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In 1970 the United States was in the midst of one of its greatest upheavals. With high interest rates, rising unemployment, and a perceived breakdown of social traditions, American people felt adrift. The 1960s were on their way out, but its creations -- civil rights, demonstrations, and the Vietnam war -- remained. Americans since 1968 had seen the assassinations of a presidential candidate and of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the horrific 1968 Democratic presidential convention and the Chicago Seven, and the emergence of a viable third political party running a thinly-veiled racist campaign for President. They had seen the firing upon demonstrators by National Guardsmen at Kent State, demonstrations across the nation on college campuses and, by presidential order, the escalation of the Vietnam war into Cambodia. For the average American things appeared to be in disorder and something, anything, needed to be done about it. As stated by Tom Wicker, in a column that appeared in the Knoxville News-Sentinel on November 2, 1970,

A swing to the right is not nearly so evident among the American people as is a pervasive sense of crisis, a widespread feeling that something has gone wrong in America - with the economy, with 'the kids,' with life in the city, with society generally, with a war that no one even tries to defend any more, with the way things are and the way people have to live in the most highly "developed" of all 20th Century societies.¹

For the average white southerner things were in even more disorder. Not only did the country appear to be going to hell in a handbasket, but white southerners were forced to deal with the race problem directly for the first time. Integration of schools,
workplace, and other areas, along with forced busing, all federally mandated, made white southerners wary of what would be forced upon them next. On top of the race problems appeared the apparent disarray of the rest of the nation. These problems could not have comforted a white southerner on a long, hot, summer night. Things were changing in the nation, especially in the South, and southerners who usually dislike change were not happy.

Tennesseans, being part of the South, experienced these problems as well. One way to understand how they reacted to the events and attitudes of 1970 is by looking at how they voted and who they voted for at election time. A good case study for this would be a specific election, in this case the senatorial race between Albert Gore, Sr. and William E. Brock III.

Tennessee in 1970 was an unusual southern state politically. Only once since 1944 had it voted for a Democratic presidential candidate (Lyndon Johnson in 1964) and it had begun to develop a strong Republican party that was capable of winning elections. By 1970, four of Tennessee's nine representatives in the United States House and one of its two senators were Republicans. The Republicans also had managed to wrest control of the state's House of Representatives away from the Democrats in 1968. So, the Republicans had managed to make the state a competitive two-party system. This political situation was relatively new, because from the time of the Civil War until the 1960's, the Democrats had controlled the state by controlling Middle and West Tennessee while the Republicans controlled East Tennessee. The arrangement had
prompted one political analyst to call the political situation in Tennessee that of two one-party systems, with the two parties entrenched in their respective areas and never challenging the other one’s turf.²

Therefore, the election in Tennessee in 1970 was viewed as an important one by both Republicans and Democrats. With its mixture of national overtones, the emergence of the GOP on the statewide level, and the first serious attempt by Republicans to win the governorship (Republicans had failed to win the governor’s office since 1920³), the 1970 Senate race shaped up to be an intensely competitive one.

Albert Gore, Sr. had been a member of the United States Congress for thirty-two years, the first fourteen as a Representative and the last eighteen as a Senator. Gore, from Carthage, a small city in Middle Tennessee, was considered a liberal and, as The Nashville Tennessean called him, "heir to the illustrious Cordell Hull."⁴ As one of the more liberal senators in the Congress and in the Democratic party, he was associated with men like George McGovern and Edward Kennedy.⁵ He had failed to make himself popular with the President of the United States, Richard Nixon, or his Vice-President Spiro Agnew.⁶ Because of the mood of the country and Tennessee’s recent Republican surge, Gore knew it would be a tough for him to be re-elected, and he considered whether or not to run very carefully. He finally made the decision to run what he knew was going to be a difficult and long campaign. Why? He felt that he had to get his liberal
message across and he believed he was the only one who could do it.  

William E. Brock III, known as Bill, represented Tennessee’s Third District in the United States House of Representatives. He had served four terms, defeating a Democratic incumbent in 1962. In 1968, Brock’s decision to run for the Senate was set after Nixon’s presidential victory. Brock helped Nixon in his bid for the presidency and was one of the first to encourage him to run for President.  

Therefore, with the Nixon victory Brock’s next step was to try for the Senate. As a political conservative and a recently converted Republican, (Brock’s grandfather was a Democrat who had served as a Senator from 1929-1932), Brock had built up the Republican party in the Chattanooga area. This was his political power base which he used for his election in ’62 and kept using for re-election in his next three victories in ’64, ’66, and ’68.

Bill Brock defeated Albert Gore because he was able to portray himself as what the Tennessee people wanted and needed. He was able to make himself the people’s candidate by using statewide political problems to his advantage, by using national issues to his advantage, and by riding a new found growth in Republican party strength in Tennessee.

One of the reasons Bill Brock was able to beat Albert Gore was because of the political scene on the state level. In the gubernatorial race, the Republican candidate, Winfield Dunn, was running against a Democrat, John Jay Hooker, Jr., who had been
defeated in the 1966 Democratic primary for governor. Winfield Dunn was a political unknown at the beginning of the election, but was able to ride a strong campaign to the governor’s office.

Much of the reason for Dunn’s victory was the fact that Hooker was heavily in debt, the result of bankruptcy proceedings against him and his businesses. Dunn, by attacking Hooker repeatedly on his failed business adventures (at one point he blamed Hooker’s business failings for causing more unemployment in Tennessee than any other reason) and by outspending Hooker by an estimated margin of 3.5 to 2.5, was able to ride to victory. His victory could only have helped Brock. A county-by-county analysis shows that there was a strong correlation in the votes between Dunn and Brock, with the two candidates being between five percent of each other in seventy-seven of the ninety-five counties. Although Brock ran ahead of Dunn in some areas, Dunn’s large margin of victory in west Tennessee, especially in Memphis, his home city, helped to sweep Brock to victory.

Bill Brock was further helped by the fact that Albert Gore and John Jay Hooker were not successful in running a joint campaign, wasting the scarce resources available to them. With East Tennessee almost assured of voting heavily for Dunn and Brock, combined with Brock’s probability of winning Chattanooga and Dunn’s strength in Memphis, Gore was at an inherent disadvantage. Not being able to run a joint campaign caused Gore and Hooker to compete for valuable resources. It also undermined the increased party loyalty that Gore felt he needed to win.
Initially, John J. Hooker turned down Gore’s idea to campaign jointly because of the fear Gore would weigh him down. According to campaign polls done by the Hooker camp, Gore trailed badly. \(^{15}\) Gore had encountered stiff opposition from a conservative Democrat who had run a very close race in the primary to him, Hudley Crockett and he did not looked like he had a chance of winning. \(^{16}\) Geographically, Gore and Hooker were at a disadvantage because they were from the same region, Hooker from Nashville and Gore from Carthage, just south of Nashville. Therefore, even though Gore was able to run a spirited campaign, he was as much hurt by Hooker’s albatross (the failed business ventures) and the inability to run a joint campaign as Hooker was. But in a tight race anything can happen and if the two had gotten together earlier and campaigned unified, they might have won. Although they ran within about five percentage points of each other in over 82 percent of the counties, if Hooker’s support had gone to Gore in West Tennessee, Gore might have been able to just squeak by.\(^1\)

In the national arena Brock was able to capitalize on two things. He had the support of the Nixon administration in his election campaign, and he felt that Gore’s record as a senator and a national figure was out of synchronization with Tennessee. Richard Nixon and his administration felt Albert Gore to be their worst political enemy because of his virulent disagreement with administration policies over Vietnam, his fight with them over tax

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\(^{1}\) If you take all the counties in which Hooker ran ahead of Gore and counted those votes together, there is a possibility Gore might have been able to win. Hopkins and Lyons, p. 360.
Gore was, in his own words, "the number one target of the President." Because they so desperately wanted to defeat Gore, Nixon appeared twice in Tennessee and Spiro Agnew appeared a few times to support Brock.

Each of the times they visited they underscored their support of Brock by stating that he would be their man in the Senate and would allow them to get their programs through. Brock, sensing that Nixon was popular with voters (Nixon had won Tennessee in all four national elections he had run in, as both a presidential and a vice-Presidential candidate) agreed, even using Nixon's speech as part of one of his commercials. Along with administration support came money and help, especially since Gore was so targeted. Bill Brock was able to outspend Albert Gore and because of his opponent, Brock also had access to powerful political consultants and public relations agencies to help him win.

In some ways, however, using the Nixon administration's plan backfired. Gore tried somewhat successfully to link Brock to the economy, which has long been considered the fault or success of the president. He attacked the administration, specifically calling Vice President Spiro Agnew "our worst disaster since Vietnam." He also said in a moment of reflection after the election that his fortunes had begun to improve once Spiro Agnew had appeared in Memphis. Obviously, there was no love lost between Gore and the administration. The attention of the administration also brought
the national press and with it more campaign contributions, something Gore felt he sorely needed. However, even with Gore’s ability to hit back against the administration and collect more money, it does appear that Brock’s victory was partially because of the help he received from Nixon. Nixon and his administration took credit for it and were pleased with Brock’s victory, and the national press apparently thought Brock’s victory was important also, as Brock appeared on the cover of the November 16, 1970 issue of Time.

Although Bill Brock had the help of the administration, his most successful attacks on Albert Gore were the ones on his voting record as a senator and the prominence Gore had in the liberal Senate establishment. Brock tried to portray Albert Gore as someone out of touch with Tennessee, someone who did not represent the interests of the citizens of Tennessee in Congress. Brock’s litany, used in many of his speeches, was reprinted as an advertisement in all the major state newspapers in the days leading up the election,

On gun registration Tennesseans said no, but Albert Gore voted yes. On busing of school children Tennesseans said no, but Albert Gore voted yes. On school prayer Tennesseans said yes, but Albert Gore voted no. On Carswell and Haynsworth Tennesseans said yes, but Albert Gore voted no. Isn’t it time Tennesseans said no to Albert Gore?

Brock also attacked Gore on his dovish stance in the Vietnam, insinuating that Gore did not support the troops there because he did not support the war. Gore struck back, saying that he had always voted for appropriations to the troops but that he believed
the war was wrong. Gore found these charges to be especially ludicrous, especially considering his son was under orders for Vietnam at the time. That may have caused Gore to begin hitting back with his own statements comparing himself to Brock, two days before the election, you can see I came up with Tennessee dirt on my hands; not Chattanooga chocolate. (Brock was heir to the Brock Candy factory).

Gore also tried to explain his voting record, stating that he was against school busing, that the bill on busing he had voted for was necessary to allow federal funding to continue for bus services (Tennessee’s Republican senator, Howard Baker, also voted for the bill and he was quoted in the paper as saying he supported the bill for the same reasons that Gore did). But the hits kept on coming. Gore also had to defend his votes against two southern nominations to the Supreme Court. Even though he felt that neither man was capable or should have been on the Supreme Court, he was still slammed. In having to defend himself so much, Gore was not able to strike back as hard at Brock.

He was, however, finally able to articulate his attack against Brock by coming up with 50 bills he had voted for that Brock had not. He explained that Brock’s votes were against the average Tennessean. He began to expound on the fact he had given breaks to Tennesseans by expanding Social Security and the tax exemptions. In a paid political advertisement that appeared in the Knoxville News-Sentinel two days before the election, Gore challenged Brock’s contentions about his record and then made a few
of his own about Brock's record. Specifically, he hit Brock on voting against farm bills, veterans' benefits, and education. Gore also tried to clarify his views on prayer and gun registration, explaining that Brock had oversimplified many of the issues.

He was most successful with the prayer issue, saying that it had backfired against Brock because various religious leaders had criticized Brock publicly for his attack on Gore on the prayer issues. But his advertisement was wordy compared to Brock's, and to an untrained casual observer, was not as powerful as Brock's, especially in simple black and white. Gore did not seem to understand that he needed a simple theme to combat Brock, one like Brock's repetitious theme that Gore was out of touch with the state. But Gore failed to come up with a simple theme. The differences between the two political advertisements of Gore and Brock are very symbolic of the campaigns the two candidates ran. Gore was trying to get the issues across he believed were important, while Brock continued to hit Gore with a simple and straightforward message, albeit a little free with the truth.

The final reason Bill Brock was able to pull off his victory was because of the shift in party alignment away from the Democratic party in Tennessee. Although Tennessee had long been considered a Democratic stronghold on the statewide level, it had been slowly changing. Most of the change can be attributed to the growing empowerment of the African-American. The shift away from the Democratic party can trace its beginnings to the Dixiecrat
campaign in 1948 by Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. As African-Americans were granted more and more rights, specifically voting rights, the shift away from the Democratic party became more obvious, first at the presidential level in Tennessee and then all the way down.

Brock benefitted from the disarray the Democratic party in Tennessee found itself in because of the shift. In fact, both Bill Brock and Winfield Dunn fit the mold of men who had felt the Democratic party had betrayed them by becoming too liberal and had switched parties. Brock’s timing was such that he was able to ride to victory on a rift in the Democratic camp between the liberal and conservative camps that could trace its beginnings back to 1948. In looking back at the ’64, ’66, and ’68 elections one can see that there was a gradual shift away from the Democratic party, especially among lower income whites.

The Republicans already had control of the growing middle and upper class white suburban professionals, and with this strong base they could reach out for others, in this case poor whites. With forced school integration, school busing, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, even the poorer, white, rural folks in Tennessee felt that the Democratic party was deserting them. And when Senator Barry Goldwater presidential candidate of the Republican party in the 1964 election, voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, people who had voted Democratic for their whole lives sat up and took notice. Republicans were making an effort to court the white vote and it
was working too, as whites began to back away from their Democratic party.

The exodus continued non-stop throughout the '60's. In 1968, when George Wallace broke from the Democratic party to run an independent campaign, many of the whites who had felt they had been betrayed by the Democratic Party voted for him. In Tennessee, for example, Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate for President, came in last in the field of three. Nixon came in first and saw the wave of the future.

In fact, one of Nixon's political consultants believed that the Democratic party would gradually become the party of the African-American. So, in 1970, Nixon devised his Southern Strategy to attract the Wallace voters, reasoning that a vote for Wallace was a way station on the way to voting Republican. Nixon campaigned heavily to gain strength in the South and he also tried to get candidates to run who would help his new strategy. In the case of Bill Brock he was successful. Brock, like Goldwater, had also voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and he was able to win his election by playing to the fears of the Wallace voters in thinly veiled comments about race. In effect, he took many of the ideas of the old conservative Democrats, put a media glitz on them, and ran his election campaign.

The race for senator was very even, with major news services saying it was too close to call on the eve of the election. Even political reporters were unsure who would win. A poll done by The Nashville Banner, showed eleven reporters picked Brock to win and
ten picked Gore.\textsuperscript{53} The candidates did not have any better idea. In the days leading up to the election Gore predicted a victory of 50,000\textsuperscript{54}, while Brock predicted he would win by 100,000 votes.\textsuperscript{55} Both were wrong. On election day William E. Brock III defeated Albert Gore, Sr. by a little over 42,000 votes, or by a margin of 51.3 percent to 47.4 percent\textsuperscript{56}. Winning large in east Tennessee, losing middle Tennessee, and winning west Tennessee, Bill Brock became only the second elected Republican Senator from Tennessee.

In a final analysis of William Brock's win, it is interesting to point out, that although Brock was able to win and so was Dunn, the Republicans lost thirteen governorships throughout the nation and were only able to gain three Senate seats, far less than the administration wanted. In fact, the administration was largely ineffectual in winning its contests. But, in Tennessee, Bill Brock was able to win the state despite a strong Democratic showing nationally, partially because of the strong turnout afforded Winfield Dunn.

Tennessee reacted differently to the upheavals occurring throughout the nation, but its reaction was that of a state with a pure southern outlook. It reacted to the alleged chaos and the unrest conservatively, turning away from the more liberal party, the Democrats, and to the more conservative party, the Republicans. But the results of the election were just one blip on the historical record (and not conclusive) as six years later, Brock lost his seat to Jim Sasser, who was able to win in part because of the coattails he rode of another governor, Jimmy Carter.


7. Ibid., pp. 211-213.


11. Ibid.


15. Ibid., p. 247.

16. Ibid., p. 249.

17. Ibid., pp. 278-279.


19. Ibid.

21. Ibid.


23. Ibid., pp. 267, 269, 277.


27. Gore, Let the Glory Out, pp. 256-257.

28. "Strong Bid for President in '72 Seen."

29. Cover shot, Time, Nov. 16, 1970


34. "Is it Democrats or GOP?"


38. Ibid., p. 263.


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.


44. Gore, Let the Glory Out, pp. 270-271.

45. Freeman, p. 4.


47. Freeman, p. 4.


49. Gore, Let the Glory Out, p. 210

50. Ibid., pp. 210-211


52. Lamis, pp. 167-168.


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