



# **The Rise of a Prairie Statesman: The Life and Times of George McGovern (Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America)**

*Thomas J. Knock*

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*The Rise of a Prairie Statesman* is the first volume of a major biography of the 1972 Democratic presidential candidate who became America's most eloquent and prescient critic of the Vietnam War. In this masterful book, Thomas Knock traces George McGovern's life from his rustic boyhood in a South Dakota prairie town during the Depression to his rise to the pinnacle of politics at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago where police and antiwar demonstrators clashed in the city's streets.

Drawing extensively on McGovern's private papers and scores of in-depth interviews, Knock shows how McGovern's importance to the Democratic Party and American liberalism extended far beyond his 1972 presidential campaign, and how the story of postwar American politics is about more than just the rise of the New Right. He vividly describes McGovern's harrowing missions over Nazi Germany as a B-24 bomber pilot, and reveals how McGovern's combat experiences motivated him to earn a PhD in history and stoked his ambition to run for Congress. When President Kennedy appointed him director of Food for Peace in 1961, McGovern engineered a vast expansion of the program's school lunch initiative that soon was feeding tens of millions of hungry children around the world. As a senator, he delivered his courageous and unrelenting critique of Lyndon Johnson's escalation in Vietnam—a conflict that brought their party to disaster and caused a new generation of Democrats to turn to McGovern for leadership.

A stunning achievement, *The Rise of a Prairie Statesman* ends in 1968, in the wake of the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, when the "Draft McGovern" movement thrust him into the national spotlight and the contest for the presidential nomination, culminating in his triumphal reelection to the Senate and his emergence as one of the most likely prospects for the Democratic nomination in 1972..

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