprint in politics than Nixon in the last hundred years. Privacy and suspicion infected his thought, and the rising tide of liberal press and college campus protests would increase the guardedness. As White articulates "scar tissue had grown thick by the time of re-election, rigid self discipline" (p.16).

And the democratic primary of 1972 was as entertaining as the most recent Republican circus of 2016. The McGovern strategy, "leapfrog Illinois and roll up the party from the left (p.95), successfully thwarted the attempts of former vice president Hubert Humphrey, the stiff old school morality of Governor Muskie, and the dog-whistling inflammatory language of Governor Wallace. McGovern's identification with the far left, embrace of draft dodgers, and unequivocal call to end the war in Vietnam left him continually behind Nixon. Even in attempts to add Kennedy to the ticket, and attack the establishment, his foothold as a leader to the country never occurred.

There are multiple stories here that are really fascinating, the chapter on Tom Eddington as a vice-president selection, selected by the campaign committee on a tiring all-nighter, is insightful into mental health as a campaign story. John Dickerson's "Whistlestop" episode on this is just fascinating in particular, and shows how McGovern's decision on his VP destroyed his credibility with voters. Also, Nixon's attacks on the Washington Post and New York Times, and the beginning of a fractured worldview in the country forecasts the media landscape today. And of course the Watergate affair, likened to a mystery novel with less clever intruders.

White uses numbers to discuss his story effectively. Commenting on how the daily death reports in Vietnam would effect the nation, or how the beginning of more sophisticated polling data was used in campaigns, all of which shows the beginning of a more data heavy way to take in the world. Compare to today's rigorous pollings of every issue, and Twitter spectacles, it's quaint, but as White points out, it's a sign of the country's beginning into a few decade.

White points out that the 1972 is often compared to the campaign of 1964. Ideas of the Great Society, and big government initiatives vs state initiatives were central to voters. Attacks on the establishment or by the establishment are as fresh as the latest 2016 campaign. The electorate has just voted again, and there are shades of 1972 in the mirror. Like that fractured turbulent time, the dice have been cast, and America has accepted a leader, and time will test our prudence.

