

= Bring Us Together =

" Bring Us Together " was a political slogan popularized after the election of Republican candidate Richard Nixon as United States President in 1968 . The text was derived from a sign which 13 @-@ year @-@ old Vicki Lynne Cole stated that she carried at Nixon 's rally in her home town of Deshler , Ohio during the campaign .

Richard Moore , a friend of Nixon , told the candidate 's speechwriters he had seen a child carrying a sign reading " Bring Us Together " at the Deshler rally . The speechwriters , including William Safire , began inserting the phrase into the candidate 's speeches . Nixon mentioned the Deshler rally and the sign in his victory speech on November 6 , 1968 , adopting the phrase as representing his administration 's initial goal ? to reunify the bitterly divided country . Cole came forward as the person who carried the sign , and was the subject of intense media attention .

Nixon invited Cole and her family to the inauguration , and she appeared on a float in the inaugural parade . The phrase " Bring Us Together " was used ironically by Democrats when Nixon proposed policies they disagreed with or refused to support . Cole declined to comment on Nixon 's 1974 resignation , but subsequently expressed her sympathy for him . In newspaper columns written in his final years before his 2009 death , Safire expressed doubts that Cole 's sign ever existed .

= = Background = =

The 1968 presidential campaign was one of the most bitterly fought in the nation 's history . Set among national divisions over the Vietnam War , social policy , and against the backdrop of riot and assassination , none of the campaigns made healing divisions a major theme ? an early slogan by Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey , " United With Humphrey " had been scrapped . The incumbent President , Democrat Lyndon Baines Johnson ( often called L.B.J. ) could give Humphrey little support because of his own unpopularity .

By 1968 , candidates were appealing to the electorate through television , rather than through whistle @-@ stop train tours . Nixon had included them in his past national campaigns ? he had broken off one such tour in 1952 to make the Checkers speech , and in 1960 , had stopped at Deshler . The rural Ohio village , about 45 miles ( 72 km ) southwest of Toledo , was popular among whistle @-@ stopping presidential candidates as two main lines of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad crossed there ? other visitors in search of votes had included Al Smith , Harry Truman , and Barry Goldwater . Deshler voters would respond in 1968 by giving Nixon an overwhelming majority of their votes .

= = Rally and sign = =

Cole was an eighth grader in Deshler ; her father was the local Methodist minister while her mother taught third grade . On October 22 , 1968 , the day of Nixon 's stop in Deshler , Cole attended class as usual . During the morning session , one of her teachers announced that any girls interested in being " Nixonettes " ( girls asked to cheer and provide atmosphere at the rally ) should report to the fire station after school . Cole did so , along with her friend , Rita Bowman , and the girls were provided with paper red , white , and blue dresses ( to be worn over other clothing ) and signs . Cole 's said , " L.B.J. Convinced Us ? Vote Republican " .

That afternoon , Cole attended the rally , wearing her dress and holding her sign . The Nixon train pulled in , and the police lowered the rope which kept the crowd clear of the tracks . In interviews , Cole related that as the crowd surged forward , she dropped her sign amidst the pushing and shoving . Cole stated , " I wanted a sign to wave . I had lost my own placard and as the crowd moved forward as the train approached I saw this sign lying in the street and I just picked it up and held it high , hoping Mr. Nixon would see it . "

Nixon gave a speech from the rear platform of the train . He praised the size of the crowd , stating , " There are four times as many people here than live in the town and more than the number that were here in 1960 . " The candidate asserted that though his opponent , Vice President Humphrey ,

claimed that Americans had never had it so good , he should tell that to the farmer . Nixon pledged that he would give special attention to agricultural issues and would make the Secretary of Agriculture a farmer 's advocate to the White House . He promised to restore order : " The most important civil right is the right to be free from [ local ] violence . " He noted the many youths in the crowd , stating , " Young Americans know their future is at stake . They don 't want four more years of the same . " He recalled that his father had hailed from Ohio : " his roots are here and mine are too ! " As Nixon spoke , Cole observed him , and thought he was a good family man , looking warm and friendly and appearing much as she expected him to . She later stated that she did not even look at the sign until she was teased about it by a classmate , who suggested the sign , " Bring Us Together Again " was about boys , not politics . She kept the dress , but told the media she threw away the sign .

= = Nixon speeches and inauguration = =

Nixon speechwriter William Safire had been told of the sign by a friend of Nixon , Richard Moore , who left the train at campaign stops to mingle with the crowd and seek items of local color for the speechwriters to use . Safire stated in his book on the early days of the Nixon administration ( originally published in 1975 ) that at Deshler , " Moore boarded the train with that mystic look that a writer gets when he has something delicious to work with , some piece of color that could be more than a gimmick . " According to Safire in a 2007 column , Moore stuck his head into the compartment occupied by Nixon 's speechwriters and stated , " There 's a little kid out there with a hand @-@ lettered sign that I think says ' Bring Us Together ' . " Safire wrote in that column that he inserted the phrase into Nixon 's remarks for the speech to be given at the next stop .

Nixon used the phrase in concluding a rally at New York 's Madison Square Garden on October 31 , 1968 . Recalling the visit to Deshler , the Republican candidate stated , " There were many signs like those I see here . But one sign held by a teenager said , ' Bring Us Together Again ' . My friends , America needs to be brought together . " However , Nixon 's use of the phrase received little coverage until after the election . Deshler school officials heard of the speech , and asked students about the sign , but no one came forward .

Safire included the incident in a draft victory statement , which Nixon looked at before addressing the nation as President @-@ elect . In his victory speech on November 6 , Nixon recalled the sign :

I saw many signs in this campaign , some of them were not friendly ; some were very friendly . But the one that touched me the most was one that I saw in Deshler , Ohio , at the end of a long day of whistle @-@ stopping . A little town . I suppose five times the population was there in the dusk . It was almost impossible to see , but a teenager held up a sign , " Bring Us Together . " And that will be the great objective of this administration at the outset , to bring the American people together .

Reconciliation among the American people was also a theme of Humphrey 's concession statement . " I have done my best . I have lost , Mr. Nixon has won . The democratic process has worked its will , so now let 's get on with the urgent task of uniting our country . "

School officials again asked students about the sign after Nixon mentioned his visit to Deshler in the victory speech , and this time Cole came forward . She stated that she had not done so before as she had not written the sign . Reporters interviewed the girl in the principal 's office . Cole stated she felt Nixon was the one who could bring the country together again . Being interviewed by reporters from Washington , New York , and Chicago , she indicated , was more fun than sitting in history class . The Toledo Blade investigated the matter , but could not ascertain who made the sign , or what happened to it after Cole discarded it . John Baer , village chief of police , stated , " I think this has to be the most important thing that has ever happened around here . " Paul Scharf , editor of the Deshler Flag , stated he did not believe the mystery of the sign 's origin or fate would ever be cleared up . Safire stated he was told by Moore that the sign stood out as obviously handmade and not produced by the local Nixon campaign .

As early as November 7 , the Northwest Signal , local paper for nearby Napoleon , Ohio , reported that Deshler merchants were considering taking up a collection to send Cole to Washington ; the following day the paper editorialized that she , along with whoever actually made the sign , be sent

to Washington to see the inauguration . On November 19 , 1968 , campaign special assistant and longtime Nixon advisor Murray Chotiner proposed inviting the Cole family to the inauguration and having Vicki Cole ride the theme float . The President @-@ elect subsequently invited Reverend and Mrs. Cole and their family to attend the inauguration ; the family was brought to Washington by the Inaugural Committee . Vicki Cole carried a recreation of her sign on the theme float in the inaugural parade .

Carla Garrity , a fourteen @-@ year @-@ old girl from Burbank , California , objected to Cole 's invitation to the inauguration on the ground that Cole had done nothing to deserve it . In a letter to her congressman , Ed Reinecke , Garrity stated she had worked very hard for Nixon and other Republican candidates , " Therefore , I am very much against that 13 @-@ year old girl in Ohio who held up the sign ' Bring us Together ' being invited to the inaugural . She didn 't even read or write it ! " Reinecke forwarded the letter to Nixon aide John Ehrlichman with the comment , " I suspect that Carla 's reaction may be shared by other young people who worked in the Nixon campaign " . Nixon assistant Charles E. Stuart replied to Reinecke , stating , " Vicki Lynne has been invited to the inauguration not because she carried the sign , or even because she made the sign , but rather because the sign which she did carry proved to be an inspiration to Mr. Nixon " and expressed his confidence the invitation would be well received by other young Nixon partisans .

= = Political usage and aftermath = =

The Inaugural Committee wanted to adopt " Bring Us Together " as the inaugural theme , appalling Safire , who said , " That wasn 't the theme of the campaign . " Safire and other aides felt the administration should seek to advance its agenda , rather than seeking consensus on policy , and White House Chief of Staff @-@ designate H. R. Haldeman was able to change the theme to " Forward Together . " Nevertheless , the phrase " Bring Us Together " was thrown in the face of the Nixon administration by Democrats each time something divisive was proposed , and was used as the title of a tell @-@ all expose by Leon Panetta after he was fired from the Nixon administration for dissenting from the White House 's " Southern strategy " on civil rights policy . According to Safire , the use of the phrase against Nixon shows a slogan which evokes emotion can cut both ways .

Nixon 's advisors denied he had abandoned a desire to bring the American people together . However , they were divided between those who sought national unity , and those , such as campaign manager and Attorney General John N. Mitchell , who felt Nixon should concentrate on keeping the voters who had cast their ballots for him , and should seek to win over the voters who had favored third @-@ party candidate Alabama Governor George Wallace , as the key to reelection in 1972 . According to Safire , after taking office , Nixon and his advisors decided he need not bring the country together , but need only work to secure his reelection by appealing to voters who were not hostile to Nixon and his policies ? they became known as the Silent Majority . Historian Stanley Kutler suggested in his book on the Nixon administration that Nixon 's policies widened divisions in America , but that the nation finally came together late in his presidency ? to reject Nixon and demand his removal .

In late 1970 , Vicki Cole indicated in an interview Nixon was doing the best he could . During the 1972 campaign , Cole served as Ohio chair of a future voters organization for the Nixon campaign . She then left politics , devoting her spare time to training and showing horses . In 1974 , Cole declined to comment on the resignation of President Nixon in the wake of the Watergate scandal , but stated in 1977 that she felt sympathy for him , though she believed his resignation was necessary .

Safire , in his political dictionary published in 2008 , recollected that when he asked Moore , some years after the inauguration , whether he had really seen the girl holding the sign , or whether he had imagined it , " his eyes took on a faraway look " . In columns written in the final years before his 2009 death , Safire commented that the sign was " almost too good to be true " , and said of Moore , " [ h ] e may have made that up " .