



George ROMNEY

The one word that is often used to describe George Romney is *intense*. As governor during the 1960s, Romney led Michigan through some of the biggest changes it experienced since becoming a state in 1837.

George Wilcken Romney was born on July 8, 1907, in Mexico. His grandparents had left the United States in the late nineteenth century. In 1912, when Romney was five years old, his parents moved the family back to the United States. Romney grew up in Utah.

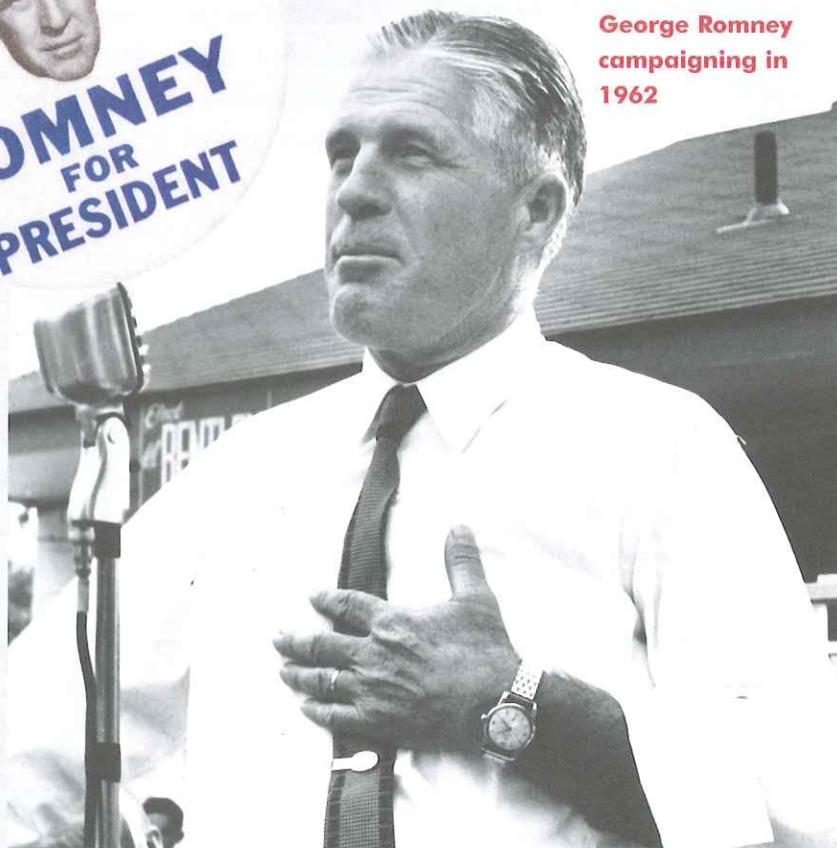
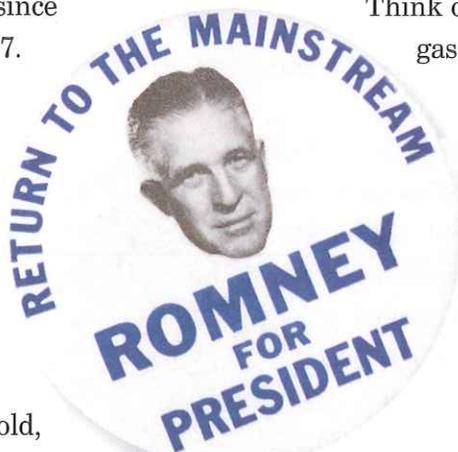
Romney arrived in Michigan in the 1940s. In 1954 he became president of the newly organized American Motors Corporation (AMC). Romney turned AMC into a profitable company. AMC's most popular car was the Rambler, a small, fuel-efficient vehicle that quickly became one of the bestselling cars in

America. Romney criticized other car companies because their cars kept getting bigger and bigger. He once said, "Who wants to have a gas-guzzling dinosaur in his garage? . . .

Think of the gas bills."

Romney also turned his attention to politics. In 1959 he founded Citizens for Michigan, a group that wanted a new **constitution** for Michigan. The state constitution had been adopted in 1909 and state government needed to be improved. Michigan's voters agreed, and they selected **delegates** to write the new constitution. These delegates, including Romney, gathered in Lansing to write the constitution.

(Continued)



George Romney campaigning in 1962



On April 1, 1963, Michigan voters adopted the new constitution.

In 1962, Romney resigned from AMC and ran for governor as a Republican. He won, ending 14 years of Democratic control of the State Capitol. He was reelected in 1964 and 1966. (In 1966 governors started serving four-year terms.)

Romney had a great smile and a friendly handshake, and was a good speaker. As governor, he opened his office on Thursday mornings so citizens could visit and talk with him. When he saw schoolchildren in the State Capitol he often greeted them with a handshake. Romney neither smoked tobacco nor drank alcohol. He exercised regularly. Even after turning eighty years old, he either jogged or walked each day.

Romney's popularity and leadership—especially as a

three-term governor—led him to be an attractive candidate for the U.S. presidency. On November 18, 1967, Romney announced he

would run for president. He said he hoped “to build a new America.” Three months later, Romney suddenly stopped his campaign.

There are several reasons why he did this. First, he was behind the **frontrunner**, Richard Nixon, in the polls. Second, Romney's ability to be a leader was questioned because of racial disturbances in Michigan cities during the summer of 1967. Finally, in September 1967, Romney made a statement on a television program that when he visited Vietnam two years earlier he had received a “**brainwashing**” from American officials about how well the war was going. Critics wondered how someone so easily **deceived** could be president.

In January 1969, Romney resigned as governor and was named secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. He left that job in 1973. He said that he looked forward to returning to private life “with great enthusiasm.”

Years after leaving public office, Romney was asked what it takes to be a successful governor. He said, “It's a matter of luck almost completely, if you'll accept my definition of luck—when preparation meets opportunity.” He added, “To be a good governor, you need to be prepared . . . and to have some real convictions as to what needs to be done to benefit the state.”

George Romney, who was one of Michigan's most **charismatic** politicians, died on July 26, 1995, at the age of eighty-eight.



I KNEW George Romney

by CHARLES E. HARMON

I met George Romney, one of Michigan's great men during the twentieth century, for the first time in 1961. I was a newspaper reporter at the Michigan constitutional convention where he was a delegate. Next, I covered Romney's 1962 election campaign for governor, his first two years in that office, and his 1964 reelection campaign.

Soon after the 1964 election he asked me to become his press secretary. I accepted. The next four years were the most exciting of my life. I worked with Governor Romney almost every day.

As the governor's press secretary, I was in charge of his contacts with newspapers, television, radio, and magazines. We worked together

on what he should say or not say about important issues. Sometimes we had press conferences. Other times, we issued printed statements, or went on radio and television. He often gave speeches that I helped write.

George Romney was a born salesman. When he was eighteen he went to England and Scotland as a missionary for his church. He preached everywhere for two years, even on street corners and in parks. It was super training for his later work.

Governor Romney believed in keeping himself physically fit. He would go to bed early and get up early, usually at five o'clock in the morning. He always exercised right after he got up. He often ran several miles. Romney's daily life included time for reading and for prayer. When he arrived at work, he called me into his office to talk about what was going on and to plan the day.

When he made up his mind to get something done, the governor rolled up his sleeves and went to work. I always enjoyed watching him as he went after what he thought was the right thing to do. He never gave up on something he believed in—even when it was unpopular. That is never easy.

As a result, he got big changes made in our laws and helped Michigan become a much better state.

We parted company in 1969, but my admiration for him never stopped. George Romney was a very special man.

■ *Charles E. Harmon lives in Green Valley, Arizona.*

Standing behind Governor Romney are Charles E. Harmon (right) and Romney's executive assistant, Robert J. Danhof (left).



Charles E. Harmon collection

What Did You Learn?

BONUS:

Who did Romney run for president against?

- a. Gerald R. Ford
- b. John B. Swainson
- c. Richard M. Nixon

1. *What automobile company was Romney the president of?*

- a. General Motors
- b. Chevrolet
- c. American Motors Corporation

2. *When was Michigan's current constitution adopted?*

- a. April 1, 1963
- b. January 27, 1827
- c. November 18, 1967

3. *How many terms did Romney serve as governor?*

- a. one
- b. three
- c. six

Vocabulary WORDS



Brainwashing: forcing or tricking a person into accepting certain beliefs, usually political or religious

Charismatic: quality of being well liked and charming

Constitution: a document that contains the laws and system of a government or organization

Deceived: misled, caused to believe something untrue

Delegates: representatives to a convention or conference who act for others

Frontrunner: person in the lead in a race or competition

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Find the following **ROMNEY** words

CONSTITUTION
DELEGATES
GOVERNOR
LEADERSHIP
POLITICIAN
RAMBLER
ROMNEY