

By JOHN ANDERSON

## One Bright Shining Moment:

The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern

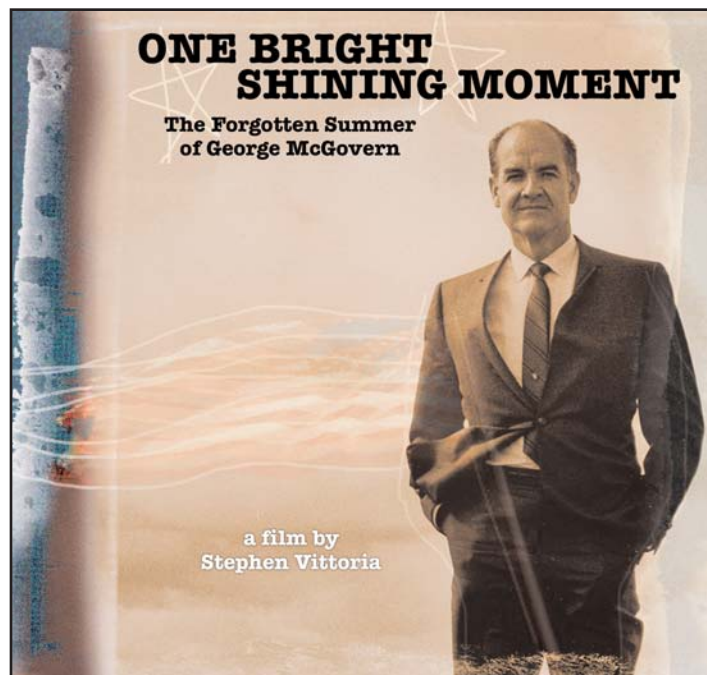
**(Docu)**

**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.**

"**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.

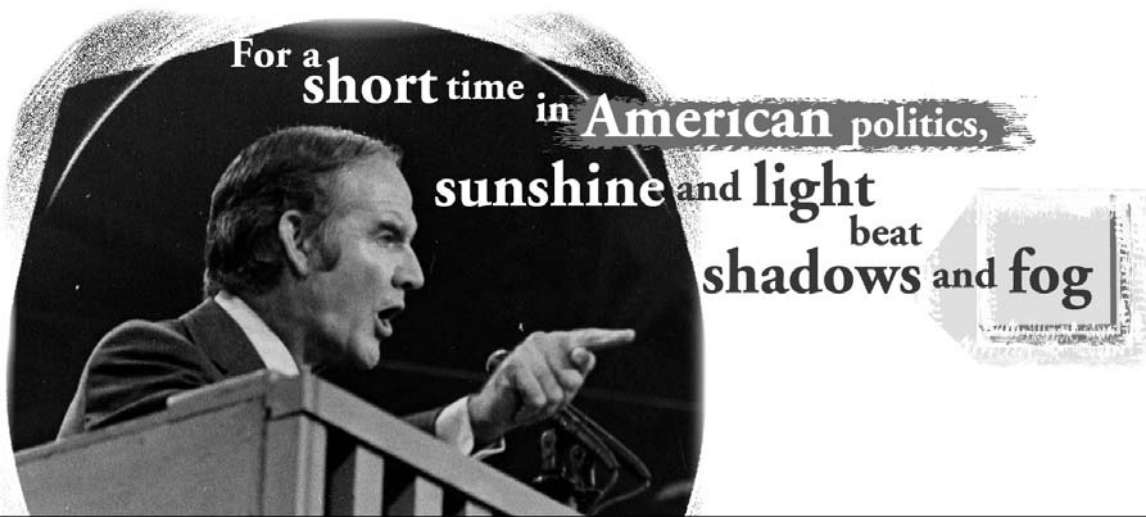
It's a story largely informed by treachery and Democratic Party self-immolation. At Miami in '72, the troika of the fast-fading Hubert Humphrey, the AFL-CIO's George Meany and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley -- whose police had effectively handed the election to Nixon in 1968 -- were more intent on salvaging 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 the kind of world that would have existed had he won.

With: George McGovern, Gloria Steinem, Warren Beatty, Dick Gregory, Gore Vidal, Ron Kovic, Gary Hart, Frank Mankiewicz, Jim Abourezk, Howard Zinn, Thomas Knock.

Camera (color, digital Betacam/Betacam/DV/ archival 16/35mm), Patrick Kelly, Gilbert Yousefian; editor, Jeffrey Sterling; music, Robert Guillory; additional Music, Bob Dylan, Leon Russell, Donovan, Robbie Robertson, Elvis Costello. Reviewed at Sarasota Film Festival, Feb. 5, 2005. Running time: 123 MIN.



## **ONE BRIGHT SHINING MOMENT**

**:: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern ::**



**A Street Legal Cinema / Deep Image Production**

**Produced, Written, and Directed by  
STEPHEN VITTORIA**

featuring  
**GLORIA STEINEM GORE VIDAL DICK GREGORY  
WARREN BEATTY RON KOVIC HOWARD ZINN**

**Produced by FRANK FISCHER Edited by JEFF STERLING**

**Narrated by AMY GOODMAN**

**Songs from BOB DYLAN, ELVIS COSTELLO, DONOVAN,  
LEON RUSSELL, and ROBBIE ROBERTSON**

**Executive Producer (and contact)  
MICHAEL C. DONALDSON**

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