



Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar American Liberalism

Dominic Sandbrook

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Eugene McCarthy was one of the most fascinating political figures of the postwar era: a committed liberal anti-Communist who broke with his party's leadership over Vietnam and ultimately helped take down the political giant Lyndon B. Johnson. His presidential candidacy in 1968 seized the hearts and fired the imaginations of countless young liberals; it also presaged the declining fortunes of liberalism and the rise of conservatism over the past three decades.

Dominic Sandbrook traces Eugene McCarthy's rise to prominence and his subsequent failures, and makes clear how his story embodies the larger history of American liberalism over the last half century. We see McCarthy elected from Minnesota to the House and then to the Senate, part of a new liberal movement that combined New Deal domestic policies and fierce Cold War hawkishness, a consensus that produced huge electoral victories until it was shattered by the war in Vietnam.

As the situation in Vietnam escalated, many liberals, like McCarthy, found themselves increasingly estranged from the anti-Communism that they had supported for nearly two decades. Sandbrook recounts McCarthy's growing opposition to President Johnson and his policies, which culminated in McCarthy's stunning near-victory in the New Hampshire presidential primary and Johnson's subsequent withdrawal from the race. McCarthy went on to lose the nomination to Hubert Humphrey at the infamous 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, which secured his downfall and led to Richard Nixon's election, but he had pulled off one of the greatest electoral upsets in American history, one that helped shape the political landscape for decades.

These were tumultuous times in American politics, and Sandbrook vividly captures the drama and historical significance of the period through his intimate portrait of a singularly interesting man at the center of it all.

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