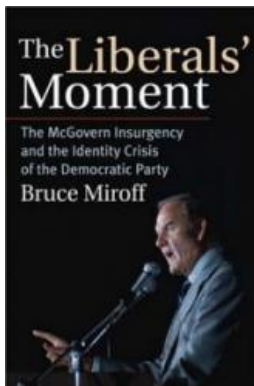


The Liberals' Moment

Monday, June 9, 2008



The decade of the 1970s is now a generation behind us, but the cultural and political movements of that pivotal decade set the stage for so much of what we face in our current times. In terms of national politics, two great developments stand out. On the Left, the nomination of Sen. George McGovern became the pivotal event of the decade, even as the rise of a reinvigorated conservatism became the great event on the Right.

Author [Bruce Miroff](#) of the State University of New York at Albany takes his readers into the heart of the McGovern campaign in *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* [University Press of Kansas, 2007]. There is no way one can make sense of the modern Democratic party without understanding this campaign. The issues of that campaign still define the Left, as do many of the individuals involved in the campaign (such as Bill Clinton). *The Liberals' Moment* should be read by all

who want to understand our current political context — both liberals and conservatives.

An excerpt:

Despite the landslide defeat, the McGovern campaign bequeathed to the Democrats a talented, youthful cadre of strategists, organizers, and wordsmiths who as they aged would largely shape the evolution of the party over the following decades. Every presidential campaign brings new activists into electoral politics, and some stay for the long haul. But for Democrats, the McGovern campaign produced a more distinctive and influential generation of political operatives than any campaign since. We can identify McGovernites—a term I use descriptively, hoping to detach it from the pejorative implications it is often given by right-wing commentators. But we do not speak of Mondaleites, Dukakisites, or Goreites, and even the senior Clintonites were McGovernites further down the political road.

Many liberals would prefer to look back on the McGovern campaign with nostalgia rather than discomfort, as the last time they could feel passionate and honest as they rallied behind one of their own in a presidential election. Certainly, later insurgent liberals, who have never made it past the primaries, have not paid much heed to the electoral vulnerability of liberalism that the McGovern campaign made palpable. Yet any future campaign mounted by the liberal wing of the Democratic Party needs to grapple with these vulnerabilities. Several characteristics of the McGovern campaign that offered plump targets for the Republicans remain of great relevance today, and liberals cannot evade the problems that they pose if they want credibly to renew their claim to the party's leadership.

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