The Vice Presidency of Richard M. Nixon:

One Man's Quest for National Respect, an International Reputation, and the Presidency

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents Josh and Betty, my wife Amy and my son Alexander. My parents gave me the skills, knowledge and confidence to approach this project and any others that cross my path. Amy gives me a reason to succeed. Alexander makes almost everything and everyone else, no matter how important, unimportant. You all give clarity to life.
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Abstract

Richard M. Nixon served as Vice President under Dwight Eisenhower from 1953 to 1961. During this time, he worked to portray himself to the public as an international affairs expert and integral advisor within the Administration. Drawing on experiences as a Congressman and his close relationship with John Foster Dulles, Nixon made every effort to gain a meaningful advisory and decision-making role. His actual success was limited. The Vice President was motivated by his love of international affairs, desire for respect and vision of his position as a possible jump off point to the presidency in 1960. This last goal proved his most enduring accomplishment. Nixon improved public awareness of the vice presidency and added political overtones to the office that previously had not been evident.
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Introduction:
Nixon - Vice President Unexplored

Richard M. Nixon is remembered by most people for his presidency: Watergate, Vietnam, Kissinger and his resignation. His eight years as Vice President to Dwight Eisenhower rarely come to mind. The 1950s are less well remembered by people than the sensational events from 1968 to 1974. Pick up a book about Nixon and chances are good it will dramatize Nixon's downfall and ignore the rest of his life.

Our perception of the thirty-seventh President is reinforced by most Nixon historians, who concentrate on his presidential terms also. When they look at the earlier period, they typically emphasize elements that foreshadow Nixon's later problems. Although the vice presidential tenure in office was far less spectacular than Nixon's later incarnation, it nonetheless can stand on its own. In 1953, Nixon certainly was not preparing for the calamitous events of Watergate.

Scholars largely ignore Vice President Nixon because his importance in the Eisenhower Administration has always been in doubt. They ask did Nixon do anything significant as Vice President and did he make an impact on the decisions? Historian Stephen Ambrose concludes "As Vice-President, Nixon had no important influence on policy decisions. Nor could he, nor can any Vice-President."¹ In fact, Nixon's influence in the Administration has never been fully examined. And, more importantly, the amount of
influence Nixon gained is less interesting than the amount that he attempted to exert on policy decisions. Although his actual success was limited, Richard Nixon made every attempt to build a reputation inside and outside the Eisenhower Administration as an integral, knowledgeable and admirable member of the government. His efforts transformed the Vice President from the constitutionally mandated second in command, to the publicly acknowledged presidential successor. Before Nixon, the vice presidency was a political dead end. By 1960, he had turned it into a launching point. Concurrently, he sought to gain an influence on policy decisions. Nixon expanded the vice presidential role as he pursued his particular ambitions.

As Vice President, Richard Nixon worked toward three goals. First, he hoped to pursue his interest in foreign relations. He genuinely enjoyed the field. Second, whenever possible, he exploited his growing international relations experience to increase his influence on Administration decisions and/or give him more sway when he presented his advice. Finally, he demonstrated his foreign policy expertise and reputation to the populace as a qualification for succeeding to the presidency in 1960. These goals were completely intertwined, and thus pursued by Nixon simultaneously. Sometimes one might be better served than the others, but always Nixon pursued them all. The Vice President pressed for roles that would give him a significant place within the Administration, thus presenting his leadership abilities to the widest possible audience.

But, he found the vice presidency did not bring with it a great deal of autonomy. Often unable to follow his own inclinations, two men generally determined his roles, Dwight
D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles. Each had a different agenda for Nixon.

While the Vice President looked to his own interests, these two set Nixon to tasks of their choosing. Eisenhower saw Nixon only as a political advisor and presidential aspirant. He used Nixon primarily as a congressional liaison, frequently putting Nixon in charge of recruiting votes in Congress for support of Administration legislation. But, Ike held Nixon’s political aspirations in low regard and therefore did little to help the Vice President in that area. Ironically, while Nixon preferred international exposure, his grassroots campaigning and constant congressional activities had benefits when he finally ran for the presidency.

Dulles’ assignments fell somewhere in between those coveted by Nixon and those mandated by Eisenhower. He wanted to help Nixon realize his objectives, but recognized the limits Ike imposed. Like the President, Dulles took advantage of Nixon’s congressional skills. Foster Dulles, however, appreciated Nixon’s international relations abilities. He allowed the Vice President to advise him on most foreign topics and used Nixon as a surrogate Secretary of State. Nixon delighted in both of these roles.

This dissertation analyzes Nixon’s progression from Representative in the House to presidential candidate in 1960. It begins in the late 1940s with his earliest foreign relations experience. Nixon developed an insatiable interest for international affairs as a Congressman appointed to the Herter Committee. The committee existed to assess the economic aid needs of Europe after the Second World War. Out of this episode, Nixon confirmed and formulated much of the international relations perspective on which he later based his expertise. The Herter Committee acted as a catalyst for Nixon, propelling him toward foreign relations,
which in turn led to his presidential bid. He enjoyed this assignment and also discovered foreign affairs enhanced his résumé.

Nixon's experiences in Congress brought him into contact with John Foster Dulles, a top Republican foreign affairs consultant. From the beginning of their relationship, Nixon viewed Dulles as a powerful ally. In time, they became friends. The friendship and consultation they shared gave Nixon a critical link to the inner circle of presidential advisors in the Administration. It was thanks in large part to Dulles' appreciation of the Vice President that Nixon had any foreign relations role at all. Dulles acted as a patron to Nixon, helping him gain experience and build his reputation.

The Vice President, however, sought ways to improve his position in the Administration beyond Dulles' help. Nixon needed to display some independence from the Administration, if he were to avoid the fate of most previous vice presidents, unknown and unelectable. He used every opportunity to influence decisions, or at minimum, create the appearance that he did.

Despite his efforts, and those of Dulles, Nixon faced an incredible impediment because of Eisenhower. The President did not see him as a foreign relations expert and failed to consider seriously Nixon's advice. To Ike, the Vice President was a political advisor at most, and usually just an attack dog to be set on the Democrats. While Nixon performed both roles well, he preferred the more glamorous foreign relations work. Eisenhower's resistance to any expanded role for Nixon greatly reduced Nixon's ability to achieve his goals.

Stanley Kutler points out "that after 1946, Richard Nixon was a public man. His
history thereafter is a matter of record, and consists of conscious and unconscious deeds, as well as both calculated and accidental incidents, that together form a complex mosaic of explanation of the man and his actions." It is therefore appropriate to begin where the public record starts.
ENDNOTES:


Chapter 1: 
Beginning a Career - The Herter Committee

In 1946 Richard Nixon's foreign relations experience consisted only of his overseas assignment during World War II. As he prepared to return to his native California that year, Lieutenant Nixon received an offer to run for the House of Representatives on the Republican ticket. He agreed and managed to unseat the five term incumbent of the twelfth district, Jerry Voorhis. In January 1947, Nixon joined the 80th Congress and began his steady rise within the party ranks. His ascent was helped by superb timing. His party gained 56 seats in the House and 13 in the Senate making, for the first time in fifteen years, a Republican controlled Congress. With the newly regained strength came an ability to place Republicans on committees of their choice. Nixon wrangled a pair of coveted committee seats and an opportunity to adopt foreign policy as a career cornerstone.

Representative Nixon asked to be assigned to the Education and Labor Committee and the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). He received both posts thanks to the help of an influential supporter. To his credit, he distinguished himself on both committees through exceptionally hard work. On the first, he helped convince constituents and Congressmen to support the Taft-Hartley bill. As a member of HUAC, he effectively questioned witnesses who came before the committee, with his most famous prosecution being the Alger Hiss case in 1948. But, during his first year in Congress Nixon had already made a
name for himself.  

From the start, Nixon had connections enough to warrant the attention of Speaker of the House, Joseph Martin. At the end of July, Martin appointed the freshman Congressman to the Foreign Aid Committee, better known as the Herter Committee. The committee borrowed its name from its chairman, Christian Herter. Their task was to ascertain the necessity of the huge economic aid package for Europe, that eventually became known as the Marshall Plan. The Committee would sail to Europe and make a first hand assessment of the situation. Members were divided into subcommittees, each responsible for an in-depth investigation of a specific region.

Nixon attributed his inclusion on the roster to Martin's search for a geographically balanced membership. Thanking fellow freshman Congressman Charles Kersten for a congratulatory wire, Nixon wrote "I think one of the reasons I might have been picked was that I happen to be the only Westerner who was selected and from the news stories, it appears that they wanted a cross-section of the whole country. In any event, as you of course know I am very pleased at the opportunity to go. . . ." While Nixon's assessment had veracity, Martin also chose him because of the Californian's willingness to exert himself for whatever cause he supported. One of those causes was the Marshall Plan.

Once aware of his appointment, Nixon set out to educate himself. He sought as much information as possible on areas he expected to visit. This became a standard operating procedure for Nixon when preparing for foreign trips. His search for every scrap of paper and bit of advice never diminished, although his sources for information expanded when he attained higher office. In this case, because he was assigned to the Italy-Greece-Trieste
subcommittee, he directed research toward those Mediterranean zones.  

Before Nixon began his own search for information, he received offers of help in the mail. The first assistance came from John Phillips, another Republican Representative from California (22nd district). Phillips wrote Nixon on Friday, August 1, to recommend Dr. Frank B. Gilgiotti as an expert on Italy. The following Monday, Nixon responded "I know very little about the Italian situation and a little briefing in advance should be most helpful." He planned to consult with Dr. Gilgiotti and added this was especially important because of his sub-committee assignment.  

Although he knew the committee would be briefed by government experts, he searched outside the standard sources for any additional information. 

Along with official documents provided by Herter, Nixon accepted help from a private group called the America Friends Service Committee. Founded by the Quakers in 1917, the AFSC was committed to humanitarian services. The Herter Committee purported to embrace similar ideals. On August 2 James Reed, the Secretary of the Foreign Service Section of the AFSC, offered a list of the organization's representatives in Europe. Nixon expressed an interest in the list and had a copy of it within a week. Reed mentioned that Christian Herter was the only other committee member with a copy of the list. Whether Nixon's peers declined the offered names or were not given that option is unclear. In any case, they did not directly receive help from this source. Quite probably, Reed knew of Nixon's Quaker background and selected him as an appropriate recipient of the information. While Herter could have shared his copy with other committee members, Nixon gave no indication he did. The limited circulation of these names probably appealed to Nixon because of his expediency and ego. He saw the contacts as an opportunity to establish an overseas network. Even this
early in his career, Nixon attached importance to increasing his associations. The more people who he knew, the more people who knew him, the greater his name recognition and resources.

Nixon's desire to expand his knowledge of European affairs was revealed as he responded to a letter from a constituent, John J. Garland. To Garland he explained that the Herter Committee needed to maintain an "independent attitude in considering the needs of Europe and our ability to satisfy those needs." The Executive branch held too much foreign relations power. "The Congress has more or less had to go along because we haven't had access to the facts. The Foreign Aid Committee [a.k.a. Herter Committee], in my opinion, has a great responsibility to reverse this trend..." Nixon worked hard to learn those facts when in Europe. He did so for the party - his comment about Executive dominance in foreign policy was a not so subtle criticism of the Truman and Roosevelt Administrations - and for his own benefit. There was a bright future to be made in foreign relations if he could establish himself in the field.

These examples are probably the first illustrations of Nixon's continued search for contacts abroad. His preparation was an adaptation of a practice he had utilized on both of his domestic committee assignments. Nixon consistently sought to expand his own knowledge to better deal with every possible situation. To that end, he increased his circle of associates to enlarge the resources from which he could collect information. Nixon's interest in foreign relations blossomed during this trip to Europe. His experiences helped cement his perception of the world and determine the course of his political career.

On August 26, the entire Committee met in New York City for a pre-departure
briefing. Charles "Chip" Bohlen led the presentation. The State Department's foremost expert on Russia, Bohlen had been in foreign affairs for twenty years. Fluent in Russian, he served as Roosevelt's translator at Yalta. Now he discussed the latest developments in Europe. Lewis Brown, a business man who had just returned from Europe, followed with a second briefing. The next day the Committee boarded the Queen Mary and sailed from New York Harbor, destination England. Upon reaching Europe, the Congressmen spent nearly a month inspecting and assessing. They traveled sometimes as a group, but more often in their subcommittees. All of the Committee members were affected by the war torn landscape of Europe. Despite the later perception of Nixon as unfeeling, the Congressman from California was no exception.

Nixon spent his life taking prodigious notes. This first non-military trip abroad was no exception. But, unlike any of his subsequent trips, on this early visit to Europe, Nixon also wrote a 37 page personal journal recounting his experiences. It was, he noted a decade later, "not made public and it was not used officially. These are my own recollections -- dictated from notes I had jotted down on the trip at the end of each day." This document provides a close and rare portrait of Nixon's mentality and perspectives. Unlike so many of his later reports, Nixon wrote this without the input of aides either in drafting or revising. It was for himself, not for publicity or partisanship. As such, it is particularly revealing about his early lessons in foreign relations.

Nixon's unofficial log documents his trip from England to the continent and then to his subcommittee's assigned region. The paper reveals some basic foreign affairs principles and tactics that Nixon developed during his trip. It also illustrates some character traits that
would later determine his reactions on the international tours he made during Eisenhower's Administration (and his own).

The *Queen Mary* docked in Southampton. From there, the Herter Committee members boarded a train to London. Once in London the group met with various members of the British government.\(^\text{12}\) Among them, Nixon seemed most impressed with Stafford Cripps, the top economic advisor for the Labor Government. Although he was generally opposed to the policies of Labor, Nixon mentioned two character traits displayed by Cripps that he admired and attempted to emulate.

First, Nixon commented that during an hour of questioning from Committee members Cripps responded without relying on notes or "his corps of advisors." By the time he was Vice President, Nixon had made speaking without notes - either off the cuff or from memory - a hallmark. Ignoring the advice of advisors came naturally to Nixon. As Nixon's positions in the government increased in power, it became easier for him to pick and choose whose advice he considered. The difference was one of political position. When Nixon was a Congressman he listened to most offered opinions, regardless of where they originated. As Vice President he followed the suggestions of Administration experts and his superiors, and less so those of his subordinates or constituents. Cripps' ability to rely only on his own knowledge appealed to Nixon because it showed his independence and authority. Nixon admitted this admiration for Cripps' style and the example probably affirmed his own preferences.

Even more telling was Nixon's praise for the practical and tough stance Cripps expressed for dealing with England's economic woes. The Englishman informed the