

TIME MAGAZINE

Man and Woman of the Year: The Middle Americans

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The Supreme Court had forbidden it, but they prayed defiantly in a school on Netcong, N.J., reading the morning invocation from the Congressional Record. In the state legislatures, they introduced more than 100 Draconian bills to put down campus dissent. In West Virginia, they passed a law absolving police in advance of guilt in any riot deaths. In Minneapolis they elected a police detective to be mayor.

Everywhere, they flew the colors of assertive patriots. Their car windows were plastered with American-flag decals, their ideological totems. In the bumper-sticker dialogue of the freeways, they answered Make Love Not War with Honor America or Spiro is My Hero. They sent Richard Nixon to the White House and two teams of astronauts to the moon. They were both exalted and afraid. The mysteries of space were nothing, after all, compared with the menacing confusions of their own society.

The American dream that they were living was no longer the dream as advertised. They feared that they were beginning to lose their grip on the country. Others seemed to be taking over--the liberals, the radicals, the defiant young, a communications industry that they often believed was lying to them. The Saturday Evening Post folded, but the older world of Norman Rockwell icons was long gone anyway. No one celebrated them: intellectuals dismissed their lore as banality. Pornography, dissent and drugs seemed to wash over them in waves, bearing some of their children away.

But in 1969 they began to assert themselves. They were "discovered" first by politicians and the press, and then they started to discover themselves. In the Administration's voices--especially in the Vice President's and the Attorney General's--in the achievements and the character of the astronauts, in a murmurous and pervasive discontent, they sought to reclaim their culture. It was their interpretation of

patriotism that brought Richard Nixon the time to pursue a gradual withdrawal from the war. By their silent but newly felt presence, they influenced the mood of government and the course of legislation, and this began to shape the course of the nation and the nation's course in the world. The Men and Women of the Year were the Middle Americans.

The Battleground of Change

"Some say that you can't rationalize the plight of the kids," observes the Hudson Institute's Frank Armbruster, "you have got to feel it. The same thing is true of Middle America; you have to feel it. "The Middle Americans cherish, apprehensively, a system of values that they see assaulted and mocked everywhere--everywhere except in Richard Nixon's Washington. "This," they will say with an air of embarrassment that such a truth need be stated at all, "is the greatest country in the world. Why are people trying to tear it down?"

Middle Americans both physically and ideologically inhabit the battleground of change, and they feel themselves most threatened by it. Taxes hit them the hardest, and yet they feel that they have less and less voice in where and how their money is spent. The Woman of the Year, perhaps even more than her husband, senses the chaos. Often enough, inflation determines the diet she feeds her family. She is anxious about safety in the streets. She worries about her children being bussed, about the sex education to which they are subjected, the drugs they might pick up at school, the smut for sale on the drugstore newsstand and the neighborhood movie screen. For too long no one has seemed to care about the Middle Americans' concerns. They have felt ignored while angry minorities dominated the headlines and the Government's domestic action. If not ignored, they have been treated with condescension.

Paul M. Deac, executive vice president of the National Confederation of American Ethnic Groups, which says it represents 18 million foreign-born and first- and second- generation Americans expressed the especially virulent outrage of the poorer Middle Americans. "The professional liberals let the genie out of the bottle--racial hatred, lawlessness," says Deac. The backlash today is not so much against blacks per se, or against black militancy and the white intellectuals: "The Moratorium was a stab in the back to our boys on the firing lines. Our

families don't have long-haired brats--they'd tear the hair off them. Our boys don't smoke pot or raise hell or seek deferments. Our people are too busy making a living and trying to be good Americans."

Heroes and Villains

The gaps between Middle America and the vanguard of fashion are deep. The daughters of Middle America learn baton twirling, not Hermann Hesse. Middle Americans line up in the cold each Christmas season at Manhattan's Radio City Music Hall; the Rockettes, not Oh! Calcutta! are their entertainment. While the rest of the nation's youth has been watching Dustin Hoffman in *Midnight Cowboy*, Middle American teenagers have been taking in John Wayne for the second or third time in *The Green Berets*. Middle Americans have been largely responsible for more than 10,000 Christmas cards sent to General Creighton Abrams in Saigon. They sing the national anthem at football games--and mean it.

The culture no longer seems to supply many heroes, but Middle Americans admire men like Neil Armstrong and to some extent, Spiro Agnew. California Governor Ronald Reagan and San Francisco State College President S.I. Hayakawa have won approval for their hard line on dissent. Before his death last year, Dwight Eisenhower was listed as the most admired man in the nation--and Middle America cast much of the vote. In death, John Kennedy is also a hero. Ironically, Robert Kennedy had the allegiance of much of Middle America along with his constituency of blacks and the young. Whatever their politics, both Kennedys had an idealism about America, a pride about it to which Middle Americans responded because they shared it.

Middle America's villains are less easily singled out. Yippie Abbie Hoffman or S.D.S. leaders like Mark Rudd are hardly important enough by themselves to constitute major devils. With such faceless groups as the Weathermen, they merely serve as symbols of all the radicals who pronounce the country evil and ripe for destruction. Disliked, too, are the vaguely identified "liberals" and "intellectuals" who are seen as sympathizing with the radicals. Perhaps the most authentic individual villains to Middle America are the Black Panther leaders, Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale.

But there is a danger of over simplifying both the loves and hates of Middle America. Despite all the evidence of a shift to the right, Middle America for years--certainly since the New Deal--has been part of the country's basic leftward trend, and still is. The Middle is located much farther toward the left today than it was a decade ago.

Defining Middle America

Who precisely are the Middle Americans? Columnist Joseph Kraft gave the term currency in late 1967. They make up the core of the group that Richard Nixon now invokes as the "forgotten Americans" or "the Great Silent Majority," though Middle Americans themselves may not be a majority of the U.S. All Americans doubtless share some Middle American beliefs, and many Middle Americans would disagree among themselves on some issues. The lower middle class, including blue-collar workers, service employees and farm workers, numbers some 40 million. Many of the nation's 20 million elderly citizens, frequently living on fixed incomes, are Middle American. So is a substantial portion of the 36 million white-collar workers. Although a hard figure is not possible, the total of Middle Americans possibly approaches 100 million, or half the U.S. population.

A State of Mind

The Middle Americans tend to be groped in the nation's heartland more than on its coasts. But they live in Queens, N.Y., and Van Nuys, Calif., as well as in Skokie and Chillicothe. They tend toward the middle-aged and the middlebrow. They are defined as much by what they are not as what they are. As a rule, they are not the poor or the rich. Still, many wealthy business executives are Middle Americans. H. Ross Perot, the Texas millionaire who organized a group called "United We Stand Inc." to support the President on the war, is an example. Few blacks march in the ranks of Middle America. Nor do the nation's intellectuals, its liberals, its professors, its surgeons. Many general practitioners, though are Middle Americans. Needless to say, Middle America offers no haven to the New Left, although Middle Americans might count a number of old leftists--unionists, for example--in their numbers. They are not extremists of the right despite the fact that some of them voted for George Wallace in 1968. They are both Republicans and Democrats:

many cast their ballots for Richard Nixon, but it may be that nearly as many voted for Hubert Humphrey.

Above all Middle America is a state of mind, a morality, a construct of values and prejudices and a complex of fears. The Man and Woman of the Year represent a vast, unorganized fraternity bound together by a roughly similar way of seeing things.

The American mood during the past year has been unquestionably calmer than it was in 1968, which seemed to be the violent crescendo for the '60s. A new Administration given to understatement--on the part of the President if not the Vice President--soothed the national psyche. When Spiro Agnew erupted against television and newspaper commentators and against dissent's "effete corps of impudent snobs," Middle America was further comforted--and also aroused to an intimation of its own potential strength. The flights of Apollo 11 and 12 were a quintessential adventure of American technology and daring, the "triumph of the squares" is what Eric Hoffer, the forklift philosopher and spokesman of the workingman, called the Apollo program. The astronauts themselves were paragons of Middle American aspiration. Redolent of charcoal cookouts, their vocabularies an engaging mix of space jargon and "gee whiz," the space explorer gave back to Middle America where such things still matter; that among Neil Armstrong's extraterrestrial baggage was a special badge of his college fraternity, Phi Delta Theta. He used it symbolically to establish Moon Alpha Chapter.

No Clear Victories

For most of the '60s, the nation was transfixed by its darker side, as if some impulse of Ahab were obsessively driving it to a suicidal reunion with an evil deep in its own nature. The astronauts reasserted the chief mate Starbuck's cool, professional sanity. Not intellect, but intelligence. Not evil, but remediable errors, course corrections, chatter from Capcom to Houston. In the Middle American version, the Pequod steers for him, Moby Dick is a holdful of whale oil for the nation's lamps.

Some liberals grumbled that the Apollo programs \$26 billion would have been better spent on curing hunger or the urban malaise. Poet W.H. Auden wrote dyspeptically: "It's natural the Boys should whoop it up for so huge a phallic triumph, an adventure it would not have occurred to

woman to think worthwhile, made possible only because we like huddling in gangs and knowing the exact time..."

Yet Americans, particularly Middle Americans, reveled in the lunar landings precisely because they were victories purely accomplished: in Viet Nam, in the various slums, in the polluted environment, no clear victories seemed possible any longer.

"To go forward at all," Richard Nixon said at his inauguration, "is to go forward together." Assuming office after a year of wrenching passions, Nixon enjoyed a honeymoon of lowered voices that lasted at least through the summer. Except for the further radical fringes, antiwar dissenters wanted to allow Nixon time to make good his pledge to extricate the U.S. from Viet Nam. The nation had overcommitted itself both at home and abroad, and Nixon took it to be time to stop making promises, to realign American obligations with the nation's resources and desires. There are many who feel that America's problems are so great and urgent that it could not endure an era of "consolidation." But the Nixon Doctrine appealed to Middle America.

Contradictory Mixture

He recast domestic policy, established a White House Council for Urban Affairs designed to give coherence and continuity to urban planning. Like most Middle Americans, Nixon reflected what would have traditionally seemed a contradictory mixture of liberal and conservative impulses. From a liberal point of view, the record of Nixon's first year is probably better than his poor public relations and awkward rhetoric would indicate. At year's end, the Administration saved its "Philadelphia Plan," designed to open construction trade unions to thousands more black workers. His bold welfare reforms for the first time proposed a policy of guaranteed annual wages combined with a work incentive. His draft reform, instituting selection by lottery, brought a new equity to the Selective Service system. He won liberal applause for ending the U.S. production of biological weapons and for beginning the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Soviet Union.

But Nixon counterpointed such liberal moves with a series of gestures toward the conservative instincts of his Middle American constituency.

In naming U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Warren Burger to be Earl Warren's successor as Chief Justice, he began readjusting the Supreme Court's balance toward a stricter constructionism. His voting rights bill would have the effect of weakening the Negro gains accomplished under the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Even though the Supreme Court ordered "all deliberate speed" in school integration 15 years ago, the Administration sought to delay the process once again by allowing some Southern school districts more time to formulate their desegregation plans. Then the Supreme Court, in its first major decision after Berger became Chief Justice, unanimously rejected the delays.

Civics-Book decency

Nixon was pursuing not so much a "Southern strategy" as a Middle American strategy. The South is only one part of the Middle America that Nixon has installed in Washington. His Administration--with such exceptions as Daniel Patrick Moynahan and Henry Kissinger--is like the reunion photograph of a Depression class that rose to the top by Horatio Alger virtues. Interior Secretary Walter Hickel arrived in Alaska at the age of 20 with 37 cents in his pocket. George Romney, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development is the son of a Mormon who was driven out of Mexico by Pancho Villa and supported his ten children for a time as a carpenter in El Paso.

Nixon himself is the embodiment of Middle America. There is opportunity for everyone, his mother taught him back in Whittier, Calif.--work hard, love your country, never give up.

God likes fighters. Nixon's philosophers are Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham. Like the rest of his Administration, the President has gone far beyond his humble origins. But Nixon, John Mitchell and Spiro Agnew minister to and play upon the discontent of Middle America by conjuring up the imperatives of discipline and restraint.

Americans of different generations inhabit the same continent, but they exist in different eras. The American mind is, in effect, stretched out over several decades. The radical young dwell in projection of the 70's. The values of many of their fathers are the ethics of the Depression, of World War II or the later 40's. In the imagination of his ideals, the Middle American glimpses cracked snapshots through a scrim: a khaki uniform,

trousers gathered at a waist; a souvenir samurai sword; a "ruptured duck"; a girl with Betty Grable hair and hemline; the lawn of a barely remembered house. The ideological order that he sees is a civics-book sense of decency. The Depression taught him the wisdom of accumulation and the fear of joblessness. He knew from schooling on the G.I. Bill what education could do and what it meant.

The Middle American's faith is not merely grounded upon nostalgia and emotion. He believes in a system that did work and in large measure still does; a brilliant, highly adaptable system, heir to the Enlightenment and classic democracy, with innumerable, ingenious, local accretions. But the country has become too complex and the long-hidden inequities too glaring for the system to continue without drastic changes. The Middle American's education does not dwell upon the agonizing moral discrepancies of American history--the story of the Indians or the blacks, or the national tradition of violence. He quite sincerely rejects the charge that he is prejudiced against the blacks or callused about the poor. He cannot believe that the society he has come to accept as the best possible on earth, the order he sees as natural, contains wrongs so deeply built-in that he does not notice them. His sense of indignation is all too easily served by the fact that so many reformers have gone beyond the reform as being too slow, and are using methods ranging from rude to downright totalitarian. The issues that arouse and haunt Middle America form a catalogue of national crisis in values:

-- Race. The rising level of crime frightens the Middle American, and when he speaks of crime, though he does not like to admit it, he means blacks. On the one hand, Middle America largely agrees with the advances toward equality made by blacks in the past ten years. Says Robert Rosenthal, an insurance auditor in New York City: "Sure, I know it's only a handful of Negroes who are causing the trouble. Most of them are the same as whites." His daughter Nancy, 17, attends a school that is 60% black and she expresses both the adaptability and anxiety of the Middle Americans: "I always look down the stairway to make sure no one is down there before I walk. It's not really bad, except that you can't go into the bathroom because they'll take your money."

Middle Americans express respect for moderate black leaders like Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young--which is easy enough. Middle Americans would generally like to see the quality of black education improve. But

the idea of sacrificing their own children's education to a long-range improvement for blacks appalls them. "They moved to the suburbs for their children, to get fresh air and find good schools," says Frank Armbruster. But programs such as bussing "negated all their sacrifices to provide their children an education."

Open admissions programs at universities strike Middle Americans an unfair and illogical violations of the merit system. Beyond that, they see a bias toward blacks in conventional admissions policies. "If anything," says Futurist Herman Kahn, "they believe that a black face helps. A Middle American can't send his kid to Harvard, but he knows the black man down the street can, if the boy is bright enough." Middle American workers frequently feel that blacks are given preferential treatment in job hiring. Says Harvard Psychiatrist Robert Coles, who has made a study of the grievances of Middle America: "They say that the Negro should be given jobs, but only so long as he does not go faster than they had to go."

-- Black Militancy.

It is the black militants who especially anger the white Middle. During 1969, job militants at construction sites in Pittsburgh came up against phalanxes of hard-hatted white workers determined to prove that they were capable of counterviolence. "The threats strike me as blackmail," says Al Breselton, an Atlanta advertising man. "Negroes have got to confront the white community strongly, but we had better not be met with shotguns, because we're got a lot more of them than they have." Without exactly meaning to, white Middle America rests upon the unspoken threat of sheer presence and the six-gun deterrent, Gary Cooper's fingers twitching two inches from his holster. No wonder the Middle Americans recoil when the twitching fingers are black--as at Cornell, or at Black Panther headquarters.

-- Dissent.

Middle Americans associate black militancy with white students' dissent--university revolts that the white middle, brought up to cherish education as an almost sacred instrument of self-improvement, find incomprehensible. "San Francisco State is being destroyed by a bunch

of crummy punks," says Eric Hoffer. "Who the hell would have dreamt that a thing like this was possible? Ignorant, bedraggled, illiterate punks!

Our institutions are tremendously vulnerable. What are we afraid of? Of the Government? Of the police? Of Congress? No, for God's sake, we're afraid of the individual, of the beast masquerading as man." Some less volcanic thinkers--among them many liberals and academics--have also expressed dismay. All institutions are fallible, says Columbia University's Jacques Barzun, and unending criticism can bring down the entire structure of society.

No one expresses the ideology of the Nixonian nation on dissent better than Historian Daniel Boorstin, whose book, *The Decline of Radicalism*, Nixon sometimes studies in a secluded den in the Executive Office Building. For an academic, Boorstin is almost ferocious about dissent: "Disagreement is the lifeblood of democracy, dissention is its cancer. Disagrees seek solutions to common problems, dissenters seek power for themselves." In a section on the "Rise of Minority Veto," which must be Agnew's text, he writes: "Small groups have more power than ever before...We are witnessing the explosive rebellion of small groups, who reject the American past, deny their relation to the community. This atavism, this new barbarism, cannot last if the nation is to survive." To that, Middle America offers a resounding amen.

Middle Americans believe that the radical young are operating in a vast misunderstanding of their nation. Brandeis Political Scientist John Roche tells an anecdote about the Chicago convention trouble. As he was being collared by a cop, a dissident shouted: "Long live the dictatorship of the proletariat!" Raising his nightstick, the cop retorted "I am the proletariat." Bash, bash.

-- Viet Nam the war, which has claimed so many of his sons, leaves Middle American in a moral perplexity. Most probably agree that the U.S. commitment was a mistake in the first place. Yet they want "an honorable withdrawal." The idea of a U.S. defeat troubles them. Edward Looney, a Brooklyn bus driver, lost a son a year ago; he was killed by a misdirected American shell.

"We may find out some day that what we're doing in Viet Nam is wrong," he says, "but until then, it's my country right or wrong."

The My Lai massacre has only deepened the confusion. Many Middle Americans stoutly refuse to believe that it even occurred. This was true of 49% of those polled by the Minneapolis Tribune last month. When they do believe that the massacre happened, they attribute it to battlefield error and not to the malignancy of American soldiers. Middle America teeters on the edge of a different fear: What of all that death and maiming were to amount to little or nothing, of so much sacrifice made no real difference to Southeast Asia, to the containment of Communism? American sons keep coming homeward in zippered plastic body bags, and a sizable percentage of Americans tell the pollsters that they believe Viet Nam will eventually turn Communist in any case.

-- Morals.

When their own children desert to the "counterculture" and in effect become strangers, Middle Americans say in bewilderment, "Either we neglected them or we spoiled them." A surprisingly large number of Middle Americans attribute the weakening of the family structures to the fact that so many mothers have gone to work. In the youthful disrespect for American institutions they see reflected the breakdown of their own parental authority, although a great many still control their children and command their respect.

The proliferation of drugs seems to the Middle American an apt metaphor for his sense that American life has grown contaminated. The spectacle of Woodstock--quite apart from the nudity and the mess--was offensive to Middle America because it seemed that everyone was dropping something or smoking something, and the police stood by and watched. At the same time, the widespread use of marijuana, sometimes by their own children, is leading many Middle Americans toward a bit more sophistication, and ability to distinguish between the use of pot and harder drugs. For some months of his presidency, the distinction seemed lost on Nixon and his Justice Department, whose crackdown on marijuana induced a pot famine and sent many of the young to amphetamines, barbiturates and other more serious drugs. Said Abbie Hoffman with typical hyperbole:

"Richard Nixon was becoming the biggest pill pusher of us all." At a White House conference on narcotics in December, Nixon confessed: "I

thought that the answer was simply enforce the law. But when you're talking about 14-year-olds and 15-year-olds, the answer is information. The answer is understanding."

-- Inflation.

Treadmill inflation has betrayed Middle America's faith in the work ethic; American affluence seems indefinitely expandable, all right, but prices expand just as rapidly, or more so. Last year, despite his wage increases, the average American worker barely broke even in actual buying power.

Inflation has a profound psychological as well as material importance, for it stacks the deck against the old American gamble. The nation has always bet--with extraordinary diligence, skill and luck--the promise of opportunity could be redeemed, that the nation's natural fertility would justify the values of hard work and individualism. Now many of the Middle Americans, who have banked on work ethic, find themselves in a losing streak with the loser's psychology.

This feeling is reinforced by an all-around frustration. "Nothing seems to work properly any more," says Political Analyst William Pfaff. "Industry makes cheap goods but wrecks the landscape and pollutes the air and rivers. Technocrats tell us all problems are solvable, but their submarines sink at the dock and scientific administrators spill nerve gas onto grazing lands and then lie about it. Bureaucracies make the system function, but they meddle in private lives." Telephones don't seem to work very well. Public transportation grows ramshackle.

The quality of schools declines--in part because inflation prompts Middle Americans to vote against school-bond issues, against one of their own deepest values.

The Politics of Againstness

Where will the Man and Woman of the Year be led by their discontent? The left sees the nation already on the edge of a long night of repression. Nixon, says the left, is subtly calling forth the night riders. The liberal-oriented National Committee for an Effective Congress worries that the Administration is molding the Middle Americans into a respectable new right based on the militant Goldwater morality.

"The Administration is working the hidden veins of fear, racism and resentment which lie deep in Middle America," says the committee in its annual report. "Respect for the past, distrust of the future, the politics of againstness."

Witness, says the left, the Chicago conspiracy trial, in which seven defendants face possible \$10,000 fines and five-year jail terms for violating a law of doubtful constitutionality. Or witness what seems to be radicals--and many others--to be a systematic police slaughter of Black Panther leaders. They point to John Mitchell's wiretapping policies, preventive- detection program and no-knock raiding techniques. They see harsh drug laws as political instruments by which Middle America means to destroy dissent and counterculture. In Dansville, Va., last July, an 80-year-old judge sentenced a 20-year-old student to 20 years for possession of marijuana.

Some Middle Americans doubtless do believe that repression is the only answer. They were disposed to take Spiro Agnew seriously when he tossed off his line, "We can afford to separate them from our society with no more regret that we should feel over discarding rotten apples from the barrel." Yet most Middle Americans would find repression incomprehensible and cherish. Certainly, a species of Know-Nothingism is evident in the U.S. But, as Harvard's Seymour Martin Lipset points out, the reaction does not begin to approach the tenor of the 20s, when many Government leaders preached a blatantly anti-immigrant racism.

Right or Left?

In the 20's it was merely the values of small-town America that were challenged. In the 60s and into the 70s, it is the nation itself. Americans, almost unique in the world, are incapable of imagining a different form of government of the nation. As William Pfaff observes, "The Constitution is all." Thus, to assault America, to call for revolutionary change, as some black and white radicals do, is a profoundly spiritual offense, an invitation to Armageddon. Most Middle Americans, and most radicals, share one blind spot: they tend to forget that both the form and content of the U.S. Government has undergone enormous changes over the years, and that the Constitution will tolerate much more change without having the entire system collapse.

The present shift to the right is in one perspective illusory. Since the start of the New Deal, the tide of the nation has flowed to the left. Middle America is now swimming against the tide in some issues, but the current is likely to continue, carrying it ever more leftward. The mass of Americans have grown steadily more tolerant over the last few generations. One can glimpse the changes in small incidents of the popular culture. When Ingrid Bergman became adulterously pregnant by Roberto Rossellini in 1949, she was all but stoned out of the country. Mia Farrow and Andre Previn, anticipating the joys of unwed motherhood and fatherhood, have aroused only minor indignation. Middle Americans accept Bayard Rustin as an eminently sensible black moderate now, but only a few years ago they thought him a firebrand. The idea of socialized medicine gives apoplexy to the patients. Middle Americans have more or less accepted the principles of guaranteed annual income, of coexistence with Communism.

"Recently," says Columbia Sociologist Amitai Etzioni, "there has been almost unanimous agreement among newspaper commentators that the country is moving sharply to the right. These statements are far from accurate." In terms of philosophy, Etzioni observes, practically all Americans would call themselves conservatives, favoring more individualism, more freedom, less government power. But on an operational level, he insists, in terms of the specific Government policies it will accept, the country is liberal. According to a study that Etzioni completed last summer for the Office of Economic Opportunity, the nation, in operational terms is 65% liberal, 21% middle-of-the-road and only 14% conservative. (By "liberal, Etzioni means willing to accept government intervention for specific, progressive social programs.)

Middle America does not express its likes and dislikes very well, "It's really too bad that we middle Americans don't have an articulate spokesman," says Opie Shelton of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. Nixon, Mitchell and Agnew speak to Middle America, but they are not its leaders. Nixon, in fact, excites little of the personal enthusiasm the even Agnew can arouse. Nor does Middle America have any organization. The anti-moratorium rallies, for example, were largely a failure. For all the great joiner's tradition in the U.S., Middle America is diffuse and tends to be private to the point of self-consciousness--demonstrating is not its style.

To Assist, Not Resist

Yet the Man and Woman of the Year have, with a new sense of truculent self-awareness presented Nixon with a special paradox. According to Etzioni, the issues that have thrust forward his relatively conservative politics are inflation and crime. If he solves both problems, the saliency of the issues will diminish and the voter will go back to attaching more weight to the liberal issues--and may vote Democratic as a result. If Nixon does not redress inflation and cut crime, then the country may turn even more conservative--to George Wallace--particularly if the Viet Nam War is viewed as a defeat.

TIME's Washington Bureau Chief High Sidey confesses "the uneasy sensation that Nixon is riding the crest of the huge wave called Middle America, but he is reacting to it rather than leading it." There is a precedent for that view of the president. Woodrow Wilson wrote that "the ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people. He cannot be of the school of the prophets; he must be of the number of those who studiously serve the slow-paced daily need."

The trouble with that formulation is that America's needs have long since ceased to be slow-paced or daily. Problems whose resolution will require years need to be attacked now, the priorities set and the programs begun. Solving America's most pressing problems will require the enlistment of Middle Americans, who live in the thick of them. To denounce the evils of radicalism is not enough. In the long run, the burden will be on Middle America to show that nonradical reform can accomplish what needs to be done. However unfair it may seem, this will require sacrifices in Middle America's part--and on the part of other portions of U.S. society as well. In this situation, it may be that Middle America will find itself in alliance with liberals newly awakened to its concern. Many Middle Americans, listening to the slogans of the farther left, may well come to prefer liberal formulas.

If the U.S. is to go forward as Nixon has promised, Middle America must be led to assist change rather than resent and resist it, to help shape the future rather than try to preserve and already vanished America. In that task, a presidential prophet might find himself surprisingly honored in Middle American country. The Man and Woman of the Year still want to believe in America and the American dream. It has dimmed for too many,

sometimes because of their failed expectations, sometimes because of the assaults on their complacency. Yet if the dream were to be redefined properly for them, Middle Americans could again provide abundantly that felicitous mixture of idealism and sound common sense on which the U.S. was founded.