

Lindsay: What He Will Do

by JEFF GREENFIELD

Jeff Greenfield was a speechwriter for the late Senator Robert Kennedy and for Mayor John Lindsay.

It is all so, so implausible. He ranks third according to some polls of registered Democrats, but he is still an enrolled Republican. He supported Eisenhower over Stevenson; Nixon over John Kennedy, and almost surely would have supported Richard Nixon over Robert Kennedy had that been the choice in 1968. He has no base in the South, and most of organized labor in his own city opposed him the last time he ran. And yet . . . and yet . . .

One can already hear the mention of Lindsay in the conversations of regular Democrats in such places as South-eastern Ohio, close to Appalachia, where burnt-out mining towns of decade ago exist. Many are Democrats who equate the Kent State riots with the Russian Revolution. Or, in Southern California, in an union hiring hall, among the skilled workers staring at the floor. They came West to find paradise, and now the aerospace plants are laying off thousands of people, and they have voted for John Tunney for new jobs.

The Key

This is the key — the one way that it fits together for John Lindsay in 1972 as a Democrat. The Pros (whoever they are) don't want him; he's poison to the construction worker from Queens Village or the New York City cop who lives in North Babylon. But John Lindsay nationally is someone new and attractive and possible. To "experienced" observers, the unfortunate things about Lindsay are crystal-clear. To the country, they are not.

Lindsay has two issues going for him: Racial tolerance and anti-war sentiment.

First, it is true that large numbers of New Yorkers hate John Lindsay passionately, even more than they traditionally hate their Mayors. Cab drivers, small homeowners in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, the hard-hats, think of him as a pinko, a faggot, a man who is giving the city over to the Mau Maus. At large, nationally, this distaste disappears. People tend to remember him walking through Harlem in his shirt-sleeves in an act of physical courage.

Further, most of the nation has not lived with John Lindsay as a symbol of a crumbling New York. For five years, he has been with the town every day of its life; and every failure, every breakdown, is his. When I worked

at City Hall, I spent one evening as Night Mayor answering the telephoned cries for help. That night, they were blaming the Mayor for the Con Ed breakdowns, the telephone service, and the postal strike. To live in New York City is to be convinced of a massive, coordinated plot by everyone in power to drive you into derangement.

Lindsay Looks Fresh

But the rest of America is oddly immunized from this vision. They know New York is an impossible city, and therefore anyone who attempts to lead it is by definition precluded from success and therefore from failure. To

Lindsay is unpopular locally, but his national reputation is still great.

them, Lindsay is an appealing, vague form. A man who appears on the surrogate salons of Carson, Cavett, and Griffin, with a sober, concerned sensibility about the country, and a refreshing capacity to laugh at himself. Six years ago, when Lindsay first ran for Mayor, writer Murray Kempton described him in a phrase which became the campaign slogan: "He is fresh, and everyone else is tired." John Lindsay is very tired now, and parts of the city are tired of him — but for the nation he is someone fresh, new, untarnished like Nixon.

Furthermore, there are large numbers of Americans who feel they owe John Lindsay an enormous debt, on two different counts. One of them is race. However much we now understand the woes of blue-collar Americans, we can never forget that five years ago this country was beginning to shred apart along racial lines. It was a matter of very special leadership in New York that kept many people from being killed, and that kept New York relatively sane. This was a man who said some very plain truths about white and black people when few others were willing to.

Vietnam and Lindsay

The other count is Vietnam—an issue that, for me, at any rate, is the litmus test of any prospective President for the next generation. "Where were you when we went to War?" must be the question that will plague any Presidential hopeful. To hear Hubert Humphrey now solemnly warning about the danger of escalation in Laos is a sick joke. To hear Senator Muskie cautioning restraint is to despair—one wants to shout at him, "You stood up in 1968 and led the fight for Lyndon Johnson's war plank."

This is one issue where Lindsay has been right from the onset. He has opposed every stage of this war. He has helped people to understand that Vietnam was and is a political and moral outrage.

A Lindsay candidacy, then, carries with it something special and vital—a sense of enthusiasm and purpose and drive that cannot be bought or demanded as a matter of party loyalty. The fact is that more people would be passionately for a John Lindsay than they would be for a Muskie or even a McGovern. I don't know how to meas-

The passion for Lindsay is greater than that for Muskie or McGovern.

ure the force of that passion, but it helps to win elections.

The final piece of the equation is that Lindsay is an incredible campaigner—the best I have ever seen. He drives himself 14, 16, 18 hours every day and thrives on it. In person and on television he creates interest and sympathy. If he runs, he will go everywhere. He will outthrust everyone else. That doesn't necessarily win elections, but it doesn't hurt, either.

The Equation

There's no way to know if it adds up, or even if it should. There is enough Republican blood in John Lindsay to
(Continued on following page)

