

ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT

The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern

A Documentary Film by Stephen Vittoria

125 Minutes, 2004, Video



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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ADVANCE PRAISE FOR 'ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT'

**** Official Selection of the 2004 Hamptons International Film Festival ****

**** Winner, Best Documentary Feature, 2005 Sarasota Film Festival ****

“★★★★ (highest rating) Lively documentary about McGovern's disastrous run for the US presidency. The interviews with him are worth the price of admission.”

– *Christian Science Monitor*

“A lively, long, intelligent documentary ... seen against the general current background, McGovern refreshes.” – *The New Republic*

“Its ferocity about the state of American politics could earn it substantial numbers among doc, arthouse and politically progressive audiences ... an elegy for decency and true democracy in American politics.” – *Variety*

”Clearly, *One Bright Shining Moment*, besides being a vivifying, entertaining documentary, it is a tool that can educate our young, and hopefully cure the “terrible cancer eating away at the soul of our nation.” – *New York Theatre Wire*

“Thoughtful interviews with an array of insiders (including Dick Gregory, Gloria Steinem, Warren Beatty, and Gary Hart) reflect back on the man who ran on a platform of fairness and compassion...Of the many political documentaries that have recently emerged, ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT resounds perhaps more strongly than any other.”

- *Hamptons International Film Festival*

“The portrait of this honest, idealistic man driven by a sincere wish to help his country will make you weep for our current political state.” – *IFC*

“A very lively, informative and coherent film.” –*NYC Movie Guru*

ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT

The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern

The film retraces George McGovern's bold and grassroots presidential campaign of 1972 – a campaign that fought to the bitter end for peace and justice... a campaign that positioned ideas and people first... and, for a myriad of reasons, it was a campaign crushed in workmanlike fashion by the Butcher from Whittier, Richard Nixon.

The tragedy of the '72 campaign is this: George McGovern might have been the only candidate to run for President in the 20th Century who truly understood what an incredible monument America could be to the human race.

The film poses this central thought:

The ultimate political defeat of the American Century may also be its high watermark. And if so, what does that say about the electoral process, the American government, and more importantly, what does it say about the forces at work on the American people – then and now?

The cast is a patchwork quilt of historians, activists, as well as firsthand POVs – from the candidate himself to foot soldiers in the McGovern Army. Among others, the cast includes:

George McGovern, Gore Vidal, Gloria Steinem, Warren Beatty,
Dick Gregory, Gary Hart, Frank Mankiewicz, Howard Zinn, Jim Bouton,
Sen. Jim Abourezk, Rev. Malcolm Boyd, and Ron Kovic

The film's off-screen narrator is Amy Goodman – host of DemocracyNow! and author of the current bestseller “The Exception To The Rulers.”

In addition to an original music score and traditional folk ballads, the story incorporates songs from Leon Russell, Bob Dylan, Robbie Robertson, Donovan, and Elvis Costello.

CAST

Narrated by Amy Goodman

George McGovern

Gore Vidal, Gloria Steinem, Warren Beatty, Howard Zinn, Dick Gregory, Gary Hart, Frank Mankiewicz, Jim Bouton, Sen. Jim Abourezk, Rev. Malcolm Boyd, Ron Kovic, Thomas Knock, Harvey Kornberg, Chip Berlet, Rick Stearns, and JC Svec.

Songs from Leon Russell, Bob Dylan, Robbie Robertson, Donovan, and Elvis Costello

CREDITS

Produced, Written, and Directed by Stephen Vittoria

Executive Producer – Michael C. Donaldson

Producer – Frank Fischer

Lighting Cameramen – Patrick Kelly, Gilbert Yousefian

Original Music – Robert Guillory

Editor – Jeff Sterling

Sound Design – Robb Wenner

A Street Legal Cinema Production

Stephen Vittoria

Producer, Writer, Director

“ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT – *The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern*” is Stephen Vittoria’s fourth feature film. The film world premiered at the Hamptons International Film Festival in 2004 and recently won top honors at the 2005 Sarasota Film Festival as “Best Documentary Feature.” In 1987, Vittoria wrote, directed, and edited the dramatic feature “*Black & White*,” starring Kim Delgado and Frank Vincent – a story about racism tearing apart the lives of two urban kids set against the backdrop of post-World War II America. In 1995, Vittoria produced, wrote, and directed “*Hollywood Boulevard*,” starring John C. McGinley, Jon Tenney, and Julianne Phillips – a dark and satirical look at the film business.

In 1998, Vittoria wrote, directed, and edited the six-hour health documentary “*Save Your Life – The Life and Holistic Times of Dr. Richard Schulze*,” and last year he completed work writing, directing, and editing the documentary feature “*Keeper of the Flame*” with Linda Ellerbee, Wilford Brimley, and Professor Stephen Pyne – a film that deals with the environmental history of wildfire on the planet as well as the current ecological crisis facing American forests.

Short films include the drama “*Easter*,” starring Vincent Gardenia, and the documentary short “*Marcel Dionne: Stuck Inside of LA With Those Hockey Blues Again*.” Vittoria is the founder and creative director two Southern California production companies — Deep Image & Street Legal Cinema. One day, Steve hopes to play centerfield for the New York Yankees. He lives in Los Angeles (under protest) with his wife Ellen and his daughter Shannon.



Posted: Thurs., Feb. 10, 2005, 4:30pm PT

One Bright Shining Moment: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern

(Docu)

A Street Legal Cinema production of a Stephen Vittoria Film. Producers, Vittoria, Frank Fischer; executive producer, Michael P. Donaldson. Written and directed by Stephen Vittoria.

Narrator: Amy Goodman

By JOHN ANDERSON

This review was corrected on February 11, 2005

"Too decent to be president" was the label stuck to former senator and 1972 presidential candidate George McGovern, the self-effacing subject of Stephen Vittoria's "One Bright Shining Moment." If "decent" means "polite," then the movie makes no effort to emulate its subject: Its ferocity about the state of American politics could earn it substantial numbers among doc, arthouse and politically progressive audiences.

Narrated with heat by Amy Goodman of "Democracy Now!" pic is both biography and political analysis, ranging from McGovern's prairie roots and Depression boyhood to his place in the vanguard of the Vietnam era's antiwar movement. Without overplaying the obvious parallels with contemporary Washington, the film is clearly intended as an elegy for decency and true democracy in American politics -- the "bright shining moment" of the '72 Democratic convention -- and as a sad comparison with today's administration.

One of the aspects to the McGovern legacy the filmmakers seek to redress is the man's poster-boy status for political failure -- even while noting that his loss to Richard Nixon in the '72 election was the "mother of all landslides." What the film aims to show -- and does well, through a variety of well-informed talking heads, and well-tailored archival footage of elections past -- is that McGovern's grassroots, anti-establishment tactics and ultimate victory at the Democratic convention was, and remains, an example of what U.S. politics strive, and generally fail, to achieve.

It's a story largely informed by treachery and Democratic Party self-immolation. At Miami in '72, the troika of the fast-fading Hubert Humphrey, the AFL-CIO's George Meaney and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley -- whose police had effectively handed the election to Nixon in 1968 -- were more intent on salvaging the remnants of the old party machinery than in winning an election. What's ironic about the McGovern story is that, having overcome the chicanery of hack politicians, he torpedoed his own slim chances via the ill-advised, hurried selection of running mate Thomas Eagleton -- whose history of mental illness lost the campaign even die-hard McGovernites.

Helmer-scribe Vittoria finds bookends everywhere -- the political rise of McGovern running from "Tet to Nixon," his public life essentially spanning "Huey P. Long to Huey P. Newton." It's an affectionate portrait of man once described by Robert F. Kennedy as the most decent man in the Senate.

"It's hard to find someone who's run for something and has engendered as much affection as George McGovern," says Warren Beatty (a Democratic delegate during the McGovern campaign). Pic gains poignancy amid speculation about the kind of world that would have existed had he won.

ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT

The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern

From Kim Snyder, *Variety*: for the Hamptons Int'l Film Festival

"What might have happened had McGovern defeated Nixon in the 1972 Presidential election?"

ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT retraces the political campaign of George McGovern, the soft-spoken Senator from rural South Dakota and most ardent opponent of the Vietnam War. Against all odds, McGovern's Army, a grassroots movement born in living rooms across the country, gave way to the unlikely defeat of his Democratic opponents and to his nomination for President.

Memorable footage of the Vietnam era takes us back to the assassination of Martin Luther King and Kent State, when passions ran high in the struggle for Civil Rights and to end the bitter war in Vietnam. A series of thoughtful interviews with an array of insiders (including Dick Gregory, Gloria Steinem, Warren Beatty, and Gary Hart) reflect back on the man who ran on a platform of fairness and compassion. In sober retrospect, these individuals recount the tragic downfall of McGovern's campaign and Nixon's landslide victory to the Presidency.

Despite his political defeat, McGovern's legacy lives on through those who so passionately participated in his campaign with the hope that politics could be honorable and that change was indeed possible. **Of the many political documentaries that have recently emerged, ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT resounds perhaps more strongly than any other.** Regardless of political orientation, one cannot help but draw parallels to the war we now face in Iraq, the culture wars and struggle to integrate diversity, and the frustration with dishonorable partisan politics. And to what might happen in the days ahead."

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS
Heights and Depths

A friend of mine was a network correspondent during the Nixon-McGovern presidential campaign in 1972, and was assigned to the Nixon campaign train. At one point the train stopped overnight at Pennsylvania Station in New York, and my friend took me on board to have a look. He introduced me to two other correspondents. We talked about Nixon whom, pre-Watergate, I already loathed, and I was pleasantly surprised to hear that they agreed with me. Then each of them turned over the lapel of his jacket and showed me a McGovern button.

I hoped that this incident was a prediction, that McGovern would prove to be the quiet favorite while Nixon gargled along, but in a few weeks my romantic hope was quashed. Now a lively, long, intelligent documentary called **One Bright Shining Moment** helps to explain why. Stephen Vittoria, the experienced director who made this film, braiding a series of crisp interviews with McGovern (then and now) and his campaigners and enthusiasts, provides a saddening clarification of McGovern's defeat. Especially sad these days.

The picture begins long before the campaign. It first gives us a biographical summary of George McGovern's life. The son of a South Dakota clergyman, he was a bomber pilot in World War II, returned to get a Ph.D. in history and government, and became a teacher at Dakota Wesleyan. Then he ran for Congress and was twice elected, was once defeated for the Senate, then was thrice elected to the Senate. Of course comparable data could be ticked off for some other politicians, but the surface similarity only makes the McGovern story more remarkable. Unlike most others, McGovern's career seemed exceptionally pure. (What a word for politics!) The film shows us a man who was exceptionally yet not priggishly principled.

Vittoria clearly had a particular reason for making this film just now. It seems poignant in these murky days. Surely there are political people these days who deserve respect, yet seen against the general current background, McGovern refreshes. Mistakes he certainly made. He says in one clip that he most regretted his vote for the Tonkin Gulf resolution that launched the Vietnam War, which he thereafter vehemently opposed. (In a recent interview McGovern said that John Kerry failed because he didn't oppose the Iraq war and instead claimed he could fight it better than Bush. Some of us felt that Kerry was going to lose anyway and that he might as well lose by speaking what we thought was his true belief.) McGovern spoke truth in his campaign, alongside the campaign rhetoric. The truth didn't help.

McGovern's party chiefs didn't much help, either. They permitted his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention to be broadcast at 3 a.m. Newspapers reported that Nixon, watching the Democratic convention on television, laughed with delight. The Democratic managers then gave Nixon more to laugh at. Their first choice for his vice presidential running mate turned out to have a history of mental illness and had to be replaced. Still, as Frank Mankiewicz, a McGovern aide, says in this film, "We lost an election, and the other guys went to jail."

Nobody can know how successful McGovern would have been in the White House, but the atmospheric effect of his presence, especially as regards the disaster in Indochina, would have been nationally, globally, healthful. His portrait in Vittoria's film is in a way painful: we feel very distanced from him today. The title is not a misnomer.



Arts & Entertainment > Movies
from the August 12, 2005 edition

Movie Guide

One Bright Shining Moment: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern (Not rated)

Director: Stephen Vittoria. With Gore Vidal, Gloria Steinem, Howard Zinn, Warren Beatty. (125 min.)



Lively documentary about McGovern's disastrous run for the US presidency. The interviews with him are worth the price of admission. - D.S.

One Bright Shining Moment (2005)

movie review by [Brandon Judell](#), [New York Theatre Wire](#)

"The Establishment... has led us into the stupidest and cruelest war in all history. That war is political disaster - a terrible cancer eating away at the soul of our nation."

One Bright Shining Moment: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern

By Brandon Judell

If the seventies, Nixon, Vietnam, the Chicago Seven, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Robert MacNamara, L.B.J, Bella Abzug and Spiro Agnew still resonate for you with some meaning, One Bright Shining Moment will help you relive your youth when politics were still tinged with hope, and you still felt that you could make a change.

Now if you were born in the seventies or later, and you are sick of the war in Iraq; the government's malfunctioning in New Orleans and Mississippi; the realpolitik policies of our nation's leaders; homophobia, racism, and George W. Bush in general, this documentary will open your eyes to the fact that history repeats itself ad nauseam.

Yes, director Stephen Vittoria's eye-opening opus, whether intentionally or not, clearly presents the parallels between Richard Nixon and George W., and these correlations are quite nightmarish.

The hero here, though, George McGovern, Nixon's failed nemesis, does leave Al Gore and John Kerry a bit wanting. McGovern was a vital, valiant politician, who fought against racism and the Vietnam War, was head of John F. Kennedy's Food for Peace program, and who helped make the Democratic Party an inclusive one that championed the rights of women, minorities, and gays.

Just read some of his quotes:

"I'm fed up to the ears with old men dreaming up wars for young men to die in."

"The Establishment center... has led us into the stupidest and cruelest war in all history. That war is a moral and political disaster - a terrible cancer eating away at the soul of our nation."

"The highest patriotism is not a blind acceptance of official policy, but a love of one's country deep enough to call her to a higher plain"

"You know, sometimes, when they say you're ahead of your time, it's just a polite way of saying you have a real bad sense of timing."

The ill-timed McGovern, as we all know, lost the election in a landslide, winning just one state.

But what was the effect of McGovern on American politics? Did he destroy the Democratic Party forever? Did he bring new ideas to center stage that are still flourishing? Or was the residue of his short stay in our public consciousness just a negligible footmark?

Interviewing the likes of Gore Vidal, Gloria Steinem, Warren Beatty, Dick Gregory, and Gary Hart, Vittoria makes it clear that for many, having experienced the McGovern magic was an everlastingly important part of their lives; it was a moment that helped shaped their future paths. And quite possibly, it was a moment that can now be recalled and put into good use for the next election.

Clearly, One Bright Shining Moment, besides being a vivifying, entertaining documentary, it is a tool that can educate our young, and hopefully cure the "terrible cancer eating away at the soul of our nation."

News

Fri, Jan. 28, 2005

McGovern documentary shines light on 1972 presidential campaign

DONNA HARTMAN
Herald Staff Writer

After a season of contentious political documentaries and a divisive presidential election, "One Bright Shining Moment: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern," is a breath of fresh air.

The documentary, written, produced and directed by California filmmaker Stephen Vittoria, recalls the exhilarating 1972 presidential campaign of U.S. Sen. George McGovern, D-S.D.

Using tightly edited archival footage of the McGovern campaign, the 1968 and 1972 Democratic conventions, the tumultuous events of the 1960s and '70s, the Vietnam war and interviews with celebrities, campaigners and McGovern himself, Vittoria captures on film the populist spirit of hope generated by McGovern's candidacy.

In his campaign for president, McGovern galvanized voters in America like no other candidate before him. He drew together people who had not been previously involved in the political process - women, young people, gays, senior citizens and blacks.

From 1968 to 1972, America witnessed four years of events that rocked the nation - the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam, rioting at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, shootings of students at Kent State University, the burgeoning women's rights and civil rights movements and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.

Vittoria, 47, said his film is an important reminder of an era when people believed they could make a difference. It's also a tribute to an American statesman.

"George McGovern is the same relevant, exciting passionate man that he was 40 years ago," Vittoria said from his production company, Street Legal Cinema in Los Angeles, Calif., which produced and financed the film.

"One Bright Shining Moment" will be screened at the Sarasota Film Festival Feb. 4 and 5. Vittoria, McGovern, and the film's narrator, Amy Goodman, host of the radio program, "Democracy Now!", are expected to attend the Feb. 4 screening and discuss the film.

Vittoria chose to make a documentary about McGovern after he became disillusioned with politics and politicians, especially after the contentious 2000 election.

McGovern embodies the qualities that Vittoria admires in a leader. McGovern, 82, is a respected author, speaker and teacher.

"He was, and is, for peace, justice, sincerity, honesty and putting issues first," Vittoria said. "People embrace him with passion and love wherever he goes."

Celebrities in the film - Warren Beatty, Jim Bouton, Gloria Steinem, Gore Vidal, Dick Gregory, Gary Hart and Howard Zinn - willingly provided commentary without pay.

The documentary isn't merely a McGovern biography. It recounts his background - his youth as a minister's son, his college years, his military service in World War II, his years in the senate and his 1972 presidential campaign. It is also "an alternative history of some of the most important events of the 20th century," Vittoria said.

The centerpiece of McGovern's 1972 campaign was his stance against the war in Vietnam, but he also targeted social issues. In the summer of 1972, his political star rose, but his campaign also targeted social issues. In the summer of 1972, his political star rose, but his campaign against President Richard M. Nixon ultimately failed. McGovern won only Massachusetts in the election.

McGovern, in an interview from his office at the University of San Francisco where he lectures, said the film "helps us realize, in a dramatic way, what the big issues of the 20th century were. I was very touched by the film."

The senator, who has homes in South Dakota, Montana and on Marco Island, recently published a book, "The Essential America." He has written nine books, including "Terry: My Daughter's Life and Death Struggle with Alcoholism," about his daughter, Terry, who died in 1994. McGovern and his wife, Eleanor, have four other children.

'One bright, shining moment'

McGovern would like to see more Americans get involved in the political process instead of sitting on the sidelines.

"Since the shootings of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it has gotten harder to excite people. Politicians haven't done anything to inspire confidence in the political process and in the Constitution," he said. "Three of the most exciting and challenging figures of our time are not only gone, but they were shot down like wild animals." McGovern said he finds a few admirable politicians on the scene today, including U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and he looks forward to seeing the futures of U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Illinois; U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.; and U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth, D-S.D.

Comparisons between the 2004 presidential campaign of Vermont's ex-governor Howard Dean and McGovern's 1972 effort are inevitable. Both were little-known politicians from small states. But, both men re-energized the Democratic Party.

"Howard Dean excited people," McGovern said. "He was a hard-hitting clear-spoken campaigner.

He certainly had an army of supporters. We will hear more about him." The John Kerry/John Edwards Democratic ticket in 2004 was appealing, but failed, because the senators backed away from opposing the war in Iraq, he said.

"We have no business in Iraq," said McGovern, a decorated World War II veteran. "We ought to start pulling out today. Every day, young Americans are killed in Iraq. It's very similar to Vietnam. With time, this country will realize it's a hopeless adventure."

The former senator sees absence of universal health care, global warming, world hunger and nuclear proliferation as more pressing problems than the threat of terrorism.

Meanwhile, Vittoria doesn't apologize for his film's point of view.

"It's an unabashed political essay," he said. "The year 1972 taught us that change comes from a grass roots effort. "McGovern captured the imagination of the country. If not for some bad luck and the skill of his opponent, a seasoned campaigner, he may have won. "I want people to come away saying, 'George, we never knew you,' " he said. "The people I interviewed for the movie seemed to have hope - in the past. For them, 1972 was this one bright, shining moment."

Donna Hartman, *features writer*, can be reached at 745-7057 or dhartman@HeraldToday.com