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Wisdom to Know the Difference: The Rhetoric of Pat Nixon

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Chapter 15

Pat Nixon
Wisdom to Know the Difference

Linda B. Hobgood

> I believe that even when people can't speak your language, they can tell if you have love in your heart.
>
> —Patricia Nixon

> *Socrates:* Tell me, then: you say, do you not, that in the rightly developed man the passions ought not to be controlled, but that we should let them grow to the utmost and somehow or other satisfy them, and that this is a virtue?
> *Callicles:* Yes; I do.
> *Soc.:* Then those who want nothing are not truly said to be happy?
> *Cal.:* No, indeed, for then stones and dead men would be the happiest of all.[1]

Henriette Wyeth Hurd painted the official portrait of Patricia Nixon. The woman depicted is serene, almost sad. She appears fragile, yet brave. Above all, the face that gazes from the canvas understands—the wisdom in her eyes reflects that sense of tribulation bequeathed by experience. Both the painting and the subject reflect "calm at the center." It is an insightful portrayal of the American first lady known to the world as "Pat."

As the wife of a man who was by the time he became president one of the most well-known public figures of the twentieth century, Pat was herself a familiar face. Richard Nixon featured his family in every political contest he entered, and by 1968, the nation knew the Nixons—even their dog, Checkers. Television, as a medium of news, burst on the scene to coincide with Richard

Nixon's rise in national politics. As the visual medium expanded press coverage, any privacy that political families once may have enjoyed could no longer be presumed. This explains in part why so many of our memories of Pat are the indelible photographic images of her across more than four decades of American history.

Remarkable for their similarity are the terms used—both complimentary and critical—to describe Pat Nixon. Those who paid tribute to her upon her death praised the same qualities in her character. She seemed to embody all the virtues of Reinhold Niebuhr's familiar prayer, the very qualities revealed in her official portrait: serenity to accept what she could not change, courage to change what she could, and wisdom to know the difference.

What is striking about Pat Nixon's image is that while nearly everyone of her era recognized her familiar face, she remained a mystery. The life beyond the range of the camera's lens was a private one that Pat worked hard to protect. What the public did not know was left to speculation and caricature. Pat's response to such characterizations—even those that were blatantly false—was always a perspicacious silence. Faith that the truth as she knew it would have the final say gave Pat the confidence to refrain from elaboration and sustained her during the most trying times of her life. The temptation to publicly respond to criticism during or after her White House years was something Pat Nixon resolutely resisted.

We often forget that Pat Nixon was a wartime first lady. Undeclared and far away, the Vietnam conflict cast a shadow over the Nixon presidency that never lifted. American lives were sacrificed in the jungles of Southeast Asia for more than thirteen years, five and a half of which comprised the Nixon administration. Entrenched fears of the Cold War, mistrust of the Soviet Union and of its communist rival the People's Republic of China, Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe and the quashing of liberty in Czechoslovakia, heightened tensions between East and West Berlin, and the perilous aftermath of the six-day Arab–Israeli war combined to make Nixon's a more tremulous diplomatic and complex international challenge than the presidency had been since the Second World War.

Discontent with the Vietnam War led to violence at home. The sounds of protest in Lafayette Park across the street were the voices to which Pat Nixon awakened every morning of her White House stay.[2] Increasingly stark ideological differences between the two political parties in Congress were compounded by resentment over the narrow majority by which Richard Nixon won the presidential election of 1968. Finally, there was Watergate and, following an overwhelming victory in 1972, the unprecedented resignation of the president. Through it all there was the quiet calm of Pat Nixon.

Discernment seemed almost inherent in Pat. She had an instinct for what mattered and what, in the long term, did not. This "wisdom to know the difference" was complemented by two additional qualities in her character—a rigidly demanding definition of public service and an unwavering sense of self-discipline. These two qualities may have strengthened her capacity to withstand political battles that would have overwhelmed almost anyone else. At the same

time, they gave rise to perceptions hardly compatible with the person friends and family knew her to be. The uncertainty that lingers regarding the stoic figure of so many press photographs reveals a failure of press and public to penetrate her silence to appreciate her sense of duty or share her regard for privacy. Pat's own supposition that these predilections should not need explaining may have contributed to her persona as an enigma. In the vacuum, otherwise implausible portrayals of Pat Nixon in print and film nourished a fungible narrative[3] easier to believe than to question. Lack of inquiry, however, deprives us of an understanding of Pat Nixon's indomitable strength and steadfastness that are hallmarks of her life and legacy as first lady.

Because by choice she gave so few publicly recorded remarks, the informal expressions and the activities of Pat Nixon form the basis of my analysis. If indeed they "speak louder than words," the actions of this first lady are valid assessments of her rhetorical effectiveness. This study begins with a biographical overview that records Pat Nixon's lengthy public career, examining especially the advantages and constraints of its duration and high profile. My study culminates in a critical look at Mrs. Nixon's White House years and the remaining two decades of her life.

Biography

In 1960, *Time* magazine featured the nation's second lady on its cover. In the accompanying story, headlined "The Silent Partner," author Burt Meyers wrote:

> Along with her bottomless energy, Mrs. Nixon has formidable reserves of poise and aplomb, and a notably retentive mind. . . . Since her abrupt debut into public life, there have been many occasions to test her serenity, and she has never failed to meet the test.
> Pat Nixon's stamina and courage, her drive and control have made her into one of the U.S.'s most remarkable women—not just a showpiece Second Lady, not merely a part of the best-known team in contemporary politics, but a public figure in her own right.
> She earned that right the hard way—in a tough childhood that knew little luxury. (Meyers 1960, 25)

Lessons in self-discipline, explicit and inferential, accompanied the meager circumstances into which Thelma Catherine Ryan was born. Nicknamed "Pat" because her birth came on the eve of St. Patrick's Day 1912, she adopted the name officially to honor her father's memory upon his death. The third child and first daughter born to Will and Kate Ryan, Pat inherited her father's love of reading and adventure. A sailor and then miner, Will moved his family from Ely to Artesia, California, to try his luck at farming when Pat was just a year old. Money was scarce, and Pat learned at an early age to be content with little—to accept the things she could not change.

Before she was in school, she already knew how to suppress her tears and keep her head high. One of her earliest memories is of riding into the little

southern California town of Artesia with her farmer father to buy the weekly staples. While Will Ryan shopped, his four-year-old daughter waited patiently, perched on the high seat of the family buggy. "I would never ask for anything," she remembers, "but how I hoped! I'd watch the corner to see if he came back carrying a strawberry cone. That was the big treat." If there was no cone, the little girl understood that her father had no money left for treats, and she stifled her disappointment. "I just waited and hoped" (Meyers 1960, 25).

Pat knew better than to ask for such luxuries. Not wishing to add insult to the injury of Will Ryan's struggle to provide for his family's needs, Pat seemed to dread the thought of causing or adding undue misery even unintentionally. She therefore learned to read not just the printed word, but people as well. She developed an instinct for recognizing others' underlying emotions and responding with sensitivity. Years later, as first lady, Pat's "way with people" was the trait staff and visitors alike recalled best. Susan Porter Rose, who served as Mrs. Nixon's appointments secretary, recalled the White House reception for a group of Appalachian quilters, who were so overwhelmed by actually being at the White House and shy in the presence of the first lady that many began weeping uncontrollably.

> When [Mrs. Nixon] walked into the Diplomatic Reception Room to greet the quilt makers and heard the sobbing, she simply went around the room and wordlessly gave each of her guests a hug. Susan remembers that as the tension eased she was so moved that she felt tears spring into her own eyes. (Eisenhower 1986, 84)

Neither economic circumstance nor age seemed to make any difference in Pat's ability to anticipate and respond to others' needs. As first lady her "way" with children became almost legendary.

> Once, when a little crippled boy came to the White House for a photo opportunity with the First Lady, Pat saw the youngster was terrified and tried everything to help him relax, to no avail. Suddenly, he blurted: "This isn't your house!"
> "Why do you say that?" Pat asked.
> "Because I don't see your washing machine."
> Pat solemnly conducted him to the third floor and showed him the washing machines in the laundry room. He returned to the first floor holding her hand, as contented and cheerful as if he were with his own mother. His awed parent said that it was the first time he had ever been at ease with a stranger. (Truman 1995, 192–93)

Her mother died of Bright's disease and cancer of the liver when Thelma Ryan was thirteen. The details of Kate Ryan's life, her family, her faith, her favorite things, and the advice and hopes she no doubt had for her daughter were never conveyed. Pat recalled: "We were so busy on the farm. It was always a struggle. We didn't have much time to talk. And when you're thirteen you do not ask questions about philosophy or family" (Eisenhower 1986, 27).

In the years that followed, Pat assumed household responsibilities, attended

school where she excelled academically, and found time for extracurricular activities such as debate and drama. She put off college to nurse her father through silicosis until he died in 1930. Then the youngest Ryan, who had taken care of her father and brothers since the time of her mother's death, was on her own to pursue an education and her dream to travel. Both necessitated constant employment.

Her degree in merchandising from the University of Southern California, with teaching and office administration certifications, was financed by research assistantships and work as an x-ray technician, jobs that included serving food in the cafeteria, checking books at the library, and performing bit parts as a movie extra. One faculty member commented on Pat Nixon's ubiquity on campus because of her numerous people- or service-oriented occupations. Another professor wrote of Miss Ryan's "splendid attitude towards young people, with her buoyant enthusiasm for life in general." The assessment by the teacher who supervised Pat Ryan's practice teaching is telling: "Her students are very fond of her and she gets good results from them" (quoted in Eisenhower 1986, 48).

The opportunity to travel presented itself when an elderly couple asked Pat if she would chauffeur them in their Packard from California to Connecticut. Such an offer, coming at the onset of the Great Depression, must have seemed especially exciting. She traversed dangerous mountain highways, learned to change flat tires, and reached the East safely in the fall of 1929. Her payment was a bus ticket back to California, but Pat decided to see as much of the East Coast as possible before returning to complete her undergraduate work. She visited relatives she had never met, saw the nation's capital for the first time, and toured the White House. Pat's Aunt Kate, a nun with the Sisters of Charity, worked at Seton Hospital in New York. She offered Pat a position that autumn working with the patients who suffered from tuberculosis. In one of many letters to her brother Bill back in California, Pat wrote: "I love to help others. . . . It's funny but even a cheerful smile uplifts them. . . . Sometimes I feel that I should like to spend my life just working for the afflicted unfortunates—helping them to be more happy. Too, I enjoy hospital work" (Eisenhower 1986, 37).

Pat avoided sharing with her brothers that the Seton patients would soon die of the very disease that had taken Will Ryan's life. Years later, Pat's daughter Julie asked her mother if she had been afraid that she too would contract the illness while caring for these patients, but Pat claimed she had not been afraid. Pat showed the same courage to care for others in difficult conditions when she was first lady. Her first solo mission to a foreign country was to Peru to bring comfort to the many victims of a devastating earthquake. She also visited soldiers wounded in Vietnam, becoming the first president's wife to enter a designated combat zone on foreign soil. Photos of Mrs. Nixon at the bedsides of amputees and wounded servicemen, often on her knees so that they might whisper private messages for her to convey, reveal a woman singularly focused on the face of each of the suffering and completely oblivious to self.

Pat returned to California to complete her studies as the summer of 1934 came to an end. Her brother Tom financed the bus trip home, and to save money Pat shared an apartment with her brothers for the remainder of her college years.

Upon graduation, she accepted a teaching position at the local high school in Whittier, California. An earnest sponsor of extracurricular activities, Caroli's biography suggests that Miss Ryan's willingness to support the students' pursuits beyond the classroom was mutually rewarding. She writes:

> Her students found her so lively and likable that they selected her to advise the Pep Committee, organized to arouse school enthusiasm. Robert C. Pierpoint, who later covered the White House as a correspondent for CBS, was a member of the Pep Committee, and he remembered Miss Ryan of his Whittier student days as: "approachable, friendly, and outgoing. She was happy, enthusiastic, sprightly. Her disposition was sunny, not intermittently but all the time. . . . We liked her enormously." (Caroli 1987, 246; David 1978, 40)

Pat also found an opportunity to pursue acting, from high school days a source of enjoyment. The decision to join a local theatre group changed the course of her life. In February 1938, Pat went to a tryout for the Whittier Community Players and met Richard Nixon. Their daughter, Julie Nixon Eisenhower, recounts that for her father it was love at first sight. He actually proposed that evening, in a manner of speaking.

A young attorney in Whittier's Wingert and Bewley law firm, Richard Nixon was highly regarded in the community. Awarded a scholarship to Harvard upon graduation from high school, Nixon had been forced to turn down the offer because his family lacked the money for his travel and boarding expenses. He had instead attended nearby Whittier College where he excelled and was elected president of the student body. His high academic achievements continued at Duke University Law School where Nixon was inducted into the Order of the Coif (the law equivalent of Phi Beta Kappa) and served as president of the Duke Law School Student Bar Association. Back home in Whittier, he was a member and future president of the 20–30 Club (sponsored by the Rotary), an active Kiwanian, and the town's deputy city attorney. But in 1938, his attentions turned to the popular and attractive Miss Ryan. His spontaneous proposal was followed by a courtship that lasted more than two years. Dick and Pat discovered common interests and marked similarities in background beyond their mutual Irish heritage.

In 1940, they were married. Within two years, America was at war. The couple moved to Washington, D.C., where Dick had been hired in the new Office of Price Administration (OPA). Pat volunteered as a secretary for the Red Cross until also finding employment with the OPA. Richard Nixon's service in the navy included duty overseas during which time Pat was employed in a bank in Iowa and then again with OPA as a price analyst in San Francisco. When Dick returned home, his military obligation situated the couple for a brief time in Baltimore. It was there that Richard Nixon received a message from associates in Whittier asking him to return and to consider a congressional candidacy in the upcoming 1946 election against the incumbent House member. Nixon ran and won, against formidable odds.

Pat gave birth to the Nixons' first child in February 1946, just one month after the couple had returned to California. She also managed her husband's

campaign office by herself while he stumped across the district to win first the Republican nomination and then the November election. Dick's mother Hannah Nixon cared for their baby Tricia during the day while Pat performed secretarial, accounting, and other campaign duties at the headquarters. In her introduction to campaigns, Pat was exposed to the dark side of politics. A break-in occurred at the Nixon campaign headquarters. Pat, who had sold her small inheritance of land so the couple could afford to produce and distribute campaign pamphlets, reacted with a kind of hurt and disbelief over the loss of all their campaign materials. It was particularly disheartening to her that there was so little press or public outcry, something that, years later, struck her as ironic. It was a sobering lesson. The upset victory, hard fought and hard won, probably overshadowed the loss of political naiveté that accompanied the campaign of 1946. Nixon won reelection two years later, and it was during that campaign that their second daughter Julie was born.

In 1950, Richard Nixon's bid for the U.S. Senate, also viewed as an uphill race, was successful. His unlikely victories in a crucial state, his prominence on the House subcommittee investigating Alger Hiss, and his relative youth made Nixon a popular choice for vice president on the 1952 Republican ticket alongside presidential hopeful Dwight Eisenhower. Their candidacy was a successful one, but charges made in late summer that the vice presidential candidate operated a secret fund for purposes unreported drew sufficient press attention as to demand a response from Nixon. Republicans and Democrats alike called for an explanation, and there were suggestions that Nixon should withdraw from the ticket. For Nixon, this was tantamount to an admission of guilt. Determined to answer charges he viewed as deliberately false, Nixon was granted airtime on national television to give his side of the story. He determined that the only way to fight the fund allegations would be to disclose his finances entirely and to reveal—as no candidate had ever done before—all personal and family expenses, investments, and debts. Naturally a private person, Pat's exposure to three campaigns had only intensified her inclinations toward protecting the family's privacy. That she supported so resolutely the need for her husband to respond to the fund accusations and agreed with the way he chose to respond is an indication of her own hierarchy of values. Only the injustice of the situation as she perceived it permitted such a violation of their personal life. And though Pat did not know exactly what her husband planned to say, she was by his side at the broadcast. Earlier in the day, he had spoken of quitting the race, but Pat insisted that he defend himself and give the American people the truth they deserved.

The Checkers Speech is one of the most remarkable events in the history of American political campaigns. Nixon spoke directly to the camera for thirty plus minutes; he urged his audience to contact the Republican National Committee to voice their opinions as to whether he should be kept on the ticket. He bared his political and financial soul, listing the costs of his car and his mortgage, his assets and his debts. While his wife didn't have a fur coat, but instead wore a "good Republican cloth coat," he unabashedly asserted, "she'd look good in anything." And he acknowledged that the family had accepted one gift from a supporter in Texas: "It's a dog, a black and white spaniel, and our daughter Tri-

cia named it Checkers and no matter what they say we're going to keep it."

Response was overwhelmingly supportive and Nixon was kept on the ticket. Eisenhower even boasted about his running mate at subsequent campaign rallies. But in the nearly fifty years since the event, those who recall the speech remember that though it was Nixon who spoke so unconventionally and Checkers for whom the event was named, the lasting image is that of a poised Mrs. Nixon. Press accounts at the time described her as cool and collected, but a watching public recalls another Pat. Seated on the stage of the El Capitan Theatre in Los Angeles just a few feet from Nixon she set her unblinking, unflinching gaze on her husband with a somber, tight-lipped smile that barely masked the personal indignation she felt toward what had become politics at its nastiest and most intrusive. The pain in her expression was so palpable that the television viewer could feel it; the camera seemed a heartless trespasser. A half-century later with such supposed sophistication toward the television medium, her image still has that effect on the viewer.[4]

The Checkers Speech would be a key recollection of that 1952 campaign, but another incident, all but forgotten, also left indelible memories. During the Republican National Convention, on the night Richard Nixon accepted the vice presidential nomination, reporters, anxious for a story, brushed past a bewildered baby-sitter in the Nixon home where their daughters were sleeping. They wakened Tricia, six, and Julie, four, making them pose for pictures in a frenzied haste to get the girls' reaction to their father's nomination. The flashbulbs scared the youngsters to tears. The incident was not considered newsworthy, but this was the part of politics neither Pat—nor any mother—could easily forget. It could hardly help but leave a lasting impression regarding the behavior of particular reporters and the press in general.

The 1952 GOP ticket won in a landslide and repeated the victory in 1956. One of the well-known photographs of those years was taken at the 1957 Inaugural Ball. In the picture, the Nixons are smiling and waving to supporters from their box seats, but the new vice president's wife is looking sideways at a yawning daughter Julie. The photo is emblematic of the dual existence that characterized this stage of Pat's life. For the next eight years, Nixon and his wife were put to work on behalf of the administration at home and overseas. Ruth Cowan's feature article on Pat, published at the outset of her husband's vice presidency, is typical of the favorable coverage Mrs. Nixon enjoyed in that era.

> Mrs. Richard Nixon as second lady of the land is beginning an exciting new chapter in a life that already has been as dramatic as any story out of Hollywood in her home state of California. In fact, her life story as a movie could "pack 'em in." The plot is the kind Americans really like—a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that was reached only after a lot of ups and downs. (Cowan 1953, S3)

During both Eisenhower terms, concern for the president's health limited his activities, and the Nixons assumed diplomatic responsibilities, especially those involving travel to foreign countries. There seems to have been little question but that Mrs. Nixon would accompany her husband, though the decision

involved leaving their two young daughters. Her biographers indicate this was a wrenching choice. Nevertheless, response to her activity as an ambassador of goodwill and surrogate on official state occasions was uniformly positive. Members of the media who accompanied the vice president and his wife marveled at Pat's stamina. Julie Eisenhower's biography of her mother, which provides the most comprehensive account of the second lady's travels, includes the impression recounted by Robert Hartmann of the *Los Angeles Times*, following the attack on the vice president's motorcade by violent mobs of communist-inspired insurgents during the couple's 1957 trip to South America:

> At the American Embassy, reporter Bob Hartmann, who had watched the attack from the press truck, was one of the first to talk to my parents and to file a dispatch back to the United States. Part of his report read, "Pat Nixon was magnificent today"; at the end of her ordeal, "she still had a stiff upper lip, but when newsmen cheered her, tears welled in her eyes." (Eisenhower 1986, 176)

In these diplomatic and political duties, Pat Nixon reportedly welcomed opportunities for direct interaction despite the time and energy required. Helen Thomas listened to Richard Nixon describe what became a pattern:

> I remember through all of our campaigns, whether it was a receiving line or whether it was going to a fence at the airport, she was the one that always insisted on shaking that last hand, not simply because she was thinking of that vote, but because she simply could not turn down that last child or that last person. (Thomas 1975, 165)

Support of her husband's political philosophy was by all accounts genuine; Pat appears to have enjoyed demonstrating that support as his traveling partner. Following a press reception in Belgrade, a Yugoslav reporter concluded her story: "I wondered whether I was talking with the wife of a politician or with a woman who is herself a politician. I again remembered the words of Dwight Eisenhower: 'The Nixons are a team'" (Eisenhower 1986, 300). Pat was developing a penchant for informal opportunities.

In all their travels, Pat made it her special purpose to extend goodwill beyond officialdom to citizens of the countries they visited despite age, health, or economic circumstance. Beyond embassy security she came face-to-face with the danger of their ambassadorial role. By far the most dramatic episode occurred in Caracas on the 1957 trip to South America. Communist insurgents had inspired and fomented anti-American sentiment and sympathizers congregated to stimulate protests at points along the planned motorcade routes. The protests quickly became riots and local government officials were unwilling or unable to curb the demonstrators. Hostility greeted the Nixons at every stop, but as the visit progressed the violence increased. Anger culminated at the airport where protocol demanded, despite the danger of the situation, an official departure ceremony. Julie Eisenhower describes the accounts of eyewitnesses:

> When the Venezuelan national anthem was unexpectedly played at the entrance to the terminal, causing my parents to stand immobile in respect for their host

> country, the screaming crowd on the observation deck directly above them showered them with a sustained rain of spit and some garbage. At first the spit looked like giant snowflakes, but it turned to foul, dark blotches when it hit my mother's red suit and the clothes of those standing with her. Then, with the aid of the Secret Service, my parents walked through a shouting, spitting mob to the motorcade. At the car Don Hughes hurriedly rolled up the windows and then pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the saliva off the seat my mother would occupy. And yet, as Americans read in their newspapers the next day, reporters saw Pat Nixon ignore the final onslaught and stop to hug a child who had given her flowers. They also saw her lean across a barricade to pat the shoulder of a young girl who had just cursed and spit at her. The girl turned away in shame. (Eisenhower 1986, 84)

Secret Service and military channels of communication from Caracas were blocked that day. News of the rioting interrupted regular television programming back in the United States. The president and official Washington obtained their first glimpse of the trouble by tuning in, as did the Nixon daughters, who attended public school in their Washington, D.C., neighborhood and were home for lunch. The TV program the girls were watching was interrupted by film showing the smashed automobiles that had transported their parents through the dangerous streets. Dramatic voice-overs gave no indication as to whether the vice president and his wife had escaped harm. Attempts to reassure the Nixon daughters were, upon returning, their mother's heavy-hearted task.

Pat no doubt gained during these years an acute sense of the strain public service may bring to the families and personal lives of those who serve. That she nevertheless urged active involvement in public service at informal gatherings and the few formal settings in which she spoke belies Pat's fundamental faith in the value of representative democracy. She had, by her mid-forties, observed a sufficient number of alternative forms of government to endorse knowledgeably, even with its flaws, participatory government and the American system.

Domestic travel was as much a part of the Nixons' schedules as were their foreign assignments. While Pat did not go on every campaign swing, she kept a wearying pace in the campaign for reelection in 1956, and accompanied her husband to assist Republican candidates for House and Senate in the non-presidential election years. During one campaign season, Republicans coined a slogan "Let's Make a Clean Sweep," designed to inspire the recapture of a majority in the November election in both houses of Congress. At a scheduled campaign stop in Cleveland, Ohio, the Nixons emerged from their plane and were greeted by an unexpectedly large crowd of supporters. They enthusiastically chanted the clean sweep slogan and waved scores of brooms, the vast quantity of which had been supplied by a member of the Ohio congressional delegation, George Bender. More than a dozen years later, First Lady Pat Nixon was the special guest at a Congressional Club reception in Washington, D.C., at which a replica of her inaugural gown was to be unveiled. Spotting Senator Bender's widow among the invited guests, Pat approached her and exclaimed suddenly "The brooms!" The first lady then clasped Mrs. Bender's shoulders and said earnestly "You cannot imagine how much that reception meant and what those brooms did for our spirits." Taken completely by surprise at this rec-

ollection, Mrs. Bender was overwhelmed by Pat's memory and genuine thoughtfulness (Hobgood 2001).

Victorious in five consecutive elections, a proven leader in presiding over the U.S. Senate and in his role as presidential surrogate, and an impressive defender of American values and interests overseas, the vice president was considered a significant asset in assisting GOP candidates for office. He was so visible and influential that columnist Murray Kempton nicknamed the 1950s the "Nixon Decade." It was a foregone conclusion that Richard Nixon would seek to succeed Eisenhower as president; Pat, whom many thought had lost her love of campaigning in the years following the Checkers Speech, summoned her energies and approached the coming contest with customary dedication and enthusiasm. Pat had, by 1959, learned to martial her talent for recollection and her interest in others with so little apparent effort that she could be counted on to recognize former acquaintances as she made new ones. The famous and not-so-famous were treated alike as is demonstrated by one exchange in Idaho that proved typical:

> Danny Kaye stopped to chat for a moment, and Art Linkletter, in a shaggy bearskin serape, got a guffaw from Dick Nixon, and a comment: "Is this man or beast?" Then a stocky man in a blue-and-white Norwegian sweater came by. "I'm Bob Bennett," he said. "I'm sure you don't remember me, but I'd like to shake your hand." Replied Pat, without a moment's hesitation: "Of course I remember you. You were our campaign manager in Tulare County in 1950. After that big meeting we had there, we went to your house. You raise oranges." Muttered Bennett in wonderment as he walked off: "It's been ten years." (Meyers 1960, 24)

At some point in her husband's political career, Pat Nixon deliberately limited the ways in which she would express her political views, at least stateside during a campaign season. According to her daughter Julie, it was during the first congressional campaign in 1946 that Mrs. Nixon determined the extent of her own political activity:

> My mother had an innate sense of what would or would not be politically appropriate for her. She knew that she would never be comfortable with a public speaking role, so she confined her remarks to brief "greetings" in which she thanked the volunteers for their efforts. She felt strongly also that there should be only one voice on issues in the campaign—the candidate's. (Eisenhower 1986, 89)

On one occasion in 1956, when the flu kept Richard Nixon from delivering prepared remarks, Pat filled in with a three-minute speech at a stop in Oklahoma City. Julie Eisenhower's biography traces the otherwise faithful twenty-eight-year maintenance of this policy and Mrs. Nixon reiteration of it in response to reporters' questions. In one instance, Julie combines her mother's response to one of the many "why no policy pronouncements from the First Lady" with an assertive call by Mrs. Nixon (one of many informal exhortations) to citizen involvement:

> She avoided policy statements, telling Vera Glaser of the North American Newspaper Alliance, "I don't think one person can speak for another. The candidate should speak for himself." Repeatedly, she declared that individuals could make a difference. "Get involved. Instead of complaining, go to work. People should participate in local political groups. Each community has some kind of organization in which it is possible to become active. Work for a candidate whom you believe to be qualified—they are the ones who can take a problem to the top. Indicate interest to your Congressman or Senator." (Eisenhower 1986, 243)

Here is clear indication that Mrs. Nixon's reluctance to speak publicly on issues did not reflect a lack of interest or concern. And according to Julie Eisenhower, "[t]hat philosophy—the individual can change the quality of life—would be the theme of her White House years" (Eisenhower 1986, 243). Nevertheless, this combination of inclinations creates a challenge for a first lady who evidently enjoyed interacting with people in almost any situation but that of making a formal address. As one who held to certain values including the need to support her husband's positions, and who felt that attitudes or beliefs could and should be supported by action, her sense of propriety restricted expression. The rhetorical dilemma for Pat Nixon was, therefore, one of her own making. Having eliminated the option of speaking formally to effect persuasion, she limited the number of available and appropriate rhetorical options by which to exert influence. In the 1960 election, this dilemma called for creative alternatives.

Columnist Ruth Montgomery, writing in her syndicated column, asserted that "for the first time in American history one woman could conceivably swing a presidential election." According to Julie Eisenhower:

> Another reporter evoked historical precedent when she pointed out that Pat Nixon was the first woman around whom a separate campaign was being built. The Republican National Committee's women's division decided to sponsor a Pat Week beginning October 3, during which Mother would attend coffees and mini-rallies in her honor, and precinct workers would canvass the neighborhoods. (Eisenhower 1986, 189)

Pat was reportedly uncomfortable with these efforts and her permission had not been sought in advance. She would not have approved activities that distracted from the candidate himself, and she may not have fully realized the extent to which she herself was viewed as an asset by her husband's campaign organizers.

The 1960 campaign and election proved physically and emotionally draining. Richard Nixon had, by age 47, run for office twice nationally, five times successfully. Any discussion of losing was viewed as tantamount to admitting defeat during the campaign, so between Pat and Dick there was no speculation about this possibility. They maintained a grueling schedule, ignoring illness and strain. The president was judged by First Lady Mamie Eisenhower too ill to stump for Nixon; Ike's absence from the campaign was easily misinterpreted. The first televised debates took place between Kennedy and Nixon; the unprecedented role and impact of the visual medium created exigencies that fami-

lies and supporters of both candidates had to face abruptly. When it became clear on election night that the outcome was the closest in U.S. history and that Richard Nixon appeared to have lost, Nixon ignored reports of voting fraud incidents and irregularities and made a swift decision to concede. Supporters who jammed the Ambassador Hotel ballroom in Los Angeles, dismayed at his admitting defeat so early, chanted to the Nixons as they entered the room "Don't give up!" "You're still going to win!" As the vice president and his wife stood at the microphones waiting for the applause to subside, Pat Nixon, whose poise had come to be presumed, looked out at the crowd of friends and supporters of fourteen years and more and lost her composure. Again there is the unforgettable photo of Pat whose face bore all the shock and strain and disappointment of months spent exhausting themselves only to face this first defeat.

The Nixons remained in Washington until the summer 1961 when their daughters completed the school term, but it was a difficult time. Julie Eisenhower writes:

> In a sense those months in Washington marked another turning point in my mother's attitude toward politics. Nineteen sixty disillusioned her beyond redemption. She saw a stolen election and could not understand why so many were indifferent. Gradually she resolved to channel her energy into the new life awaiting us in California." (Eisenhower 1986, 204)

It was time to change the things she could.

More likely for reasons of party loyalty and anxiousness to avoid the almost inevitable split that subsequently occurred among California Republicans, Richard Nixon was less than two years later a candidate for governor of his home state. Pat had grave misgivings as to the outcome, and her fears were well founded. In the famous press conference that followed his humiliating defeat, Richard Nixon bade farewell to politics with the bitter promise "You won't have Dick Nixon to kick around anymore." Pat, watching via television, reportedly cheered, counting on this to be a promise kept.

One can therefore hardly comprehend Pat Nixon's thoughts as she came to the realization that she would be returning to the political scene. The family had moved to New York where Richard Nixon practiced law. He traveled extensively for his firm, campaigned for Republican candidates, and addressed the 1964 GOP National Convention, but the family remained close, indulging in long-postponed visits with treasured friends. On at least one of these visits, the notion of a second run for the presidency was discussed. Pat's closest friend Helene Drown recalled for Julie Eisenhower: "I sensed strongly that Pat still had a deep belief in your father's unique talent. She was sure that he alone was capable of solving some of the problems we were facing in the country then" (Eisenhower 1986, 232). As to her mother's attitude in 1968, Julie reflects: "It took courage to re-enter public life as spiritedly as she did." And she wisely notes: "She had no illusions about campaigns or Washington; no confidence that success lay at the end of the rainbow" (235).

Pat understood the odds. They did not have vast wealth, her husband steered a moderate course, he had been tagged a loser, or a has-been, and they had no

way of knowing whether he still had a real political following. At the same time, foreign and domestic crises had reached a critical point. The significance of Julie's observation is that the campaign of 1968 seemed to be an experience Pat thoroughly enjoyed. She appeared buoyant and lighthearted after years away from the limelight. She obliged the demands of campaign protocol in such a way that they seemed second nature, almost fun. She paced herself and her activities. Her happiness did not appear to depend on the election outcome. Her children had reached adulthood, there was a degree of family financial stability and, except for what he considered a minor bout with phlebitis, Dick and Pat Nixon enjoyed extraordinary good health.

The outcome in 1968, was again razor thin, but this time the edge went to Richard Nixon. Acknowledging to supporters that "Winning's a lot more fun," the president-elect and his family prepared for the wedding of daughter Julie to David Eisenhower, and their return to Washington. Daughter Tricia was married to Edward Cox in the White House Rose Garden in June 1971. Nixon was reelected president in 1972, by the largest landslide to that time. Then, exactly six years and one day following his 1968 acceptance of the Republican presidential nomination, Richard Nixon became the first president in American history to resign from office, under threat of impeachment. The former president and first lady retired to La Casa Pacifica, their home in San Clemente, California, where Pat Nixon suffered a stroke in June 1976, from which she never fully recovered. The Nixons moved back to New York and New Jersey to be near their children and four grandchildren. Pat Nixon died on June 22, 1993, the day following her fifty-third wedding anniversary and was buried on the grounds of the Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, California, next to the home that was her husband's birthplace. Her epitaph[5] reads: "I believe that even when people can't speak your language, they can tell if you have love in your heart."

Rhetorical Activities as First Lady

That Patricia Nixon took living in the White House seriously yet did not take herself too seriously created a blend of character that was recalled fondly by those who helped her perform the duties of first lady. In the brief months that I served on her staff, I asked my coworkers questions on every conceivable subject, but the answer to "What is the event or occasion you remember best?" was always the same: "The POW Dinner." The White House staff, used to entertaining, was less accustomed to planning a gala of this size and scope. Returning from imprisonment in Vietnam, the 591 servicemen were invited along with their families to an evening of supper and entertainment on the South Lawn of the White House in May 1973. Preparations for the event were unprecedented, but what her staff recalled uniformly was that Mrs. Nixon seemed especially moved by the bravery of these men and the fortitude of their families. The suffering they had endured was matched by the gratitude they expressed, and the celebration was carefully designed to honor them in a way they would remember for the rest of their lives.

To combine a dignified reserve with a genuine sense of caring that transcended age, language, and cultural limits is uncommon. My first observation of Mrs. Nixon entertaining a little boy in the White House Library convinced me that the combination of gentleness and encouragement I witnessed was something rare. In greatest detail, the child, who was afflicted with a disease for which there was then no known cure, described losing his tooth the evening before. Mrs. Nixon knelt beside him so that from his seated position he could show her the empty space in his mouth that had so recently housed his tooth. She listened attentively, oblivious to the presence of the others in the room. His spontaneous embrace came as no surprise, and she returned it warmly when it was time for him to leave. Such moments occurred regularly, but nothing about Mrs. Nixon's demeanor on these occasions could be considered routine. Carl Anthony likened her to Grace Coolidge: "As teachers, they focused on children requiring special attention.... Children seemed to respond to Pat Nixon as openly as she did to them, embracing, kissing, and leading them by the hand because she felt like it" (Anthony 1991, 165).

As a teacher, Pat was fastidious in all manner of contact with others. Her staff—four key assistants plus their respective teams—was well acquainted with her rules regarding correspondence. In the wording of letters, vagueness, jargon, trite or clichéd terms were to be avoided. She checked every letter she signed for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors. It was explained to me that while we might become accustomed to seeing White House letterhead there were citizens worldwide who cherished the only letter from the White House they might receive in a lifetime. Pat had seen letters from the White House framed and hung in homes' most special places. It was considered our responsibility to treat each piece of stationery, funded by the taxpayer, with utmost care.

Pat Nixon did her homework. She spent weeks and months prior to state visits, studying culture and customs, the people and politics with whom she expected to visit. William Safire recalls how well her extensive preparations served her when she was in Moscow for the 1972 summit and was seated next to Aleksei Kosygin at an official dinner. He quizzed her specifics of American government and the number of women holding elective office, inquired as to names of members of the traveling White House press corps, compared views of Russian theatre, and the Moscow subway system versus the one proposed for Washington, D.C. They discussed the Orlov Diamond and the clamor of fire engines outside the Soviet Embassy in New York City. Kosygin wryly suggested that the reason Americans had a grain surplus was because they didn't eat enough bread. Pat Nixon replied to all his jokes and queries. She had noted all the names (present and past) of the places in which he had spent his childhood and asked him to tell her of his youth. He recalled famine and hardship as a young boy and went on at great length because the American first lady seemed somehow to understand. Safire recounts the conversation as evidence "of a First Lady doing her job—nothing dramatic, but a bit of flavor that rarely makes the reporting of great events" (Safire 1975, 609–10). This was just as Pat Nixon would have wanted it.

Every Pat Nixon biographer alludes to the keen sense of duty and dedica-

tion maintained throughout her career in public life: "She believed that publicly the First Lady must always be an unquestionable example of high virtue, a symbol of dignity, yet refused to fall prey to the trappings (Anthony 1991, 165). She had a kind of sixth sense, however, about when to uphold the standards of decorum and when it was actually more appropriate to "be flexible" in ceremony and protocol. Perhaps because of this otherwise strict adherence to appropriateness, it was always a special delight to see Mrs. Nixon "let down her guard." Children, pets, and holidays accommodated perfectly such occasions. So too, did the presence of another first lady, the widowed Mamie Eisenhower, who Pat welcomed into the life of the Nixon family and White House. Mamie lent a kind of "impish" grandmotherly presence to executive branch officialdom. Pat brought her as the surprise guest to a reception for the staff one summer evening in 1973, and a colleague invited me to come with him to meet her. We introduced ourselves, and my colleague Bill Fillmore informed Mrs. Eisenhower that he was planning to marry that fall. "Do you have any advice for newlyweds?" he inquired. Mamie, who to that point had been quietly demure, looked tiny next to her interlocutor. Suddenly, standing on tiptoe and grasping the lapels of Bill's jacket, she looked him in the eye and admonished "You tell her she'll get a lot further with honey than she will with vinegar!" Pat, standing nearby, laughed heartily as we struggled to maintain our composure.

There were times when Pat had to conceal her own surprise. Seated next to Chou en Lai at dinner during the historic trip to China, Mrs. Nixon reached for a cigarette case that was wrapped in tissue decorated with panda bears. Pat fingered the wrapping and commented to the premier that she had "always loved them."

> "I will give you some," he replied.
> "Cigarettes?"
> "Pandas."

That is how the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., became home to the Chinese pandas, one of the most popular tourist sites in the nation's capital.

Pat was asked to define at various times her "cause" as first lady. While she launched the "Right to Read" literacy program, championed the arts and American artists in particular, and drew attention to volunteerism nationwide, she often simply alluded to her affection for people. Others viewed this as a special gift and her greatest talent—"her boundless compassion for humanity"—but she herself never saw it as anything other than being herself. On one or two occasions she did refer to her "personal diplomacy." If it can be called a style, it was one that began well before her husband became president and it remains a viable model of rhetorical effectiveness for a "silent partner."

Too prudent to be drawn into gratuitous confrontation, she apparently perceived as a violation of decorum the spouse-as-spokesperson, which seemed to her to disregard the fact of who was the candidate in an election. What enjoyment a president's family might find in the perquisites of a presidency was, she believed, balanced by concomitant obligations and sacrifice. Mrs. Nixon probably understood better than most the rhetorical risk of a voice with two faces, the

danger of intended harmony being perceived instead as contradiction. As she was inclined to support almost all of Richard Nixon's expressed views, allowing any possible confusion that might undermine his efforts by something she might say was considered counterproductive, politically and personally.

There was public support for her conduct. Throughout the more than five years of the Nixon presidency, Pat routinely led national and international popular opinion polls (Truman 1995, 192). Her style as a first lady was perceived as consistent with her four predecessors[6], and, importantly, with herself. By 1969, when she entered the White House, Pat Nixon was hardly a stranger in the popular sense. She had been a familiar face to the general public for nearly two decades, since the Hiss case had propelled her husband into the national spotlight. In the 1968 presidential race, supporters and opponents alike looked for anything that might hint of a distinction between the "new" Nixon and the "old" Nixon as a strategy to gain voter support. Patricia Nixon may have surmised that 1968 was not the time for a departure from personal conduct she viewed as having been appropriate; after all, no one had blamed her for her husband's defeats of 1960 and 1962 (or, for that matter, any of his personal and political setbacks). She, therefore, adhered to an image with which the public appeared both familiar and comfortable. The value of this can best be appreciated in its historical context. Images that pervaded print and electronic media in the early 1970s, those of Vietnam War protesters or increasingly agitated demonstrators, presented a stark contrast to any coverage of Mrs. Nixon's daily routine. The drama provided by one set of photographs easily overwhelmed and obscured the predictable appearance of the other. One gathers an impression that she would still have opted for a "safe rather than sorry" course of action.

Apart from consideration of day-to-day public opinion, Pat Nixon was no doubt aware of longer-term shifts in social and cultural perspectives regarding institutions and values. They included the presidency, the notion of privacy, and the roles and rights of women in public and corporate spheres.

Richard Neustadt's redefining of the power of the presidency as the power to persuade had proven valid and to Lyndon Johnson's advantage. His War on Poverty and civil rights legislation both owed their support to the persuasive force of that one individual. But it could also backfire. Vietnam had become Johnson's war; it then threatened to become Nixon's. A personalized presidency posed the risk that anyone close to the president might become an issue and a problem for which the chief executive could and would be held accountable. The woman whose cloth coat and cocker spaniel had dogged her since 1952 was sensitive to what may become news and grounds for criticism. Her solution appears to be based on the adage: be mindful of unintended consequences.

Privacy in the era of Franklin Delano Roosevelt bore no resemblance to the brand of the late 1960s. Respect for the personal lives of public figures, violated infrequently, and accepted by Americans of the World War II era, had evanesced by 1969. The ways in which personal and family concerns had become public fare during the Johnson administration, detailed reporting of the Johnson daughters' social experiences and the tragedies and misfortunes of Johnson family friends, no doubt alerted the Nixon family (inclined to be private anyway) to

be even more cautious before making public statements. Even so, Pat Nixon must have known that any effort to protect privacy came at a price. Her rhetorical approach, if at one time fitting, was not as conducive to increasingly staccato press coverage of the day. She needed to address the possibility that the mediated audience might perceive her as keeping the public at arm's length or lacking candor. The risk of having her disciplined nature viewed as Callicles' "dead men and stones" did in fact, occur. An unflattering image of a stiff and dispassionate consort was occasionally used to characterize Mrs. Nixon from the 1950s until the end of her husband's presidency in 1974. But reports of Pat Nixon taking any public position in contrast to the administration were, as she desired, nonexistent.

It was on the issue of women's rights that Mrs. Nixon gave the only indication of being more liberal politically than her husband. While she had indicated (via family and friends) that she favored initiatives in the 1968 and 1972 Republican Convention platforms which endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment, and that she supported the nomination of a woman to the Supreme Court, she must have been keenly aware of three constraints. First, there was little national consensus on these issues and her position would not resolve that. Second, her expressed sentiments would not likely change feminist opposition to the Nixon agenda. And third, the expanded world audience to which her husband was so keenly attuned included vastly divergent sentiments regarding the treatment of women in general and the outspokenness of political spouses in particular.

These factors, in addition to her personal preferences already noted, presented a tantalizing challenge to someone of Mrs. Nixon's political awareness and experience. She began with a savvy understanding that effecting political persuasion is not confined to registered or even eligible voters. While taking into account the breadth of an expanded world audience, she may have assessed those with whom interaction was personally most fulfilling. Already, she had defined her role as first lady, as she had consistently throughout her husband's public life, from the perspective of her status as a wife and mother. If such exemplification was not enthusiastically received by members of the media or politicians, neither did it spawn detractors in and of itself. Those inclined to like Mrs. Nixon approved the example she set; those politically opposed to her, or more precisely, to her spouse, took exception to other things. Criticism focused mostly on her manner: "reserve" became "robotic." In the popular press the term, "Plastic Pat" typically signified an unflattering news item. But for her, a domestic countenance appears to have been a natural and rewarding representation, one that permitted, even encouraged reaching out to others. Genuinely comfortable with young and old alike, and imbued by her upbringing with the demeanor of a caregiver, Pat Nixon was what Margaret Truman called "a small *d* democrat in her bones, someone who always preferred to iron her own dresses, wash her own clothes, who instinctively sympathized with the poor and unlucky of this world" (Truman 1995, 190).

A final aspect should not be casually dismissed. The office of first lady has come to convey a measure of dignity and distance that inspires curiosity, even awe. In her presence, an ordinary citizen might expect the display of gracious

hospitality or pleasantness, but not necessarily the easy warmth of a friend. If members of the public had, in addition, any preconceived notions of a reticent Mrs. Nixon, they encountered a paradox that forced choosing between the "plastic Pat" they had read about and the laughing first lady who was patting their shoulder or squeezing their hands. An expression or spirit of unconditional warmth and acceptance takes on an implausible and therefore special significance when it originates in one who is perceived by an audience to be shy and reserved. This unintended aid may have been the secret to whatever success Pat Nixon's "personal diplomacy" enjoyed. As the advantage of the so-called "stealth bomber" is its ability to fly low, undetected by radar, so the strength of "personal diplomacy" may have been that it was so obvious and came to be taken so for granted, that reporters often missed its effects completely. Two incidents in particular come to mind.

From the time of her departure following her husband's assassination, Jacqueline Kennedy had not returned to the White House. The official portraits of President and Mrs. Kennedy, painted by artist Aaron Shikler, were finished in 1971. Mrs. Nixon extended a hand-delivered invitation to Mrs. Kennedy and her children, inviting them to view privately the official portraits and to spend an afternoon in their former home. Surmising accurately that Mrs. Kennedy would not wish the press to be informed, she promised the former first lady privacy and not a word to the media. When Mrs. Kennedy accepted the invitation Mrs. Nixon did not share the reply with her press secretary Helen Smith, so that in the event the press might suspect or learn of the visit, Helen would be able to—and indeed, did—respond honestly that she knew nothing of the get-together. The three Kennedys arrived without fanfare, viewed both paintings and commented appreciatively on the prominent locations selected for each. Mrs. Nixon, who admired her predecessor's extensive efforts at White House restoration, briefed her on the progress in recovering White House antiquity. Mrs. Kennedy expressed admiration for the work of curator Clement Conger and Mrs. Nixon that was continuing based on Mrs. Kennedy's initiative. The Nixon daughters showed Caroline and John Jr. the family quarters and the rooms that had been their own. All three Kennedys wrote afterwards, thanking the Nixon women effusively for their gracious hospitality and more important for making every effort to guarantee the privacy of their visit. Jacqueline Kennedy wrote: "The day I always dreaded turned out to be one of the most precious ones I have spent with my children" (Eisenhower 1986, 310). Only later, by mutual agreement, was news of the event made public. Personal diplomacy admits loyalty and trustworthiness to an unusual degree. Mrs. Nixon could have violated the wishes of her predecessor and choreographed a press and photo opportunity without equal. Instead, she incurred the wrath of the press corps for withholding information. Helen Thomas, dean of the White House press corps and a personal favorite of Pat's had suspected something, leaked her suspicions, and felt betrayed by the White House's reluctance to confirm. Pat Nixon chose the path that hurt others least and paid the price herself.

In May 1972, the first lady accompanied her husband to the Moscow Summit and there is evidence to suggest that events occurred as a consequence of

Mrs. Nixon's personal diplomacy. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, "[Mrs. Nixon's] friendliness seemed to captivate the Russians" ("Pat in Moscow: A Busy Week," 19). *Newsweek* reported:

> Three months ago she charmed them in Peking with her unfailing cheerfulness and tact. And last week in Moscow, Pat Nixon turned in another virtuoso performance as a goodwill ambassador extraordinaire, handling the people-to-people aspects of the Moscow summit trip with aplomb.... As a former schoolteacher herself, Mrs. Nixon seemed happiest while visiting children's ballet classes and Soviet classrooms. ("Ladies Day in Moscow," 31)

Washington Post reporter Robert G. Kaiser cited unprecedented media coverage to the summit by the Soviet media:

> Thirteen minutes of the 15-minute main news program was devoted to the Nixons' visit.... Such elaborate coverage is extremely unusual here, and it contradicts predictions by Soviet journalists who said that no big fuss would be made over the visit. On the contrary the Nixons have been given the sort of attention that is reserved for extraordinary events.... The impact of all this on ordinary Russians cannot be described with certainty. But there is no doubt that they will get the message that this visit is regarded as an extremely important event. (1972, A12)

Of Mrs. Nixon's impact specifically Kaiser wrote:

> Pictures of a smiling Mrs. Nixon at a Moscow school and in the city's subway system put the First Lady in a sympathetic light for Soviet citizens. Her neatly-coiffed good looks are a far cry from the hook-nosed snarling Uncle Sam who often represents America in Soviet cartoons. (1972, A12)

In mid-1973 Soviet officials, in the spirit of détente, reversed an earlier decision with the surprise announcement that the children's cast of the Bolshoi Ballet, with whom Mrs. Nixon had visited the previous spring, would be permitted to accept the invitation to perform in the United States for the first time. The *New York Times* reported that Mrs. Nixon had invited the entire membership of the ballet, young and old, to a reception at the White House when the tour came to Washington.

Preparations for the August event focused on the children. Fruit punch and an array of sweets adorned the buffet in the State Dining Room. The Marine Band played and the White House seemed unusually festive. But the arrival of the ballerinas signaled a change in mood. Huddled together, the young members of the troupe appeared apprehensive and skeptical. One of the chaperones whispered to a member of Mrs. Nixon's staff that a newspaper's unfavorable review of the previous evening's performance had been shared with the girls.[7] They had taken it personally and doubted whether their American hosts really wanted to be friends after all.

A receiving line was quietly formed, and invitations to eat and tour the house were extended. But as the children shook hands with the first lady their manner was dutiful and their expressions wooden. The reception looked to be a

disaster. As one child extended her hand to greet the first lady, the interpreter standing beside her remarked, "Today is Zuhra's birthday." Mrs. Nixon brightened. Grasping the child's hand with both of her own and smiling at the young ballerina, she asked the interpreter "How old?" Before the interpreter could put the question to Zuhra, Mrs. Nixon had released the child's hand and ventured a guess as to her age, using her fingers. Zuhra responded almost immediately, holding up all ten fingers, and then raising a hand again to show one finger alone. As everyone in attendance watched, Mrs. Nixon reflected the gestured "eleven" response and then, in an almost seamless movement enfolded Zuhra in her arms. Zuhra clung to the first lady. Personal diplomacy had found expression in a birthday embrace for a child 5,000 miles from home.

But that was only the beginning. Ballerinas who had proceeded through the line abruptly turned and ran back to Mrs. Nixon, intent on "equal time." Chaperones tried in vain to restore the orderly procession of little girls, but they held tight to Mrs. Nixon who, laughing, made no move to stop the children. The reception became a birthday party, no one wishing to leave. The personification of an American mother, the first lady in fact, accompanied by the symbolic potency of a universal gesture, otherwise known as a hug. Détente, from that vantage on an August afternoon, seemed destined to succeed.[8]

Legacy

As the subject of rhetorical analysis, the wife of the thirty-seventh president is easily overlooked. She never sought the limelight; occasions at the podium were rare. To deflect attention she engaged in brevity, but her responses were purposeful and according to members of the media assigned to cover her, successful in the way she was able to connect with her audience for more than three decades in the public spotlight. Once asked to identify her favorite cause, the one with which she would endow the prestige and influence of her position, Patricia Ryan Nixon replied simply: "People are my project" (Eisenhower 1986, 267). Dean of the White House Press Corps and UPI reporter, Helen Thomas declared: "She was the warmest First Lady I covered and the one who loved people most" (Thomas 1975, 165).

The record of accomplishment set by Mrs. Nixon as first lady (1969–1974) is impressive. It includes restoration of White House antiquity, providing inspiration for illuminating federal buildings and monuments of the nation's capital, becoming history's most traveled first lady as an official guest of eighty-three countries, and the first to enter a designated combat zone on foreign soil. She was repeatedly honored by service organizations for revitalizing a spirit of volunteerism nationwide. Between 1959 and 1979, she climbed fourteen times to the heights of the Gallup "Most Admired Women" survey (Watson 2000, 179). And when she died in June 1993, friends and columnists paid tribute to her qualities of character and communicative behavior. Suzanne Fields recalled her "person-to-person attentiveness, her personal touch" (Fields 1993, E1). Ellen Goodman attributed to her a "steadfast" quality and stoicism: "Pat Nixon formed

our classic image of the political wife. She was the woman who campaigned once with three broken ribs and another time with a swollen ankle. And she never mentioned it" (Goodman 1993, 33). Chris Matthews eulogized: "Through it all, the great power of Pat Nixon was the simple nerve" (Matthews 1993, F3). But because Mrs. Nixon was by nature reluctant to make herself the subject of conversation, Goodman began her memorial column: "We never knew her. Not really" (Goodman, 1993, A-11).

Ellen Goodman's statement prompts a question: Was Mrs. Nixon's approach, which entailed the preservation of a measure of personal privacy, worth what it cost her image? Though additional factors are attributed to the perception of Mrs. Nixon as remote, biographers, including Eisenhower, Thomas, Caroli, and Anthony all acknowledge to some degree in their biographies the truth of Margaret Truman's assessment that "Pat Nixon is the First Lady nobody knew" (Truman 1995, 188). Gutin goes so far as to suggest that Pat Nixon shirked her responsibility as first lady: "Pat Nixon never impressed her image on the consciousness of Americans. The consummate traditional political wife, she was a nondescript cypher, a woman who preferred to be neutral rather than committed. She was a woman who understood the enormous potential of her position and yet generally rejected it" (Gutin 1989, 61)

This is a difficult assertion to substantiate when applied to specific situations. Guests at the White House, treated to Mrs. Nixon's low-key, personalized approach, did not leave feeling shortchanged. Media access to these events, with rare exceptions, was not limited. Interestingly, however, it was a style so characteristic and expected of Mrs. Nixon that it was taken for granted and not often considered newsworthy.[9] If the ability to "make news" is the primary gauge of one's speaking style, Gutin may have a point. But relying exclusively on such a measure may cause critics to miss the wisdom of a strategy that reaches beyond conventional structural boundaries of a political and rhetorical situation to become uncommonly effective.

As a study of ethos, this essay has focused on two of the three qualities ascribed by Aristotle: character and goodwill. The third component, knowledge or expertise, is every bit as critical. In Mrs. Nixon's case, experience had given her a heightened understanding of people from varied backgrounds and nationalities. In her role as first lady, she put her knowledge to use. Though Caroli suggests that Mrs. Nixon's emphasis on domestic matters was excessive, the fact that fifteen years later Barbara Bush extolled Pat Nixon's style as one to emulate suggests recognition of qualities both endearing and enduring (Weinraub 1989, A20). What is meaningful for this study is that her conduct was grounded in her field of expertise, reflected her probity, and demonstrated her benevolence. It "revealed her character" and enhanced her credibility both nationally and internationally. It was not uniformly understood or appreciated, although somewhere in Russia a former ballerina (and now her children) probably recalls, with a certain fondness, the lady who embraced her on her birthday.

Personal diplomacy was a sophisticated rhetorical strategy, but there is nothing about Mrs. Nixon's demeanor to indicate that it was calculated. She appears to have possessed a capacity, if not instinctive, then impeccably disci-

plined to respond to heartfelt need. It is fair to say that by adulthood this is who Pat Nixon was as a human being. She did acknowledge in at least one interview: "I'm a perfectionist. I won't do a thing without trying to do it well" (Meyers 1960, 24).

She never aspired to the role of first lady, or a life in politics. Within the framework of public service she sought—and found—those who needed her. The inherent motivation that Kenneth Burke locates in human action is at least implied in Meyers' account of a rare, unguarded moment:

> Recently a young friend asked about the rigors of public life. Pat's eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I've given up everything I ever loved," she blurted, and looked out the window until composure returned. Then she continued: "The people who lose out are the children. Any of the glamour or reward in it comes to the grownups. It's the children who really suffer." (Meyers 1960, 25)

Patricia Nixon adhered rigidly and dutifully to protocol, traditionally understood and personally endorsed. But there were key moments in her career, a few described in this essay, when compassion overruled her strict sense of duty. Her impulsive departure from the decorum of the moment may have been persuasive in part because she so assiduously maintained strict decorum so much of the time.

Attention to the significance of balance may be what a study of Mrs. Nixon's self-styled personal diplomacy most strongly suggests. Her penchant for privacy has been noted. In her rhetorical demeanor, it extended beyond a sense of personal decorum to set a tone of conduct that appears to have satisfied a public need. Pat Nixon's image provided an equilibrium and fortitude when compared with that of her spouse in the era they shared. Edwin Black has written of the former president: "Experienced and skillful as he was a rhetor, he was never quite able to sequester his private life in the way that other public figures routinely do, or at least did prior to Nixon's presidency" (Black 1999, 1). Pat was, however, enabled or compelled by the events of Nixon's turbulent career to master the skill. Black notes that Richard Nixon himself recalled in two separate autobiographies the devastating effect that exposing personal and family financial details as part of the Checkers Speech defense in the 1952 presidential campaign had on Pat. Black keenly observes:

> Hannah [Nixon's mother] and Pat embodied privacy for Nixon, but they were not alone in their sensitivity to the pain of his disclosure. Anyone with a reverence for the privacy of family matters and a commitment to the pieties of the public-private allocation may have regarded Nixon's financial divulgence as an act of voluntary mortification, a brave and painful conquest of inhibition in the service of a higher candor. For an audience imbued with the values of privacy, the Checkers speech was a trial by embarrassment through which Nixon triumphantly passed before their very eyes. (Black 1999, 12)

Pat Nixon appeared to complete her husband's triumph. Her embodiment of the value of privacy with which many Americans identified certainly contributed to the pathos of the Nixons' financial disclosure episode in 1952. Her stoic dig-

nity became an undeviating stance in times of crisis. Emotion overcame her only once, at Nixon's concession in Los Angeles the morning following the 1960 presidential election. Print and broadcast journalists conspicuously included mention of her stoic demeanor in reporting events of Nixon's political career. It signaled such a distinct contrast to her warmth and effusiveness that it served as a cue. Viewers observed the same resolute expression of the Checkers Speech broadcast in the gaze she maintained during her husband's resignation as he bid his staff farewell on August 9, 1974. It had become a demeanor on which the public could rely; its persuasive value may have been derived from its consistent maintenance.[10]

This demeanor continued to reflect Pat Nixon even after she left the White House. It was a period marked by silence. Prior to the debilitating stroke in 1976, she neither wrote nor commissioned a personal memoir. Her daughter Julie published the most comprehensive biography, but key staff members whose admiration for her was profound appear to have followed Mrs. Nixon's lead and are thus far content to let events of her life speak for themselves. Yet events encompass and contain facts. David Zarefsky (1998, 20) reminds those who would "do" rhetorical history, "Facts cannot speak for themselves; they must be spoken for."[11] A fuller understanding and appreciation of Mrs. Nixon's persuasive capacities will depend on the willingness of those who knew her well to share their recollections. Insufficient source material for comprehensive appraisal hinders any opportunity to appreciate forgotten virtues.

Civic virtue is persuasive, so long as it is perceived as genuine. But even in that event, it may be taken for granted and go unnoticed. Its short-term effect is apt to be confined to the context in which it occurs. If one's behavior as part of a rhetorical strategy needs to attract a certain attention, it is an inappropriate demeanor. If perceived as feigned, any appearance of integrity will likely prove counterproductive.

In the long term, however, the exemplification of civic virtue still has the capacity to ennoble a culture and its people, provided the virtues themselves continue to be valued and recorded as such. "The eyes of the beholder" or the identification that may occur between critic and subject will influence who emerges as heroic according to timeless and timely criteria. Socrates' dignity still inspires, but so too does Quintilian for preserving Socrates as he does: "he preferred that what remained of his life should be lost rather than that portion of it which was past. . . . he committed himself to the judgment of posterity [by] conduct honorable to his character as a man" (Watson 1856, Bk. II, ch. 11, p. 1). The persuasive effect of conduct may likewise depend on "the judgment of posterity." More than we realize may hinge on Zarefsky's "fourth sense" or as someone close to Patricia Nixon once said: "who writes the history" (Hobgood 1974e).

Notes

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1. From Plato's Gorgias (Bennett 1993, 98–99).

2. Even before the Nixons moved into the White House, security had required the parking of buses, bumper to bumper, so as to surround the White House grounds to protect the first family from the more violent demonstrators.

3. The term "fungible narrative" was, to my knowledge, first provided by Craig Allen Smith in his text *Political Communication* (1990, 94–95). It refers to the fact that what we do not know "about human motives, problems, relationships, and their resolutions," we infer from entertainment, from dramas we've seen. In other words, what we have no way of knowing about Pat Nixon, we "absorb" (hence, fungible), much as a sponge absorbs moisture, from such sources as Oliver Stone's film *Nixon* or reruns of *Saturday Night Live*. Eventually, what we know to be true and what we have inferred from entertainment sources become blurred—too blurred to make distinctions.

4. Professor Kathleen Turner, who served as panel respondent at the SSCA Conference in Lexington, Kentucky, April 2001, described her own reaction watching Pat Nixon during the Checkers Speech. Members of the panel audience nodded a unanimous agreement as she was apparently voicing their own impressions of the actual or taped broadcast.

5. Epitaph on cemetery monument at Mrs. Nixon's grave.

6. Though Lady Bird Johnson delivered 164 speeches during her husband's presidency, Betty Caroli writes: "Unlike Eleanor Roosevelt, Lady Bird did not thrive on the controversies inherent in politics, and she disapproved of First Ladies who involved themselves in issues that might divide the country" (1987, 237, 241). That Johnson's position was more the expected norm for first ladies by the public audience of her era is implied.

7. The review actually praised the children's ballet performance, but found the adults' performance less than impressive (Lewis 1973, D3).

8. The reception was hardly noted by the media. The best account is Tom Shales (1973, D1, D3).

9. On one occasion in particular during the summer of 1974 when this author was especially moved by Mrs. Nixon's gesture of kindness to a visitor, her press secretary Helen McCain Smith rejected apologies for display of emotion saying, "No, it's good to be reminded of Mrs. Nixon's rare qualities. We see them so frequently, we can become too accustomed to her unique way with people."

10. It failed her only once as has been noted, during Richard Nixon's November 9, 1960, concession speech at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, shortly after midnight following his presidential election defeat. She learned from the experience. On the final day of Nixon's presidency, his family was unaware until they arrived on the main floor of the White House, that there was to be media coverage of the staff farewell. Pat Nixon acknowledged almost no staff members who were assembled in the East Room of the White House. When her husband finished speaking, the family proceeded to the South Lawn for departure. Afterward, she placed a call to Helen Smith. In her determination to retain composure, she had failed to say good-bye.

11. Similar commentary by Richard Weaver is: "The supposition that facts will speak for themselves is of course another abdication of the intellect" (1948, 58).

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