1974


Millard Fayne Eiland

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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JOURNALISTIC CRITICISM OF RICHARD NIXON'S
WATERGATE SPEAKING OF 1973

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech

by

Millard Fayne Eiland
B.A., Baylor University, 1955
B.D., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959
Th.M., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1961
M.A., University of Houston, 1968
December, 1974
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ABSTRACT

During the early days of Watergate, Richard Nixon responded to the crisis in public speechmaking which received widespread attention. American journalists reacted to those speech events, exposing Americans to an unusual number of critical assessments. The reactions to the first four 1973 Watergate speeches (on April 30, August 15 and 20, and the August 22 news conference) formed the bases for this study: an analysis and evaluation of 691 responses in America's print media in the "top ten" and six other newspapers and in twelve magazines.

Criticisms appeared in editions also printing the speech texts; they appeared before and after the speeches. Responses were so numerous and prominent that they became almost parts of the messages themselves—a kind of mosaic of summaries, expectations, and reactions.

Responses were uneven in quality and appeared in media not noted for their perceptiveness of oral communication as a distinct form of communication. Respondents revealed no particular understanding of rhetorical criticism tradition, and epitomized the types or levels described in Speech Criticism, by Thonssen, Baird, and
Braden: impressionistic, analytic, synthetic, and judicial. These were both a justification for interest in the writings and a means of discussing them.

The categories provided chapter headings for the discussion and pointed up the varying emphases and degrees of sophistication, the types and levels of criticism. Within each chapter the responses also were discussed in terms of the classical canons of rhetoric to determine the emphases and bases of criticism in each case.

The writer found that the critiques resulted in a "group effort" effect as each writer contributed to a composite picture of evaluation to which readers were exposed. Also, some reporters wrote brief remarks at one point, while later writing more developed responses.

Most of the criticisms were relatively fair and accurate. No deliberate distortions or misquotations were found, although nearly two-thirds were unfavorable to Nixon's rhetoric. Some oversimplified or wrote in the peculiarly disorganized journalistic fashion, while some were brilliant assessments. All focused attention on the speeches and the issues.

Most focused on ideas and arguments and used references to style, organization, and delivery to support assertions about Nixon's ideas and arguments. Poll reports and other articles tended to be fragmentary and truncated, while columns and editorials did
most of the genuine evaluation.

Considering the limitations of the medium and the journalists' purposes, the reactions to Nixon's rhetoric provided the public with a composite picture of what the President said and sufficient bases for their own assessments. The responses employed a critical method even though they were not fully developed criticisms. They were most successful in focusing attention on the rhetorical events and in helping readers to conceive of these events as rhetorical acts in a matrix of complicated circumstances and feelings—acts which are subject to evaluation.

In spite of publishing deadlines, editorial policy limitations, and variations in allegiances and intelligence levels among the readers, reporters did a commendable job of writing. Nevertheless, a sense of the tentative was a characteristic and a restraint which seemed to emanate from respect for the presidency and an awareness of the magnitude of the issues.

The study points up the amateur nature of the criticisms. But the existence of such a large body of rhetorical analyses points out the importance public speaking still has in this nation, and suggests there is need to study and to improve such critiques. The study illustrates how vital it is in a self-governing society for the public utterances of its leaders to be subjected to creative, fair, and informed speech criticism.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During that extraordinary series of events of 1972-1974 called "Watergate," the nation experienced the spectacle of an embattled, embittered President seeking to respond to damaging disclosures through the medium of speech communication. The public utterances of the President, Richard M. Nixon, were a dominant presence in the mass media as the Watergate crisis unfolded.

Those were desperate hours for the President and for the nation. As one columnist concluded:

The gravest question ever raised concerning the personal integrity of an American President, the question of his personal involvement in a conspiracy to obstruct justice and in related crimes, casts a dark shadow across his path. Until that question is resolved one way or the other, he can hardly function as President. There can be no effective Presidential leadership when the majority of the people suspect the President may be guilty of felonies.¹

At the same time the President was seeking to restore his credibility, the mass media were exposing the public to an unusual amount of criticism of the President's rhetoric. Important as was the

critical response on television, even more extensive was the criticism of the President's Watergate rhetoric in the printed media. Those reactions to the speaking, not the speeches themselves, are the subjects of this study.

Preview of this Chapter

This chapter includes the following sections: "Purposes of the Study," "Scope of the Study" (including the speech events and the time period involved), "Materials Used" (including a list of the sources used and a statement of criteria for selection of the responses), "Contributory Studies," "Rationale," and a final section of "Conclusion and Preview."

Purposes of the Study

The writer undertook this study with several assumptions. First, oral discourse is a distinct and vital medium of communication. Second, not only what is said through that medium is important, but so are the "discriminating, insightful observations" of that rhetoric, as Barnet Baskerville pointed out.²

The purposes of this study are to analyze and evaluate the kinds of responses journalists made to Nixon's rhetoric in an effort to understand and appreciate the nature of those responses. The writer sought to shed light on the nature of rhetorical criticism

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by examining a large body of responses appearing in the mass print media, to extend our knowledge of these responses to speeches read by millions of Americans, and thereby be of value to those who seek to write rhetorical criticism and to those who seek to teach the art of rhetorical criticism.

Scope of the Study

Speech Events Studied

The study focuses on critical responses to the first four examples of President Nixon's Watergate speaking. Those were selected primarily because each was a "first." Included were responses to the first speech Nixon delivered after the Watergate affair became public knowledge (the April 30 speech), the first speech Nixon delivered after the Watergate hearings began (the August 15 speech), the first speech in this period which he delivered to a live audience (the August 20 address), and the first press conference during the period (the August 22 news conference).

The selected speech events were important for a number of reasons. The following statements about each indicate in more detail why responses to them were included in the study.

The April 30, 1973, speech of the President was chosen because this was the first public speech by President Nixon regarding the Watergate affair. This address broke the long silence during the disclosures of the illegal Watergate burglary and the burglarizing of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. The speech was
important also because millions of American heard and saw it on national television and radio.

President Nixon's August 15, 1973, address, also, a long-awaited speech, was important because it was the first public speech by the President after the confidentiality issue over the presidential tapes and documents had developed, after damaging disclosures continued without presidential response, and after Vice President Agnew had come under investigation. This was the first public address after the unsuccessful April 30 effort. The August 15 address also was on national radio and television.

The August 20, 1973, address was planned for a friendly audience in an effort to divert the nation's attention from Watergate and to build up the President's sagging image. This speech was the first before a live audience in seven weeks and the only one before such an audience in this early period. The address was important also because, although it was not supposed to be related to Watergate, events surrounding the speech made it a vital part of the pattern of presidential Watergate utterances and critical response to those communications. This speech event shed light on the state of Nixon's mind and the state of the critics' responses to his condition. Lastly, the August 20 speech was important because it seemed to lead to the unexpected calling of the press conference two days later.

The August 22 press conference is included because it also created considerable reaction in the printed media studied. It
was the President's first press conference since Watergate had developed, and the nation was anxious to have this kind of opportunity to get at the truth of the affair. Although reporters were not specifically primed since the conference was called quite unexpectedly, they were ready with more than enough questions. This speech event also was watched over national television.

The Period From Which Responses Came

The writer examined the criticism in selected news and opinion publications for the period April 20-May 15, and August 1-September 4, 1973. These dates represent coverage just before and just after the speaking events. An unusually large amount of critical writing appeared in the press during those periods. On September 5 another press conference not included in the study occurred. Therefore, the cut-off date for newspaper responses included was September 4, 1973. However, in some cases, if a critical response was found in the early September issues which was directed principally to one of the events in the study, that criticism was included even if it occurred a few days after the cut-off date.

Criticism in the magazines was selected on a different basis. Since none of these was daily, appropriate materials which appeared in any issue from April through September, 1973, were used.
**Materials Used**

**Criteria for Selection of Responses**

Written critical responses were selected for examination when they contained criticism of the speech and/or the speaking of the President on the occasions listed. Entries were chosen if they applied a rhetorical theory to these speech events or suggested what the critic expected or hoped for before the speech event.

The sources contained much related commentary. Many reflected on the Watergate crisis, the President, and his relation to the crisis, but these articles were not included unless they contained specific material on the President's character, plans, or acts in relation to his Watergate rhetoric. The distinction sometimes was not easy to make, for much material related to the President's character. These observations have not been included unless they dealt specifically with the President's speaking.

**Sources**

The following newspaper sources were studied. First was *The Houston Chronicle* because of its availability while the study was being written in Houston. Second, the following newspapers were examined because they were listed by *The New York Times* as the ten best in the United States.

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The following have been studied in order to expand and make more representative the selection:

The Times-Picayune (New Orleans)
The Shreveport Times
San Francisco Examiner
The Atlanta Constitution

The New Orleans and Shreveport papers were used also because the August 20 speech was in New Orleans.

The following newspaper was examined because it is a "Black" newspaper appealing primarily to Black readers. Inclusion of this source helped balance the selection of critical responses:

The Call (Kansas City)

Two other newspapers were examined to see if specialized papers dealt with the Nixon rhetoric. Although examined, they contained no critical responses to the President's speaking. The two are:

Women's Wear Daily
The Village Voice

The following magazines have been examined:

The Nation
Jet
Contributory Studies

In the introduction to Volume 14 of the venerable Modern Eloquence, C. C. Colton is quoted as having said:

Oratory is the huffing and blustering spoiled child of a semi-barbarous age. The press is the foe of rhetoric, but the friend of reason; and the act of declamation has been sinking in value from the moment that speakers were foolish enough to publish and readers wise enough to read.⁴

That statement, an interesting and an early endorsement of the value of rhetorical criticism, points up the vulnerability of the speaker's material to criticism, and the very nature of rhetoric itself. "Rhetoric," according to Donald C. Bryant, "is the foundation of a productive art whose artifacts are formed in a matrix of words."⁵ And that "matrix of words" invites rhetorical criticism which seems to satisfy a "critical impulse."⁶


That ancient impulse creatively expressed in rhetorical criticism "can help to bring understanding, discrimination, and appreciation to the entire process of human communication." Further, as Donald Bryant points out, rhetorical criticism is:

Concerned with the ways and means discoverable in the discourse, or in the whole transaction, through which the rhetor touched or left untouched or altered the available sources of response or which appeared to be generated by the discourse.

Lloyd Bitzer emphasizes that the role of the rhetorical critic is to examine rhetorical discourse which comes into being in the milieu of real situations, rather than imagined ones. Bitzer feels such criticism examines what was or could have been done to affect or alter the exigencies of a given rhetorical moment. That is where rhetorical criticism plays its role, "to know and to show what was and what might have been." Rhetorical criticism is, as Mark S. Klyn asserted, "intelligent writing about words of rhetoric," and it represents the "value judgments of an individual," according to Linnea Ratcliff.

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8 Bryant, p. 38.

9 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 36.

10 Bryant, p. 36.


This investigation is not a study of speeches but rather an analysis of the criticism of President Nixon's speeches during the crucial early days of the Watergate affair. As stated before, an assumption of this investigation is that the criticism to be studied was virtually inextricable from the actual speeches themselves. This assumption extends the meaning implied in Karl R. Wallace's assertion that, "the meaningful aspect of a speech act resides not in any of its parts, but in the act as a whole when perceived as a unit."\(^{13}\)

There is need not only for good criticism but for an appreciation and analysis of it when and where it occurs. The writer was influenced by the writings in professional journals on contemporary critical studies. Frederick Trautmann, for instance, asserted that contemporary criticism is usually invalid because it cannot assess effect accurately.\(^{14}\) More convincing was the position of Peter E. Kane in his pointing out the value of studying rhetorical situations while they are current. Kane said that the essential difference between criticism of past events and the work of current critics is "not one of greater objectivity about the past but rather of less chance of having one's errors exposed."\(^{15}\)


\(^{15}\) "The Validity of Current Criticism," *Today's Speech*, 16 (September, 1968), p. 49.
One of the most influential works on the thinking of the writer was the volume which resulted from ideas discussed and papers presented at the 1970 National Developmental Project on Rhetoric and published in *The Prospect of Rhetoric*. The report encouraged pluralism and flexibility in rhetorical studies and recommended lines of research which could relate rhetoric better with current and future needs. One monograph in that volume is Samuel L. Becker's "Rhetorical Studies for the Contemporary World." Becker sees the task of the rhetorical critic as examining the "lines and links," of communication wherever they are found, and in cooperation with scholars in a variety of fields. He emphasizes a need to examine more carefully what happens to communication "on its way," such as how news coverage affects communication and is affected by it.

In essence Becker calls for a new emphasis on the message as actually received. The message as created often is organized and relatively free of redundancy. As received, often it is "scattered through time and space, disorganized, has large gaps," and often the receiver is exposed to parts again and again.

That scattering phenomenon is obvious in the case of Watergate rhetoric. Sections of the speeches were repeated over and over.

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over again; newspapers quoted Nixon and quoted magazines; magazines quoted newspapers. Nixon even alluded to criticism of previous speeches in the news conference on August 22. Therefore, what really confronted the American public during April-through-August, 1973, was what Becker called a "complex communication environment" or "mosaic." The present study examines the kinds of criticism which helped to create the rhetorical mosaic of Watergate, 1973.

As far as the writer knows, only one study in the professional speech journals is similar to the present study, Ronald F. Reid's "Newspaper Response to the Gettysburg Address," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 53 (February, 1967), pp. 50-60. He sought to determine who criticized Lincoln's speaking that memorable day and what kind of coverage and influence newspaper criticism had on the American public. The techniques were similar, but Reid's study dealt with a single speech and fewer sources. Reid studied a variety of newspapers and sought to categorize and to count published responses to Everett's and Lincoln's speeches. His purpose was to clarify and correct historical references to the speeches. This present study seeks to clarify and analyze such responses while they are yet fresh.

Reid's study contributed to this study by providing evidence that even with a study as exhaustive as his, and even with a past event as the subject, it is impossible to measure effect definitively.

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19 Bitzer and Black, p. 33.
Effect is too illusive a quality. As Kane pointed out, "In spite of all the studies we do not know the effect of the Gettysburg address." 20

Rationale

The writer started this study with an assumption already mentioned, that "discriminating, insightful observations" of rhetoric are important. 21 But the question arises, are observations found in such a medium as print journalism "discriminating and insightful?" They are critical responses, but are they "criticism?" The answer is "no" if by criticism one only means the kinds of mature, well-conceived, documented, developed rhetorical criticism one could expect to find executed by a critic schooled in Aristotle's methods of rhetorical criticism, or like those studies found in volumes of academically inspired rhetorical criticism. Certainly, print journalism responses are seldom fully developed.

Pointing out that good criticism is much needed, Thonssen, Baird, and Braden said:

Of carping objections to what's said and done in public life there is no shortage; of sentimentalized affirmation and approval, there is no want. But of intelligently critical evaluation and judgment there is not, cannot be, enough. 22

20Kane, p. 50.

21Baskerville, p. 123.

In general terms, that is the question this dissertation poses: Was the criticism which dominated printed media in this period "intelligently critical," or was it only what Thonssen, Baird, and Braden called "fragmentary and incidental?" 23

The amount of criticism found relevant to this study, as well as the specificity and the differences in quality, is impressive. This finding is consonant with the observation in *Speech Criticism* that newspapers and magazines always carry an appreciable amount of speech criticism, but that it is of uneven quality. The authors pointed out:

The editorial writer and the columnist—neither of whom is necessarily skilled in rhetorical investigation, appraises . . . important speech making. . . . [But] some of this reviewing contains little more than unembroidered praise or blame of selected aspects of the speech. On the other hand, some evaluations are uncommonly good. 24

Many of the responses studied are from sources not usually noted for their perceptiveness of oral communication as a unique mode of communication. The critiques expressed no particular understanding of a rhetorical criticism tradition, nor were any written by persons whose training and interest are predominantly in the field of rhetorical criticism.

Responses such as those used in this study appear to be, in a sense, a critical genre in themselves. Whether one calls them

23 *Speech Criticism*, p. 4.
"criticism" or prefers to reserve that term for a higher form, these responses are critical responses and do exist. They are, moreover, among those which Thoussen, Baird, and Braden pointed out "are currently employed, and therefore deserve notice."25

In addition, they demonstrate well the types or levels of criticism outlined in Speech Criticism: "impressionistic," "analytic," "synthetic," and "judicial."26 These levels of criticism, to be discussed in more detail in the section of this chapter on "methodology," are useful in a limited sense. By no means can they be seen as discrete categories, but they are helpful labels to describe increasingly complex and developed stages of criticism. In fact, the first three "types" may be better described as "steps in a process," leading to truly evaluative appraisal, or "judicial" criticism.27

The responses in any one issue often constituted a combined evaluation. Writers, perhaps unknowingly, participated in this "group effort." In addition, individual writers wrote on different levels at different times. Authors wrote early impressionistic or analytic responses, but, after more information became available, they wrote synthetic or judicial evaluations.

25Speech Criticism, p. 20.
26Ibid.
At the least, the **Speech Criticism** terminology suggests the relative degree of development of the critiques. The terms suggest emphases as well as stages or levels.

Recognizing the variation in the quality of the journalistic responses was a justification for interest in them and a means of describing and evaluating them. The existence of such a large amount of speech criticism in the sources prompts the questions: "Who were the critics?" and "What kinds of criticism did they write?" "What were the characteristics, similarities, and differences among the responses?" and "On what did the critics base their evaluations?"
The following sections describe in more detail the nature of the responses which were the materials of the study and the method of analyzing and evaluating them.

Evaluation of this criticism is needed for the following reasons: First, trained speech critics need to understand the kinds of criticism being done by others if they are to improve the quality of such criticism and stimulate an awareness of the nature and importance of oral communication. Second, the criticism was read by millions of Americans for whom undoubtedly the medium and the context were, as Marshall McLuhan suggests, a part of the message itself. 28 Response to oral communication always has been bound inextricably to the message, but that bond becomes even more

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Important the more swiftly and the more prominently that criticism reaches its public--and the larger the public it reaches.

This study is an investigation of a large body of significant responses to presidential rhetoric during a profound crisis in the history of the United States while the events are yet fresh. Recognizing the risks in analyzing contemporary events and personalities, there are also distinct advantages. Something may be gained in waiting to acquire perspective or in studying a "safely dead" rhetorician. But an assumption of this study is that there is considerable value in studying a situation in which facts are still unfolding and the outcome unknown.

Methodology

The writer used as the primary bases for his discussion of the responses, the previously-mentioned categories or levels of criticism in *Speech Criticism*: "judicial," "synthetic," "analytic," "Impressionistic."\(^{29}\) Within each of the chapters using these categories, the study discusses what were the bases for the criticisms as described in terms of the classical canons of rhetoric. The following is an explanation of the analysis.

The examples of speech criticism are examined on the basis of these helpful, but not necessarily discrete categories. The following is a brief description of the levels of criticism discussed

\(^{29}\) *Speech Criticism*, p. 20.
by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden.

The first level is "impressionistic," the least systematic and scientific. It "records a judgment based upon personal preference and predisposition." It is "criticism of idle exclamation," is subjective, and "at the mercy of whim and temperament." *Speech Criticism* emphasizes that such criticism is not necessarily invalid, but it is often more accidental than it is thoughtful and analytical.\(^{30}\)

The second level, "analytic," is "a methodological examination of all available facts relating to the speech itself," according to Thonssen, Baird, and Braden. It is structural analysis which does not include much evaluation, and they point out:

> This may take the form of word counts, classification of arguments, ratios of exposition to argumentation or of description to narration, surveys of sentences according to length and structure, listings of figurative elements, itemizations of pronoun usage, and many other classificatory arrangements. The objective of such criticism is not revelation of the nature of a speech in its social setting, but an understanding of the speech in its own right.

The third type, "synthetic" criticism, goes a step beyond analysis; it includes analysis of the speech, but gathers data "which deal not only with the speech . . . but with the other elements in the total situation, with the speaker, the audience, and the occasion."\(^{31}\)

A distinguishing characteristic of this category is that it represents an effort to depict the larger context of the speech

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\(^{30}\) *Speech Criticism*, p. 20.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., pp. 20,21.
content itself. What distinguishes this from judicial criticism is that it contains little or no interpretation, but is principally descriptive.

The highest level of these four is "judicial." Judicial criticism includes the concerns of both the analytic and the synthetic categories. According to Thonssen, Baird, and Braden, judicial criticism can be described in this way:

It reconstructs a speech situation with fidelity to fact; it examines this situation carefully in the light of the interaction of speaker, audience, subject and occasion; it interprets the data with an eye to determining the effect of the speech; it formulates a judgment in the light of the philosophical-historical-literary-logical-ethical constituents of the inquiry; and it appraises the entire event by assigning it comparative rank in the total enterprise of speaking.32

The materials which the writer decided to include in this investigation often were critical not in the sense that a particular writer criticized directly. Often the reporter's approach in such assessments was to include quotations of others, or to cite critical reactions of others.

Such materials may not be necessarily the kinds Thonssen, Baird, and Braden had in mind in discussing their categories. However, the impact on the reader is probably much the same whether a piece is a collection of reactions or a carefully thought out editorial. In terms of readership, one can assume that page one articles are given more attention generally than editorials and essays on some

32Speech Criticism, p. 21.
back page. The description of the materials in terms of the Speech Criticism categories is helpful because it reveals the relative developments of the critics' responses and the type of emphasis in each critique. The procedure tends to increase appreciation and understanding of the critical writings.

Within the discussion of each of the foregoing levels, the writer of this study examines the critics' bases for their responses by utilizing classical rhetorical terminology. By no means is this an effort to force these responses into a classical mold or to suggest that critics in print journalism used or should have used the canons consciously to form their responses. The classical terminology is simply a means of describing what seemed to be the elements emphasized, and the bases for the remarks the critics directed at Nixon's rhetoric.

For centuries the classical canons have provided helpful insights for rhetoricians and rhetorical critics, and the terms are familiar and serviceable. The following definitions, however, provide the reader with a brief statement of the sense in which this writer uses the terms in this study as a means of describing and analyzing the responses. The definitions come from George Kennedy's The Art of Persuasion in Greece. 33

The first canon is "invention," or the speaker's choice of materials and ideas for his speaking, that is, what the speaker decided to include to accomplish his purposes in speaking. This invention is examined in terms of Aristotle's "three modes of proof" available to any speaker. The first, "ethos," is the character of the speaker as perceived by the critic and audience. The second, "pathos," refers to elements in the rhetoric apparently designed to appeal primarily to the emotions of the listeners. Finally, "logos" refers to the elements in the rhetoric apparently designed to appeal to the reasoning of the audience.

The second canon is "disposition," or arrangement. This term simply refers to how the speaker arranged his materials and ideas, the order, and the relationships of the materials in the speeches.

The third classical canon, "elocution," no longer is used because of its present-day connotations of effusive or overly precise speech patterns or tones. The term "style" now serves to express this ancient canon's meaning of stylistic devices and word choices—the use of language.

Finally, "action," or delivery, is the canon which refers to what the speaker did or did not do with his voice and body in the process of speaking. This term embraces all of the considerations of voice tone, style of delivery, and gestures which are sometimes

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referred to as "manner of presentation."

Questions Asked

The following questions were asked about the criticism and are focal points for the discussion of the materials in the four chapters of analysis in this dissertation (Chapters III, IV, V, and VI).

The questions are: How extensive is the criticism? What explicit statements of rhetorical criticism are expressed? What techniques of criticism are used? That is, is there comparison with other speeches, or "good" points contrasted with "bad" points, or the use of assertions or examples?

Other questions are these: What type of language is used in the criticisms? Is it essentially denotative or does it contain words that seem designed to evoke essentially an emotional response? Are there distinctive features of the language which can be noted to clarify the analysis, particularly in choices of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs? What generalizations can be made about the criticism in relation to the source types (news magazines, opinion magazines, newspapers) or to individual newspapers or magazines? In what types of writing do the responses occur: Columns or essays, articles, editorials, or poll reports? Finally, what seemed to be the author's purpose?

In addition to the foregoing questions, in relation to the classical canons particularly, the following questions also are posed:
Which canon or canons were employed predominantly in the source and writing types? That is, what did the writer emphasize or neglect? What insights did the writer offer about the speaker's task which help the reader to better understand the speaking event? What statements of prescriptive rhetorical theory or expectations are expressed? What predictions of courses of action are made? And, finally, was the criticism responsible? That is, was the criticism fair and accurate in responding to the President's rhetoric? Did the critic seem to have a responsible, professional attitude, or was he biased? Was the criticism fair in the sense of being informed about the speaker, his task, the situation, and the text? Did the critic provide the reader with examples and reasons to support his assertions?

The Nature of the Materials

In order to understand the chapters of analysis to follow, it is helpful to have a picture of some of the important features of the responses examined by the study. The following is a summation of important features of the writings.

Of the 691 pieces of journalistic writing used, nearly two-thirds were generally unfavorable assessments, about one-fourth seemed neutral, and only about one-tenth appeared to be essentially favorable. The sources contained almost three times as many negative assessments as favorable ones. Even when the favorable and neutral categories
are combined, the unfavorable responses are almost twice as numerous.

By "favorable" the writer means simply that a critic's responses or predictive rhetorical criticism was basically sympathetic to the President, or approving in content and tone. Also this term is applied to those criticisms which would, in the judgment of this writer, tend to evoke in the readers favorable responses to Nixon's character and speaking.

By "neutral," the writer means the critic seemed to take no definite stand or that his response might tend to cause his readers to adopt a neutral position on Nixon's rhetoric. The label applies as well when an assessment is relatively balanced between favorable and unfavorable critical statements.

The term "unfavorable" means the respondent was definitely not in favor of or sympathetic to the President's rhetoric. As in the other categories, the term also applies when a response tended to evoke an unfavorable response in the reader.

In the "top ten" newspapers only The Wall Street Journal had more favorable than unfavorable responses. All the others, including the conservative, Republican Chicago Tribune and the liberal publication, The Washington Post, were substantially unfavorable.

The other six newspapers were more varied. The larger publications in the South, Atlanta's and Houston's, were generally unfavorable. Others, especially The Times-Picayune, tended to be either neutral or favorable in the critical responses.
The April 30 speech received the most critical attention, and the August 15 and 22 events slightly less. The August 20 VFW speech received much less notice than the others.

The responses which tended to be unfavorable were written in pointed, specific, sometimes satirical and sarcastic language. They tended to cite specific dates, issues, passages, and arguments, made definitive statements, and were sometimes polemic in tone. At times they seemed to be searching for fresh ways to insinuate presidential guilt. Some seemed to relish their critical role. On the whole, however, while often caustic, most unfavorable writers were cautious and restrained in their approach.

Neutral critics usually sought to present both sides. Almost as often they were noncommittal or equivocal in tone.

Favorable responses generally seemed to be more hopeful than positively favorable. These writings had a self-conscious, searching, and tentative tone.

Language

Word choices are important considerations in how the writers expressed their favor or disfavor with the President's speaking. Although some seemed to choose connotative words deliberately, language in nearly all of the responses was essentially denotative. Emotionally loaded words helped to convey meanings, but no response appeared to be deliberately inflammatory or irresponsible in style.
Particular word choices accomplished the critics' purposes and conveyed their favorable, neutral, or unfavorable postures. The words in the following examples, underlined by the writer of this study, demonstrate such a use of verbs and adverbs by the respondents.

In an article in The Houston Chronicle Cragg Hines used a verb to accomplish his purpose of questioning the President's veracity. Hines, disputative and negative in tone, wrote: "Nixon claimed he sought to 'remove . . . decisions from the . . . White House, . . .' but in fact, major decisions rested with Haldeman."35

William Raspberry used verb forms to heighten the unfavorable impression in his September 3, 1973, column, accusing Nixon of: "spying, cheating, and lying,"36 while another writer suggested that Nixon had "stirred up" controversy and that the President had "finally submitted" to tough questions.37 In describing the speech delivery of the President, an editorialist said that Nixon's voice "quavered,"38 a Jet writer believed Nixon "failed" in his


April 30 speech, and The New Republic said of the August 22 press conference that Nixon "distorted the thrust of a recent Supreme Court decision." In addition to the verbs and adverbs, writers accomplished their evaluations by careful choices of nouns and adjectives. For instance, of the days preceding the press conference, Commonweal described the President as "between hiding places--San Clemente, Camp David, Key Biscayne--reportedly preparing the latest 'definitive' statement of his 'innocence.'" That sentence is a good example of unfavorable criticism inspired by the writer's use of adjectives and nouns.

Clayton Fritchey, a columnist referred to Nixon's "insinuation" that Congress was neglecting matters of more concern. John Herbers referred to "a hobbled Presidency," and a "Nixon Presidency . . . in disarray." The following passage indicates also that adjectives and nouns in an unfavorable piece serve a critical function.

The speech itself was soap opera in the manner of his "slush fund" speech of 1952. The President has never lacked the intuitions of a demagogue; he can skillfully measure the amount of "corn" to use in his invariably self-serving and intellectually dishonest presentations. He never fails to say that he could have taken the easy route but manfully did not; he always tries to touch a few heartstrings in his inimitably, vulgar way. His TV speeches are Madison Avenue "presentations," empty of content, misleading, couched in wretched rhetoric.44

Writers implied as much as they stated explicitly. The shortage of space and the publishing deadline contributed to a sparseness of style and a dependence on implication which is not characteristic of fully developed rhetorical criticism.

Writing Types

This study utilizes the generally recognizable types of journalistic writing in the discussion. Journalists use a number of terms to depict the various types of writing, but generally agree that there are editorials, columns, and news articles. The "article" label applies to many forms of reporting—the interview, the strict reporting of facts, the feature story, "explanatory writing," "background features," and interpretive articles.45 The term "article" in this study is used to embrace all such types which are primarily reportive and interpretive.


The editorial and the column all deal more in the realm of opinion. An editorial is "a critical interpretation of significant, usually contemporary, events . . .; a considered statement of opinion" by one or more editors of a publication. Columns are writings by staff reporters (often syndicated in several publications), which fill in "some of the gaps in purely 'objective' reporting," in which "the 'interpretive reporter' expands the horizons of the news. He explains, he amplifies, he clarifies," often "within the framework of opinion."46

Another type of writing journalists refer to is the "poll report." Usually this kind of writing is included as a kind of article, but journalists recognize that sometimes such reports are entities in themselves and often are ingredients in columns and editorials as well. Since the use of polls was an important feature of the critical responses to Nixon's speaking, the poll report is treated in this study as both a type in itself and as an ingredient in other types.

Poll reports sometimes appeared in article form with summation of surveys and interpretation of results. Other times they were simple summaries of survey results, but in any case they were an important part of the body of critical materials for they are explicit and straight-forward. Often they bore startling titles such

46 Kriehbaum, p. 21.
as "Nixon Isn't Telling All, Dade Majority Says," the title of a report of a poll taken in the Miami area. Most of the poll articles were results of Harris or Gallup polls of nation-wide samples and generally referred to statements in Nixon's speeches and the responses to them. For instance, in the Miami poll one question was, "Do you believe President Nixon?" The answer of 55% of the respondents was a clear "no." This poll was particularly effective as criticism because it measured response to Nixon's rhetoric and not just to Nixon generally.

The New York Times commissioned a special Gallup telephone poll and reported the results in clear critical terms in its title: "44% in Poll Find Nixon's TV Address Not Convincing and 27% Are Persuaded," and in statements such as this:

About 44 per cent of the people who watched President Nixon's Watergate address on television Wednesday night found the speech 'not at all' convincing, while 27 per cent concluded it was 'completely' or 'quite a lot' convincing.

Because poll reports in this period specifically reflect response to Nixon's rhetoric, they were included in the study. Unquestionably they had great potential for affecting perception and reception of Nixon's speaking.

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47 The Miami Herald, August 19, 1973, pp. 1, 26A
48 Ibid., p. 1A.
However, the most carefully written, and those tending more often to exemplify developed criticism, appeared in the editorial and column types. Reflecting conscious selection of ideas and materials, and better expressed, columns and editorials contain much more reason-giving statements, express more definite views than do the other types, were focused on important issues or trends in the rhetoric, and were authored by experienced, sometimes prestigious journalists. One of their chief advantages was that they had continuity, and, therefore, perspective in their responses.

Where articles and poll reports emphasize facts and often only imply evaluation, columns and editorials by their very nature are more evaluative in nature. They exemplify as well the idea of the levels or steps in the process of evaluation on which this study is based, for some columnists and some editorial staffs write increasingly judgmental or judicial responses as the period progressed.

Columns and editorials probably were read by fewer readers, being in the editorial sections of most publications. Thus, although polls and articles contained less real rhetorical criticism, they are probably no less important because they were read by more people. In any case, the American people were confronted with a wide variety of types and levels of criticism in the period studied.
Conclusion and Preview

The writer analyzed and evaluated the critical responses in 16 newspapers and 12 magazines to the speaking of Richard M. Nixon during the early months of the Watergate affair. The purpose is to depict the nature of the criticism, to understand it, and to speculate on its impact.

The criticism of Nixon's speaking was directed toward the ends Chesebro and Hamsher mentioned in their recent monograph on rhetorical criticism. They pointed out that:

The critical impulse is directed toward an end: to support a speaker's message; to clarify the message so that others will respond as the critic does; to give a message greater significance by increasing the number of people who are aware of it; or to deny the validity of the message. All of these purposes and many more are implicit in the critical impulse. Regardless of the critic's specific objective, criticism is justified because it produces insight.50

If criticism, as Chesebro and Hamsher contend, can produce the effects of "understanding, appreciation, and rejection," and if those ends "cannot be gained solely through reacting to the original discourse," then criticism can make a difference in the way others respond to the rhetorical event.51

In this study the writer seeks to contribute to an understanding and an appreciation of a large body of such rhetorical


51 Ibid., p. 282.
criticism—criticism which played an important role in the rhetorical situations when Richard Nixon spoke in April and August, 1973, about Watergate.

The following is a preview of the chapters to follow in this study: Chapter II gives a resume of the dates and basic facts which are relevant to the rhetorical situations involved. The next four comprise the body of the study. In Chapter III the writer describes and analyzes the responses studied which demonstrate the impressionistic level of criticism. Chapter IV deals with responses emphasizing analysis of the speeches (analytic). Chapter V portrays the synthetic mode or level of criticism, and Chapter VI, the judicial level.

Each of the chapters III-VI is organized around the bases or elements of criticism which are described by using the classical canon terms. Examples are cited along with analysis and evaluation. The conclusion, Chapter VII, is an attempt to draw together the important qualities and implications of the study.
CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

Watergate: A Brief Description of the Events

Watergate has no parallel in American history. Memo­
ries of the Teapot Dome scandal pale in comparison. Without ques­
tion Watergate was and still is at this writing "the most damaging
scandal to befall the Presidency" since the Harding episode.1 It is
important to note, however, that "the Watergate affair" and
"Watergate" are, at least as much as any labels, misleadingly sim­
plistic. Theodore H. White suggested that:

No simple logic yet embraces what is known as the Watergate
affair. In the word "Watergate" are contained a family of
events, a condition of morality, and a system of acts, charges
and allegations which until those accused have had their
chance to speak in court and be judged by law, defy final
judgment.2

However, White probably correctly identified the focus
of the Watergate crisis as a "sharp-set, harshly contrasted . . .
clash of cultures." That clash was, he felt, "born of two new

1 Newsweek, April 30, 1973, p. 16.
2 The Making of the President 1972, New York: Atheneum
cultures which saw Americans as enemies of each other." And that clash is obvious throughout the tragic episode as it has unfolded. What underlies the phenomenon is a disintegration of trust.

*Time* magazine concluded late in 1973 that Watergate had taken a significant "toll of the national innocence." The Watergate albatross was much with both President Nixon and the American people. For the purposes of this study, what is important about Watergate is that it occasioned unprecedented rhetorical situations for an American president and that those situations elicited a barrage of rhetorical criticism. The criticism was often unfavorable and unusually pointed. Thoughtful responses to the speeches as speeches were numerous.

This study is not a history of Watergate, but it is necessary to sketch the essential facts, dates, and personalities involved. The overview to follow suggests the state of affairs as the dissertation was being written and provides a summary of the situations which obtained before and after the speech events discussed in the study.

**The Larger Historical Context**

The period of which Watergate is a part can be seen as beginning with the assassination of John F. Kennedy, which ushered in a decade of profound changes. Robert J. Donovan, a *Los Angeles Times* Washington correspondent, pointed up the feeling many expressed

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3White, p. 269.

when he said, "The last ten years have been too much. It has been an incredible decade . . . a century has been telescoped into a decade." Indeed it was.

After the Kennedy assassination, in swift succession came the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. There followed the incredible Vietnam involvement, the 1968 riots in Chicago, the rise and fall of Lyndon Johnson and his Great Society, the Cambodian war, and the death of 1960's student activism at Kent State. The decade included the Nixon election, the Nixon unpopularity, the Carswell and Haynsworth appointment debacles, deepening Negro cynicism. There were drugs, violence in the streets, topless and bottomless everything, environmental pollution, inflation, and, as we moved into the seventies, a strange lethargy reminiscent of the fifties. Then injury gave way to national humiliation and insult. The nation found itself with a President who appeared not to trust citizens or the system of law and order he had vocally defended. They found themselves with a "common criminal" for a Vice President and a general paucity of trust in national leadership that was unprecedented. As Donovan suggested, what set apart the Watergate tragedy from other episodes in American political history was not the corruption, but the pervasiveness of that corruption and the cynical disregard of national leaders for what one eminent historian called "the written

restraints of the Constitution and the unwritten processes of politics."6

A Watergate Chronology

Before Richard M. Nixon's April 30, 1973, Speech

What is called "Watergate," began in June, 1972, when men were apprehended in the Democratic National Committee's headquarters in the Watergate complex of buildings in Washington, D.C. The leader, James McCord, was employed by the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP!). Authorities arrested this nefarious group with electronic eavesdropping equipment in their possession; their bungled bugging operation open up "the Watergate affair."7 The following is a summary of the events which preceded the series of speech events studied here and which led specifically to the first of those events, the April 30 speech. On that date Mr. Nixon broke silence on the subject in a major televised speech. The following is a detailed chronology of the pre-April 30 events.

The following events in 1972 were background to the events covered in this investigation:

June 17. Bernard L. Barker, James M. McCord, Frank A. Sturgis, Eugenio R. Martinez, and Virgilio R. Gonzalez were arrested at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee and charged


7 Time, February 18, 1974, p. 8.
with burglary. They had eavesdropping equipment in their possession. 8

June 18. The day after the Watergate break-in, John Mitchell identified James McCord as "the proprietor of a private security agency who was employed by our committee months ago to assist with the installation of our security system. He has, as we understand it, a number of business clients and interests." At that time McCord was the full-time, salaried security coordinator of the Nixon campaign committee and his only two clients were the Committee to Re-elect the President and the Republican National Committee.

June 19. At the Florida White House, Ronald Ziegler, President Nixon's press secretary, said that neither he nor the President would comment on "a third-rate burglary attempt." 9

June 28. Gordon Liddy, a lawyer for the re-election committee, was discharged by former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, chairman of the committee, for refusing to answer F.B.I. questions about the case.

July 1. Mr. Mitchell resigned as President Nixon's campaign manager. Clark MacGregor was named to succeed him.

August 19. Representative Wright Patman, chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee, ordered a staff


August 22. Murray Chotiner, one of Nixon's oldest and closest political advisers, said there is "no reason for our people to panic" over Watergate. "It was so stupid, it's clear it could not have been authorized by any of the responsible people" in Nixon's circle.

August 26. The General Accounting Office reported "apparent violations of the Federal Election Campaign Act by the re-election committee."

August 28. Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst promised that the Justice Department's investigation of the case would be "the most extensive, thorough and comprehensive investigation since the assassination of President Kennedy."

August 29. President Nixon, at a Western White House press conference said: "I can say categorically that his (Dean's) investigation indicates that no one in the White House staff, no one in this Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident. What really hurts in matters of this sort is not the fact that they occur, because overzealous people in campaigns do things that are wrong. What really hurts is if you try to cover it up."

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10 "A Chronology of Events . . .," Sec. 1, p. 33.
12 "A Chronology of Events . . .," Sec. 1, p. 33.
August 31. News reports indicated that Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, Jr., a former White House consultant, were in the Watergate complex the night of the break-in.

September 2. Mitchell, testifying in the Democrats' suit against the re-election committee, said he had no advance knowledge of the bugging incident.  

September 5. Mitchell told reporters, "Neither the President nor anyone at the White House or anyone in authority at the committee working for his re-election have any responsibility" for the break-in and bugging.

September 9. The Justice Department completed investigation of the Watergate case without implicating any officials of either the White House or the Committee to Re-elect President Nixon.

September 11. Barker admitted his role in the break-in, but wouldn't implicate others. Democrats filed an amended complaint accusing Maurice H. Stans, Liddy, Sloan, and Hunt of political espionage, in addition to the original five defendants.

September 13. The House Banking and Currency Committee staff report said that Stans had approved the transfer of $100,000 in campaign funds through Mexico to conceal the identity of the donors. The re-election committee filed a $2.5-million suit against the Democrats,

14 "A Chronology of Events . . .," Sec. 1, p. 33.

charging that the Democrats were abusing the court.

September 15. A federal grand jury returned an eight-count indictment against the five men arrested in the break-in and Liddy and Hunt. The charges included tapping telephones, planting electronic eavesdropping devices, and stealing documents.

September 20. News articles said that two re-election committee officials, Robert C. Mardian and Frederick La Rue, had destroyed financial records of the group after the bugging incident.

September 29. It was reported that Mr. Mitchell controlled a secret fund that was used to gather information about the Democrats. He denied the article.

October 10. News articles reported on a massive campaign of sabotage and intelligence directed by officials of the White House and the re-election committee. The Washington Post said Donald H. Segretti, a former Treasury Department lawyer, recruited agents to sabotage the Democratic campaign. Among incidents of sabotage reported was that of a letter to the Manchester Union Leader accusing Senator Edmund S. Muskie of laughing at a description of Americans of French-Canadian descent as "Canucks." The reports claimed that Ken W. Clawson, deputy director of White House communications, said he had written the letter.

October 15. News articles reported that Segretti had been hired by Dwight L. Chapin, Nixon's appointments secretary and that Segretti had been paid by the President's personal lawyer, Herbert
W. Kalmbach. Reportedly, Segretti had called Mr. Chapin "a person
I reported to in Washington." 16

October 16. Asked about stories charging Nixon aides
with paying for a program of subversion within the Democratic cam-
paign, Ronald Ziegler called it "shabby journalism" and said, "I am
not going to comment on stories based on hearsay, or where innuendo
or character assassination is involved. It goes without saying that
this Administration does not condone sabotage or espionage or the
surveillance of individuals or preparing dossiers on them, but it
(the Administration) does not condone innuendo or source stories
that make broad sweeping charges about the character of individuals." 17

October 25. News stories, citing Federal investigators,
said that H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, was one of
the officials authorized to approve payments from a secret campaign
fund for espionage and sabotage.

October 26. Clark MacGregor acknowledged that officials
of the re-election group had controlled a special cash fund, but denied
that the fund had been used to sabotage the Democrats' campaign.
He named Jeb Magruder, Stans, Liddy and Herbert L. Porter as the
men who had controlled the fund.

16 "A Chronology of Events . . .," Sec. 1, p. 33.
17 "Watergate Blotter," p. 615.
October 29. There were news reports that Chapin had admitted to F.B.I. agents that he hired Segretti.

Then came the 1973 events in the Watergate affair:

January 11. Senator Sam Ervin agreed to head a Senate investigation of the Watergate case.

January 30. Liddy and McCord were convicted of all charges stemming from the Watergate Democratic headquarters burglary.

February 7. The Senate voted to set up a committee to investigate the Watergate case.

March 23. Judge John Sirica disclosed a letter from McCord charging that higher-ups were involved, that there was perjury in the trial, and that the defendants were pressured to plead guilty. Judge Sirica postponed sentencing for McCord, sentenced Liddy to six years, eight months, to 20 years.

March 24. McCord told Senate investigators that White House counsel John W. Dean, III, and Magruder knew about the bugging in advance.

April 3. Liddy was sentenced to 8 to 18 months for contempt of court for refusing to answer grand jury questions. 18

April 17. President Nixon tells the press: "On March 21, as a result of serious charges which came to my attention. . . . I began intensive new inquiries into this whole matter. . . . There have been major developments. . . . If any person in the executive

18"A Chronology of Events . . .," Sec. 1, p. 33.
branch or in the government is indicted by the grand jury, my policy will be to immediately suspend him."

Shortly after Nixon's statement, Ziegler told the press, "All previous White House statements about the Watergate case are 'inoperative.' The President's statement today is the operative statement." 19

April 19, 1973. Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst removed himself from the investigation because of his "close personal and professional relationship" with some of the figures. Dean said he would not be a "scapegoat" in the case. Magruder was reported ready to testify that he helped plan the bugging with Dean and Mitchell.

April 20, 1973. Mitchell told friends he had attended meetings where wiretapping was discussed, but did not approve plans. Dean was reported ready to testify that Haldeman and another White House aide, John D. Ehrlichman, worked on a cover-up.


April 26, 1973. Magruder resigned as assistant to the Secretary of Commerce. Mr. L. Patrick Gray was reported as having burned documents belonging to Hunt at Dean's request.

April 27, 1973. Gray resigned as acting chief of the F.B.I. The judge in the Pentagon papers case released information that Liddy and Hunt had stolen Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatric records.\textsuperscript{20}

The events led to the April 30, 1973, speech by President Nixon. Just before that speech a Harris survey found that 63\% of the people polled doubted the White House's honesty on the bugging operation. By a ratio of 63 to 9\%, the American people expressed that "the White House has not been frank and honest on the Watergate affair," and has "withheld important information about it." The Harris survey indicated an increase from 11 to 32\% from September, 1973, to April, 1973, in the number of persons who felt Nixon personally "knew about" the affair.\textsuperscript{21} In addition, the Gallup poll revealed that nearly one-third of American people felt that Watergate revealed corruption in the Nixon administration and that a significant 83\% were "aware" of Watergate as a result of hearing or reading about it.\textsuperscript{22}

Americans not only had heard about Watergate; they were deeply troubled by it. \textit{The Washington Post} had led the way in breaking the story of the burglary and continued to keep the feet of the Administration to the fire on the Watergate issue. Editorials abounded in the newspapers. They decried the situation and called

\textsuperscript{20} "A Chronology of Events . . .," Sec. 1, p. 33.


for explanations and justice. Even William F. Buckley, Jr., the "arch," but articulate conservative, asked the question in his column, "What If Nixon Is Guilty?"\(^\text{23}\)

The people waited for an explanation, but rumblings of bitterness and urgency were sharper after the April 17, 1973, statement by Nixon. An editorial in *The Washington Post* captured the mood of those days in these words:

The thing has come unstuck—that much is obvious. And it is obvious too that we are only at the beginning of what must be a huge and wrenching disillusionment on the part of the public, those 200 million hapless witnesses to the degradation of their government. There is a certain "say it ain't so, Joe" quality to the way in which people are now asking one another whether they think the President himself was "involved," and in the reassurance they self-evidently take from the most commonplace answer given, namely, that Mr. Nixon probably didn't "know." One must be brutal about it: at this stage . . . neither the question nor the answer bears directly on the President's role . . . For when we talk about Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Mitchell, we are talking about men in whom the President vested enormous authority, men whom he entrusted with vast discretionary powers . . . We are not just asking about a single crime. We are talking about a 10-month stretch in which some of the highest officials of government were employed in an effort to cover up the larger implications of that crime. For the President's press secretary to feel obliged to declare that every statement which he has personally made from the White House on the subject over the past 10 months is "inoperative" now, and for Mr. Nixon himself to be obliged to say that not until this March 21 did he have an inkling of the magnitude of what had been going on is, at best a confession of incompetence and of failed responsibility that staggers the mind.

\(^{23}\) *The Miami Herald*, April 28, 1973, p. 7A.
The Washington Post also expressed in that editorial the hope that its writers were wrong:

Something far larger than a test of personal presidential endurance or of political survivability is at issue here, and it is our deepest conviction that Mr. Nixon will be able to save what is essential to the country and to him only by acting on that fact. What is at issue—and at risk—is the confidence of the people in this country in their basic institutions, in the decency of the highest officials of the land, in the credibility and honor of those men to whom they have given—in good faith—an enormous grant of authority.24

The editorial reflected the national pain as well as its hope.

As the April 30 speech approached, reports had a quality of sadness about them. Norman Cousins was quoted in a speech to be "waiting to hear" President Nixon say that he would take responsibility for the events and that nothing like the bugging operation "will ever happen again."25

Writer after writer echoed the fear Stewart Alsop expressed in the April 30, 1973, Newsweek:

President Nixon is now faced with yet another of those crises he keeps having and likes to write about. The Watergate crisis could be the biggest of the whole lot, for if he fails to resolve it with fair success his authority as President will be disastrously undermined.26

Nixon went to Camp David to ponder his fate and, it turned out, to

24 "The Watergate Disaster," April 28, 1973, p. 6B.


prepare perhaps the most important speech of his political career.
As Richard T. Cooper expressed this moment in the Watergate drama:
"the cast was fretting its hour upon the stage." 27

The April 30 Speech of President Nixon and Its Aftermath

Richard Nixon went on national television April 30, 1973, and accepted "responsibility for what happened in the Watergate affair," but said he had no prior knowledge of either the bugging or the attempts to cover it up. 28 His purpose was to discuss the case after tension had built for months because of his silence and to announce the resignation of three of his top aides implicated in the Watergate affair: H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman, and John W. Dean, III. He announced acceptance of Attorney General Kleindienst's resignation and the appointment of Elliot L. Richardson to replace Kleindienst. 29

As a New York Times article pointed out, it was not clear in what way Nixon accepted responsibility. Nixon seemed to have his own definition of the term, but he did assert that "there can be no white wash at the White House." 30 Nixon appeared to project the image of an emotional, sorrowful, wounded, newly self-appointed accused criminal now seeking to portray himself as a deceived,

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29 Ibid., Sec. 1, pp. 1, 36.
30 Ibid., Sec. 1, p. 31.
determined detective who would ferret out the truth and hide nothing. Without question the speech will be considered by historians as a stunningly important event in the life of the Republic and of its Presidency. It was widely reproduced, commented on, dissected, praised, and bemoaned.

The speech was at least as widely reported and criticized as President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural or the famous Douglas MacArthur post-World-War II speech. Typical coverage included large headlines on major newspapers, such as The Washington Post: "President Accepts Full Responsibility."31 The text was carried in full by all the top ten newspapers and by several of the news magazines. The Atlanta Constitution bannered the text with "Nixon: No Whitewash in Watergate Case." Nixon said: "In any organization, the man at the top must be responsible. That responsibility belongs here in this office. I accept it."32 But he warned against over­zealous prosecution. He announced the resignations of his aides and stated that he had no knowledge of the affair before it happened and that he had taken no part in any cover-up. Essentially the speech was a defense of his integrity. It reiterated his vow to get to the truth of the affair and vaguely referred to "new information" to which he was now privy. As editorials suggested, the speech in

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31 May 1, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 1.
32 May 1, 1973, p. 13A.
essence was a plea for "extension of faith" in President Nixon and was a self portrayal of a lonely, betrayed leader.\(^3\)\(^3\)

An interesting feature of the speech was Nixon's unexpected and uncharacteristic praise of a vigorous and free press. The administration had consistently berated the American press throughout the Watergate developments, but now Nixon seemed to have mellowed.

The speech ended and President Nixon turned and said to no one in particular, "It wasn't easy." He was nearly sobbing.\(^3\)\(^4\)

Then he walked into the White House briefing room, stood in an unlighted area, looked out to a group of shocked reporters and cameramen and said shakily: "Ladies and gentlemen of the press, we have had our differences in the past and I hope you give me hell every time you think I'm wrong. I hope I'm worthy of your trust."\(^3\)\(^5\)

The speech moment and its accompanying sounds and textures were almost surrealistic in quality. Many observers reported that Nixon felt under extreme pressure and that he showed it in his voice and action. The scene was reminiscent of Nixon's other "crises," particularly of his famous 1952 "Checkers" speech. The April 30 speech was a heady moment for the whole nation.


\(^3\)\(^5\) Ibid., Part 1, p. 2.
A Shakespeare buff, writing to William Safire, one of Nixon's articulate defenders during the crisis, captured the mood that hung in the air in early May. The anonymous writer announced: "But yesterday the word of Nixon might have stood against the world; now lies his credibility there, and none so poor to do it reverence."

In May and June there followed a circus of Watergate events: denials, charges, countercharges, pronouncements of the dire condition of the nation and the Presidency. Criticism of the rhetoric of Nixon was severe, pointed, and plentiful.

A Gallup poll shortly after the President's April 30 speech indicated that half the nation thought Nixon was indeed involved in the cover-up operations. That assessment was on the basis of a telephone survey taken two days after the speech and corroborated the several-days earlier low assessments of Nixon's credibility.

The President continued to deny involvement in the affair and refused to testify before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities. In June, however, the dam burst again with the testimony of John W. Dean, III, the former Nixon counsel. Dean testified that he was sure Nixon knew about the Watergate cover-up as early as Fall, 1972, and that Nixon had helped to keep

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the scandal quiet. What had been only thought or feared before was now said openly. The credibility of the President was on the line. It stayed there during the August rhetorical situations studied. The question still hung in the air in early 1974.

Accentuating the charges of many that Nixon had been secretive and devious, and that his Administration seemed unusually suspicious of others and defensive, John Dean provided the Senate Committee with his so called "Dean's List," an incredible document which contained a list of "enemies" of the administration. Some of the illustrious names on that list were: McGeorge Bundy, Dr. Michael DeBakey, Dr. Kingman Brewster, Senator Birch Bayh, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, actors Paul Newman and Bill Cosby, and practically every major syndicated columnist, except Safire, Kilpatrick, and a few others. Included on that historic document were The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Conservative columnist James J. Kilpatrick concluded about this period that "the vise" was closing on Nixon. His imagery was apt:

One jaw is labeled "he knew," the other, "he did not know." We are squeezed to an unhappy conclusion: If he

knew, he was crooked; if he did not know, he was inept. If that is a fair metaphor, there is no way—no way that the President and his disappointed friends can wriggle out.  

However, Nixon tried. Indeed, he seemed to relish the challenge.

Before President Nixon's August 15 Speech

On July 16 Alexander Butterfield, a former White House aide, revealed that most White House telephone calls and conversations since 1971 had been secretly tape recorded—with the President's knowledge and consent. Throughout July Nixon had continued to refuse to appear before Senator Erwin's committee and declined to honor subpoenas for papers and tapes which might have shed light on the case. He refused to give up papers to the committee or to the special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, whom Nixon himself had appointed. Nixon claimed presidential privilege and immunity—a consistent theme in his policies and utterances into 1974—but his claim was rejected by the courts.

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Cries for the President's resignation or impeachment were heard more frequently in July, but Nixon did not budge. He assured the nation at every opportunity that he had no intention of resigning.  

In addition, revelations confirmed that Nixon had ordered raids on Cambodia, although he had denied doing so. A tax watch-dog organization found the President had claimed a large, allegedly illegal, income-tax deduction for the donation of his Vice Presidential papers to the National Archives. The administration apparently had approved extensive wiretapping, the rifling of personal mail, robbing of a doctor's files, and writing of fake letters written by Nixon's associates to denigrate the character of Nixon's opponents. It was quite a year.  

Typical of the responses to the President's actions, an editorial in *Commonweal*, the religious journal, concluded:

The plain fact is that the Nixon administration has behaved in a way worthy of the Greek colonels but shocking in an American government. . . . The fact . . . that Mr. Nixon has traveled under conservative colors . . . makes it doubly ironic that characteristics of his Administration so patently resemble key features of a police state.  

Implications and complexities of the mounting Watergate revelations were "mind boggling," as Senator Howard Baker of

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Tennessee put it. But the situation became even more complicated when Nixon began his legal defense on August 7, 1973, only to be confronted by a new bombshell: that Vice President Spiro T. Agnew was under investigation for violation of tax laws and for influence peddling.

Nixon finally ended his long silence. He prepared a counter attack and came again on national television for the August 15, 1973, address to the nation on Watergate.

The August 15, 1973, Address of President Nixon and Its Aftermath

President Nixon's defense in this important address was a call for the American people to help him end the nation's "backward looking obsession" and called for the country to move on to more important matters by turning Watergate over to the courts. Claiming that reports by his subordinates had kept him uninformed, he denied any involvement or complicity, he pleaded the doctrine of confidentiality of presidential materials, and pledged to bring about "a new level of political decency" in his remaining years in office.


Numerous articles in the news media during this period reflected the attitude expressed on the front page of *The Houston Chronicle* the day after Nixon's address; the caption read, "The Question That Nixon Didn't Answer." Writers felt apparently that Nixon's speech was evasive, that the substantive questions remained unanswered.

According to a special Gallup poll commissioned by *The New York Times*, 44% of the American people were "not convinced" by the Nixon address; 50% of them did not believe Mr. Nixon's claim of non-involvement, and 56% believed Nixon should turn over his tapes and files for the investigation.

President Nixon's August 20, 1973, Address

The media were still assessing the August 15 address when Nixon decided to keep an August 20 date to address the Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention in New Orleans. Nixon was expected to avoid Watergate and give a hard-hitting foreign policy speech about his ordering raids on Cambodia. But Watergate was very much on the minds of the average American, and the Senate hearings were still profoundly affecting the conscience of the nation.

51 August 16, 1973, Sec. 1, pp. 1,12.

The New Orleans speech turned out to be related to Watergate in two definite ways: Nixon obviously hoped to regain personal prestige and to reassert a presidential image of strength. He also hoped to divert attention away from Watergate by speaking to a basically friendly audience in a city far away from the hassle in Washington.  

However, New Orleans proved to be quite different from the President's expectations. The planned motorcade through cheering throngs did not occur. The President was secreted through back streets and hurried into the Rivergate convention complex because of a threat made on his life. Nixon was shaken, nervous, and angry. As he entered the building where he was to speak, annoyed at the crowds of newspeople following him, the President angrily shoved Ron Ziegler, his Press Secretary, in the direction of the newspeople following the entourage. This show of anger and erratic behavior became the focus of numerous wire releases of both pictures and interpretation.

Evans and Novak and other respondents said that, in addition, Nixon had to "milk" his ostensibly friendly audience for applause several times during the address, that the President was jerky in his body movements and generally demonstrated that he was


under severe emotional distress. Although his audience probably did agree with his Cambodian bombing statements, according to these columnists, the President's efforts to secure favorable response and his platform behavior puzzled many in his audience. Evans and Novak, among others, reported that there was a notable lack of enthusiasm, a kind of reserve not usually seen in a V.F.W. audience.

Watergate seemed to be an unseen presence on that occasion, as the columnists suggested Nixon failed to gain the support for the President which Nixon seemed to have sought. Indeed, the whole New Orleans event had an air of futility and incongruity which several critics noticed and reported. Evans and Novak, for instance, continued:

This attempt to recreate a political atmosphere in which Richard Nixon in fact acted strongly and wisely more than four years ago was spectacularly out of context with his present predicament.  

Although the speech contained no Watergate references as such, Newsweek suggested that the "disastrous" New Orleans events caused "the hurriedly called press conference" which followed two days later and was "at least partially designed to answer the wave of doubts about Mr. Nixon's well-being." In any case, New Orleans was a fascinating episode in the President's series of confrontations with the public during this period.

55 Evans and Novak, p. 36.

President Nixon's August 22 Press Conference

President Nixon's August 22, 1973, news conference was the first such meeting with the press in five months, the first after Watergate and Nixon's alleged role in Watergate had become traumatic national issues. Reporters, until this news conference, had no opportunity to question the President on the affair.

Numerous reporters conveyed details of the high drama of the event. John Herbers, for instance, described the setting of the parking lot at Nixon's San Clemente estate, the Pacific Ocean, and a blue velvet curtain as backdrops for the President in his inevitable dark blue suit, an American flag in his lapel, and the California sun causing Nixon to squint his eyes. Herbers also pointed out that Nixon's audience on television watching the press conference was probably the same group of people who had been regularly watching the Watergate hearings on television all summer.\(^\text{57}\)

Nixon answered questions for fifty minutes, but provided no new disclosures to help his audience sift through the growing pile of contradictory data. He opened by announcing the appointment of Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State and the resignation of William P. Rogers from that post. As the lead article in *The Houston Chronicle* the next day pointed out, "The preoccupation with Watergate showed strikingly when reporters asked not a single question about that

Conference answers essentially involved a defense of Nixon's alleged ignorance of the Watergate affair. He said he had tried to get to the truth of the matter when he had become aware of it. Nixon again called for the nation to put aside the Watergate issue in favor of returning the interests of the government and people to move "important" issues. In addition, the President promised effective leadership, assailed his critics, defended Agnew, and bemoaned what he felt was the press's negative attitudes about the Nixon Administration. The questioning was blunt, sometimes barbed, but carefully couched in many of the questions in a type of formal and "correct" language. The writer, who personally heard this press conference, felt the journalists were frustrated in having to leave many questions unanswered.

The President, although nervous, controlled the situation. He was free to select his questioners. In the position of granting an audience, his manner seemed imperial. Many reporters appeared angry at the President's manner and at his claims that the Watergate investigation represented a press vendetta against him personally.


After the press conference a torrent of criticisms appeared. The event attracted wide attention in the mass media.

Thus, by the time the journalists had responded to the August 22 event, there was available for study a body of responses to four "firsts" in Nixon's rhetorical efforts regarding Watergate. The President had responded with his first speech after the controversy began, his first speech after the Hearings had started, the first speech to a live audience, and he had fielded questions in a first and long-awaited press conference. The responses to these four important rhetorical events are the materials of this study.

The events associated with this crisis continue. The outcome is not known, and the full truth may never be known. But never before in our national history had there been a series of rhetorical situations like those which form the basis for this study and which astounded the nation. In fact, one of the features characterizing the criticism of Nixon's rhetoric during this period is an apparent awareness of the critics that Watergate and Watergate rhetoric is unique. No other event or events could have occasioned those kinds of rhetorical situations or those kinds of rhetorical criticism.
CHAPTER III

IMPRESSIONISTIC CRITICISM

Introduction

Illustrating that the responses in the sources studied varied greatly in emphases and in qualities, about one-third of them could probably best be described as having primarily impressionistic characteristics. These responses were the least complex, the least thorough and developed, the least comprehensive in coverage of elements in the President's rhetoric.

Many seemed to be deliberate in tone; many others were only unorganized collections of remarks, fulfilling well the description Speech Criticism applied to such critical remarks; they often were criticisms "of idle exclamation," and "at the mercy of whim and temperament." As Thonssen, Baird, and Braden pointed out, this kind of response is often more "accidental" than thought-out and developed.¹

Whether deliberate or not, the potential impact on readers was probably the same. Whether poll reports, brief reactions by prominent or common citizens, or subjectively stated journalists' opinions...

reactions, all were critical responses directed at the President and his speechmaking. In the case of those studied, they were overwhelmingly unfavorable to Mr. Nixon, and the language was cryptic and cynical in tone.

Without question these responses do not fulfill the expectations many might have for "real" criticism. The responses are unorganized, relatively unamplified and supported, subjective opinions or impressions. Probably they are best seen as levels of criticism, as Chapter I of this study suggests. In discussing examples of this emphasis the writer of this study does not suggest that impressionistic or the other "types" as *Speech Criticism* terms them, are discrete, scientific categories with rigid boundaries.

Nevertheless, responses emphasizing impressions of varying lengths and types, were a significant part of the critical reactions in the mass media which confronted the American people. These responses both reflected and probably helped to create the vast disillusionment and frustration Americans apparently felt because they seemed to perceive Watergate as a challenge to traditional American values of fair play, honesty, and candor.

**Characteristics and Examples**

**Invention**

Many of the impressionistic critics expressed predictions about what the President might or should say in his speeches. In other words, in their criticisms they expressed expectations,
predictions, or recommendations about the President's speeches before he spoke. They usually called for candor, for disclosure, and for answers. Generally the elements of logic (logos) and speaker credibility (ethos) were tied together in these responses, perhaps because a number of them were quite brief. An editorial writer for The Wall Street Journal expressed what he expected the President to continue to do and reflected on the President's believability as a speaker. Musing about why Nixon did not volunteer answers, the Wall Street editorial writer maintained:

If we were confined simply to weighing the direct evidence the Watergate hearings have produced so far, we could believe that the President has been telling the truth, or at least is entitled to a presumption of innocence. . . . But if so, we cannot understand why he doesn't take the action within his power to dispel the chief current reason to believe otherwise.²

Numerous critics expressed the same confusion and doubt, disbelieving the President was innocent in light of his unwillingness to establish his innocence. Disbelief was at least implicit, and often explicit in nearly all of the impressionistic criticisms. These writers and critics, however, failed to develop in any organized or supported manner what were practical implications of their points of view. They left unstated more often than not what they might have expressed about Nixon's tenure and about the nature of the presidency itself. In other words, they left unstated, as the example above

shows, any judgment or suggestion for action they might have felt necessary.

Impressionistic critics, however, sometimes did guess about the President's motives and sometimes reacted to the speeches on the basis of what they assumed his motives were. For instance, Peter Lisagor discussed the August 15 address in terms of his beliefs about the President's character as he viewed it and dwelt on the isolation of the President, on his previous style of speaking, and then suggested his impressions of what he expected as a critical observer because of his assumptions:

If the past is any guide, it is a fair guess that Mr. Nixon sees himself beset by his old enemies, malign forces that have stalked him with envy and hatred. . . . The President is likely to combine his attack upon the unnamed but identifiable foes with an aggrieved self-portrait of a chief executive who has been to China and Russia, who has ended a nasty war in Southeast Asia and who is within sight of a generation of peace, and with no more gratitude than to be accused of involvement in petty political crimes. That was a rough approximation of how Mr. Nixon responded during last year's political campaign, when asked what he planned to do to defend himself against charges of corruption in his administration.

Lisagor, suggesting that the President had gone to Camp David "not to lick his wounds," but to "sharpen his sword," utilized a literary allusion to describe Nixon's speech planning; Lisagor said:

He is mapping the strategems of riposte to Watergate Part Three, and if the hearsay be sound, his mood is that of Henry V at Agincourt, as portrayed by Shakespeare; under siege, he will "imitate the action of the tiger; stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, disguise fair nature with
hard-flavor'd rage; then lend the eye a terrible aspect."³

The critic's picture is vivid, and it describes features an observer of the televised speech would probably recognize. Indeed, one could almost term prophetic Lisagor's image of the manner, mood, temperament, and delivery of the President on August 15. Certainly the monarchical images the writer evoked critized the President's sincerity and his inventive processes generally.

Nearly all critics expressing their expectations of Nixon's rhetoric wrote generally in cynical terms about his ethical credibility. Few critics, however, were as explicit as was an editor of The Nation in expressing lack of trust in the President. The critic expected the worst because of what he felt was Nixon's kind of character and previous record. The editor described what he expected in the April 30 address in these harsh words:

The President's sudden about-face on the Watergate case is entirely in character. Give him credit for fast political footwork when trapped, and eel-like flexibility when under pressure. When his personal political fortunes are at stake, he has no character, hence no scruples. He will bite any bullet . . . and deny the undeniable. Whatever political self-interest dictates, that he will do. Since he first ran for Congress, he has consistently demeaned the ethics of political leadership.⁴

Most critics were more tentative or less harsh, but no less fearful of the alleged deviousness of the President. An editorial

³"How Will President Respond to Watergate, Agnew Events?" The Times-Picayune, August 11, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 13.

writer asserted that Nixon's instinct was "to survive," and suggested that Nixon's April 30 speech reflected exactly that instinct. 5

Other writers expressed similar hopes and expectations, colored by their implied or explicitly stated misgivings about how Nixon's publicly revealed personality and record could affect his speaking. For instance, a Chicago Tribune writer, tired of what he called Nixon's "foot-dragging," expressed the opinion that Watergate illustrated how important was "communication" between a president and the public. 6 Presumably the Tribune writer referred to President Nixon's admitted reluctance to speak on the issue, his record of silence on the matter, and a lack of any press conferences and speeches.

Carl Rowan directed his column readers' attention to what he expected in the April 30 address, implying that Nixon would take what Rowan considered a predictably devious approach. Rowan asserted:

You are going to hear a lot of poppycock from the White House . . . about how Mr. Nixon rallied to the truth as soon as he learned that something evil really had taken place.

Well, all the evidence suggests that Mr. Nixon abandoned the 10-month-long coverup after he heard that . . . Magruder had sung. 7

5 "The President's Belated Bow to Propriety," The Courier-Journal, May 1, 1973, p. 16A.


7 "Can't Believe Nixon Didn't Know," The Atlanta Constitution, April 27, 1973, p. 4A.
The consensus of journalists appeared to be that the President would never answer the question "why?" definitively. The writers clearly revealed exasperation. Frank Stan, for example, wrote: "It seems too much to expect." And a writer for The New York Times editorially suggested his guess as a reason for the lack of Nixon candor: the President seemed to be concerned only with "holding together his palace guard." The implication is clear in that statement that Nixon's rhetoric and his policies were not only unfortunate, but out of keeping with democratic traditions. Note the word "palace." Equally as disdainful in his expectations was Joseph Alsop who reported in Newsweek his analysis of Nixon's April 30 rhetorical task. Alsop felt that Nixon needed work on his believability to capitalize on Americans' innate trust in their presidents by persuading people "to believe what they already want to believe," because Alsop felt, "it is inherently unbelievable that Richard Nixon, the most experienced professional politician in the United States, could have... become personally and provably involved in such amateurish nonsense" as the Watergate burglary.

Clearly Alsop was saying that Nixon had a significant, positive, ethical stance with American audiences at least in the sense


that Americans trust presidents and that Nixon's prior reputation was one of shrewdness and political savoir faire. Alsop went on to suggest that Nixon already had revealed that the President had "shrewdly chosen" as a key to his rhetorical strategy "the role . . . of the leading suspect who . . . suddenly reveals that he is and has been all along, the detective, thus proving his innocence."
The writer further predicted that this detective role, if "played . . . shrewdly and well," would permit the President to pre-empt other investigations, and felt it was safe to predict that Nixon would do that and do it well.10

In commenting on the President's speech preparation, some critics ventured their own opinions, and many quoted sources such as Nixon's aides. One such critical article appeared after the August 15 speech, but the critic wrote the article before the speech. The anonymous writer reacted to the speech situation and the speaker's credibility and then concluded: "Agnew's self-defense had made Mr. Nixon's speech writing job . . . harder." Nixon "disappeared into the Catoctins to prepare himself," the article reported; "neither the exact format nor even the tone of his presentation was settled":

Most of his advisers were said to be urging a conciliatory as against a combative approach, but the signals from Camp David were contradictory: Mr. Nixon sent for one moderate speech writer, Raymond Price, and one hard-liner,

Patrick Buchanan, and gave no sign as to whose line or prose he favored. What was sure was that his final answer to Watergate would be very much his own; what was less than certain was whether anything he can say now can put an end to his longest and conceivably his last crisis.\textsuperscript{11}

Only rarely did impressionistic critics deal with content in detail. One exception was Gaylord Shaw writing in The Times-Picayune on the August 15 address. Shaw termed the address to be delivered that night on national television a "long-awaited response to the controversy." He reported advance details Nixon's aides provided: that the speech would last about 30 minutes and that Nixon had planned the speech with an assumption in mind, that "the nation is 'ready to turn the corner' and overcome the scandal's impact." Shaw repeated a pre-assessment many other critics also reported, that the address was "ranked as the most important" in Nixon's "quarter century of public life."\textsuperscript{12}

Critics reported widely the same opinion James Reston expressed in early August: that the President seemed to be in hiding "trying to delay the public response which came on August 15."\textsuperscript{13}

The critics generally were less impressionistic about the August speeches than about the April 30 address. In August, critics


\textsuperscript{12} "Nixon to Speak on Watergate," August 15, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 1.

had the background of the April-July events, including the Senate
Hearings and the April 30 address, as context for comments, giving
substance and backing to the opinions and impressions. For example,
*Newsweek* reported finding a "party pro" who could find no one "who
believed anything the President says anymore" -- an opinion expressed
before the August 15 speech, but one based on a long summer of
experiences. In addition, a passage in *Time* looked forward to the
August rhetoric and reported impressionistically from a standpoint of
experience and knowledge not available in April. Citing an anonymous
presidential aide, *Time* s writer asserted: "The President has only
so many bullets to fire. . . . Everytime he opens his mouth, he's
risking rebuttal from a witness." 

By August 11, 1973, Joseph Alsop could say with some
assurance, although still impressionistically: "Given . . . Nixon's
character and situation, a vigorous counterattack must surely be
expected." Citing the growing evidence that Nixon was becoming
increasingly combative, Alsop quoted Nixon as saying: "It is in
my instinct to strike back," and the President, Alsop felt, was
clearly "in a mood to obey his instinct." The columnist more
specifically than most of the critics guessed what the President


16 "The President's Plight," *The Shreveport Times*, p. 6A.
would do in the August 15 speech. He foresaw "the outlines of a new game plan" which included "defying the Ervin committee" which Alsop predicted (and correctly so) that Nixon "would picture as 'out to get' the President," and the President's "enemies" Nixon would lump together "as the defenders of the likes of Ellsberg and as soft on national security." 17

Some critics of the President, focusing on credibility and character, gave particular attention to what they perceived as lack of candor as a demonstration of a flawed personality. After the speeches occurred, the responses expressed essentially opinions of belief or disbelief. An example was published in Jet in which a reporter quoted Representative Shirley Chisholm's reaction to the April 30 address. She found it "very difficult to understand how a man can be so close" to those involved in Watergate "without having some knowledge of their activities." 18 Chisholm's reaction is typical of how the critics generally received Nixon's claim that he was innocent of any wrong-doing. Her response typified the kind of negative reactions many critics had to Nixon's character--especially his veracity. The article in which Chisholm's remark appeared was like many which presented off-the-cuff, or on-the-street reactions as a


part of a larger article. These sometimes were directed at specific statements in the speeches, but were more often expressions of general feelings about the speech and the speaker.

After the August speeches such reactions became even more unrestrained and unfavorable. In the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a newspaper long distinguished for its comprehensiveness and effort by its editors to present all sides of the news, two articles appeared which illustrate well the nature of impressionistic reports composed of basically off-the-cuff remarks. Surveying local responses from shoppers in a Sears store, one writer noted the comment of a woman who stopped momentarily to watch the President on a store television set, delivering his address. The shopper declared as she boarded the escalator, "What a lot of hogwash!" The St. Louis paper also presented a wire release story (as many other sources did) about the New York gathering in a restaurant of many prominent Americans whose names had appeared on John Dean's list of "enemies." The article reported that the group that watched the Nixon address on television responded with "groans, growls, and just plain belly laughs" at strategic points.20

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Another example of the street interviews which included short, quick statements was an article in which Arnold Markowitz reported both favorable and unfavorable responses such as: "I'd like to cast my first vote [for] President Nixon for the liars club," and "I thought it was a very good speech." 21

Obviously such responses are not detailed criticism, but they are critical reactions which had potential for focusing attention of the public on the issues, the speeches, and on the President as a speaker. Although truncated and perhaps critical only accidentally, they had potential to provide for the President, the Administration, the Congress, and interested citizens generally, a picture of the public's general reactions and their specific reactions to specific points the President made in his rhetoric.

An extension of that point can be made for the potential value of such responses as those which American papers published about foreign reactions to Nixon's speaking. For instance, an Associated Press story circulated with a survey of a number of foreign press notices about Nixon's April 30 address, presenting brief reactions and conclusions for American readers. Dublin's conservative Irish Times asserted, "It is hard to believe anything other than that he has made things worse for himself by an inept, devious, and falsely sentimental performance." Peregrine Worsthorne, a columnist

21 "Nixon Speech Prompts Suspicion, Trust," The Miami Herald, May 1, 1973, pp. 1,6B.
for the London Sunday Telegraph, felt that Nixon's speech was "shameful and revolting," and the Turin, Italy, La Stampa asserted that the speech would cause loss of support for the President. 22

In many of the responses the writers implied that chicanery and deviousness were typical of Nixon and his speaking. Howell Raines of The Atlanta Constitution, for example, could not take Nixon seriously. He reported that Nixon's April 30 address was typical of the President's "habit of meeting crisis with 'dramatic changes.'" 23

Most of the impressionistic critics seemed to presume that their readers were as doubtful about the President's veracity and as sure of his character flaws as were the critics. Furthermore, they implied that the reader had at least a basic knowledge of the content of the speaker's message as they did. Nick Thimmesch made those two assumptions when he asserted that "few people believe what he said," about Watergate even if they felt Nixon "acted like a President" in firing his aids. Thimmesch explained, "White House credibility is zilch." To make sure that he would not be misunderstood, Thimmesch defined "zilch" as "one notch below zero." 24


23 "Big Shift Is Typical Nixon Crisis Solution," May 1, 1973, p. 12A.

Among the impressionistic criticisms few probably attracted more attention in the press than the poll reports. Most of these reflected directly on the President's credibility as a purveyor of truth and as a worthy national leader. Responses of this type were centered on or included prominent mention of the results of opinion polls—principally by the Gallup and Harris organizations.

The newspapers studied carried 45 responses which were exclusively reports of poll results; magazines had only two which focused on the polls, but included the results as parts of numerous other responses. The existence of the polls seemed to be, in fact, an understood "given" in nearly all the responses in all the sources.

In mid April a Gallup poll revealed the President's words were not accomplishing his apparent purposes. The title of the report in The Times-Picayune sums up the matter: "Watergate Spells 'Corrupt' to Many." The critic reported the poll results declared that the nation was increasingly aware of the scandal and that the people were concerned about the corruption they perceived in it. Eighty-three per cent were "aware" of and concerned about the President's role in the affair. 25

Published the day before the April 30 speech, a Harris survey reported the diminishing trust Americans had in Nixon. Sixty-three per cent doubted the President's honesty and felt that he had

25 April 22, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 5.
"withheld important information." That figure showed a drop in the overall esteem in which the people held their President--nine points in one month, according to Harris--and a decline in Nixon's rating for inspiring confidence personally went from 48 to 33 positive points in April, 1973.

In addition to these early national polls, many of the sources published results of special telephone surveys by the Gallup team two days after the April 30 speech. Half of the respondents said that they believed the President participated in a cover-up of the facts, and 40% said they believed he knew in advance of the bugging operation.

The figures on the critical responses continued to decline from May through July. Just before the August 15 address, Steven G. Roberts reported that Nixon's popularity was at an all-time low for American presidents--only 31% trusted and supported the President at that point, according to Gallup. In interviews critics found


people generally were resentful of what they regarded as Nixon's misuse of the power of his office and that they were increasingly disillusioned and deeply troubled by their own loss of confidence in their President. 30

These poll results both affected the public's reception of Nixon and his rhetoric and directed the attention of the nation to what reactions various people were having to the Nixon character and to Nixon's rhetoric.

As the August speeches arrived, the impressions in criticisms became more and more emphatic in questioning the President's honor and integrity. Newsweek published an article which reported a widespread belief that few believed "anything the President says anymore." 31 It was a kind of vacuum into which the President stepped as he started his August 15 address. It was touted as his most important speech ever. The address was given the most unflattering pre and post critical assessments one could imagine a President's speech receiving.

After the August 15 address, the poll results even more explicitly connected Nixon's ethos with his speech-making. The first Gallup poll, taken by telephone, was reported in The New York Times under the title: "44% in Poll Find Nixon's TV Address Not Convincing


and 27% are Persuaded."32 Perhaps critics used such results to demonstrate their own evaluations were consonant with people's reactions generally or to demonstrate the acceptance level of Nixon's audiences. One critic reported: 66% said "no" to the question, "Did President Nixon's speech increase your confidence in the Nixon Administration, or not?"33

Such a result is particularly important since all indications in the address point to the fact that in that speech Nixon had sought to go over the heads of Congress, and his critics indicate he failed in that effort. But critics did not use that conclusion as they might have in their responses. Not many of the respondents revealed an understanding of Nixon's rhetorical strategies, nor did they connect apparent failure of his strategies (as revealed in the poll results) to an analysis of the speeches and the audiences. Critics failed largely to interrelate the ideas and values of the speaker with the ideas and values of his audiences. That is, they did not specifically suggest values which Americans generally believed in to the values on which the President based his speeches. For instance, they could have explored how Americans value efficiency, candor, and honesty.

32August 19, 1973, Sec. 1, pp. 1, 41
33Ibid., p. 41.
Probably the hesitation of some critics also to explore the implications of the President's rhetoric for his audiences and for him as the holder of the highest office in the land arose from their feelings that at that time Congress should not impeach Mr. Nixon. Critics probably reflected the ambivalence Americans generally felt. A Harris survey found 53% of Americans felt that despite Nixon's alleged errors he should not resign or be impeached, even though they even more strongly felt (76%) that Nixon had produced "no convincing proof" of his innocence as late as August 15.34

Impressionistic criticisms contained poll results to convey that the President was unconvincing and that they and Americans in general did not trust him when he spoke, but these writers seldom pursued those feelings, reactions, and convictions to definite conclusions. Perhaps some did in later, more developed responses. It is impossible to know how many did.

Generally these reactions did not suggest implications except in the most vague of terms. These reporters were not ready in this period, for whatever reasons, to do much more than cluck the tongue critically. Notwithstanding that hesitation, it is easy to see from the foregoing examples how attention-getting and potentially important to the media readers were the poll results and the criticisms based upon them.

Organization

Although the great majority of impressionistic critics wrote principally about the President's content and about his personality and reputation, some did use the other canons such as delivery, arrangement, and style as bases for comment. For instance, regarding arrangement, one report quoted a San Francisco lawyer and his wife in an interview-type evaluation of their reactions to Nixon's August 15 address. As quoted in the San Francisco Examiner, William Coblenz found the speech a "finely calibrated compilation of preemptive omission and protective apology," but generally "a well-orchestrated speech." Coblenz's wife, an architect, disagreed and felt Nixon's organization negatively affected her reception of the speech. "It was," she said, "a typical diversionary speech where he branches off on other things so you don't remember what he said earlier." By using these statements, the critic implicitly suggested that organization was important and that Nixon had consciously employed organization as a way of accomplishing his rhetorical purposes. No critic, however, explicitly evaluated organization, and almost none mentioned it.

Style

The only impressionistic style response reflecting interest in the President's use of language or choice of words and style was

a critic who said that Nixon used such terms as "murky," "petty," or "unimportant," to describe Watergate or concerns by his critics, implying perhaps an effort by the speaker to dismiss or minimize the whole issue. That this remark was the only reference to style in the impressionistic criticisms suggests that use of language and nuances of word choices and meaning were not vital considerations to these critics who themselves used a direct and economical style of reporting.

Delivery

The critics gave the President's delivery little attention, but slightly more than speech arrangement or language. Impressionistic critics referred to the President's voice and physical appearance in brief and almost off-hand remarks. Critics appeared to consider manner of presentation relevant, but relatively unimportant. Two responses mentioned style and delivery at the same time. In The Washington Post Lou Cannon reacted to the August 15 address by quoting "one veteran Republican campaign organizer" who evaluated the August 15 effort as one of Nixon's better speeches" but also said Nixon "always loses me at the end, gets a little flag wavy and corny." The critic continued about President Nixon: "But he wasn't

36"Nixon to Give Report on TV in Day or Two," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 14, 1973, p. 1A.
so tense this time"—a clear reference to manner of presentation.  

An even more specific reference to the voice and appearance appeared in a criticism published in The Atlanta Constitution about the August 22 press conference, the event evoking the most comment about delivery in all four categories. The United Press International reporter said in the Atlanta publication:

In his first news conference since March 15, before the dam broke, the President's voice trembled as he defended his refusal to release the Watergate tapes and lashed out in barely concealed anger at his critics in the press and Congress.  

Arthur Veysey quoted London's The Sun as saying the President's "'performance' ended doubt about 'his emotional capacity to carry on the Presidency.'" According to Veysey, The Financial Times said, "'Despite his efforts to appear relaxed and chummy . . . the emotional toll of recent months was evident in his drawn facial expressions.'" The Sun also found a "'real Nixon!'" who was "'no fumbling product of a speech writer,'" and The Express reported "that the president's voice 'sometimes quavered and twice almost broke.'"  

38 "Nixon Slams Critics, Eager to 'Move On,'" August 23, 1973, p. 1A.  
Cryptic references such as those about the President's voice, appearance, and manner of presentation reveal that some critics found such matters relevant to their perception of the speeches. Although explicit in these criticisms, impressionistic critics implied that such factors could affect how audiences received the President's rhetoric.

Language in these responses was uniformly terse, simple, and, sometimes, vividly connotative. An interesting writing style which impressionistic critics had in common with criticisms with a more judicial emphasis was the use of satire. Several writers employed this technique, but none was as humorous or pointed as Art Buchwald. He reacted to Nixon's speaking, implying criticism of what apparently he interpreted as Nixon's pragmatic, capricious choices of words, topics, and general speech purposes. Responding to the April 30 address, Buchwald mocked Shakespeare's style:

The palace at Key Biscayne where Richard III has next move. (Enter the Duke of Ziegler.)

Ziegler: My Lord. . .
Richard: Good news or bad news . . . ?
Ziegler: Bad news, my Lord. Dean has fled to Maryland; Magruder sings in Virginia, and the palace guard is confessing in chorus.

Richard: Zounds! I cannot tell if to depart in silence, or bitterly to speak in gross reproof. Yet so much is my poverty of spirit, so mighty and so many my defects, that I would rather hide me from my greatness. What say the citizens?

Ziegler: The citizens are mum, my Lord, except for those who would impeach thy motives at the Watergate.
Richard: They do me wrong and I will not endure it.\textsuperscript{40}

Buchwald's satire, although indirect, was trenchant criticism of Nixon's credibility, but the phrase, "if to depart in silence, or bitterly to speak in gross reproof," could apply to invention in general and to method of delivery as well.

References to delivery generally used quotations of spontaneous reactions. These reactions included no direct quotations from the speeches and none of the comparisons or other such techniques found in other levels of criticism.

\textbf{Implications}

Impressionistic criticisms consisted essentially of journalists' simple, straight-forward statements of opinion and reactions—the critics' own and those of others. Generally the writers reacted to factors in the personality and reputation of the speaker which would tend to affect how audiences would receive the rhetoric. Sometimes the critics responded to the ideas in Nixon's message, and much less often, they reacted to manner of presentation, to organization of the messages, and to the matter of language and word choices in the speaking.

The critics usually stated their evaluations or predictions in somewhat cynical terms, sometimes in connotative, but not

\textsuperscript{40}"Here's New Version of Richard III," \textit{The Times Picayune}, May 10, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 11.
inflammatory language. Sometimes they seemed to convey genuine fear for the nation and a considerable hesitation to use descriptive language or to suggest logical implications of their assessments. Generally, the critics expressed belief or disbelief, favor or disfavor, sometimes combining concern for the speaker's character with references to the content of his messages. Content seldom was a basis alone for comment. More often than not the critics reflected feelings and opinions about the President as a speaker and about Nixon's ideas, language, or delivery. All were rather generally expressed, rather than responding to specific statements.

Impressionistic critics seemed to assume that their readers were already knowledgeable about the nature of the ideas and the concepts in Nixon's speaking. They seemed to assume also that most readers had either read or would hear the President's speech being discussed and were, therefore, familiar with the background and setting of each speaking event.

More concerned with calls for candor and disclosure than they were with developing implications of their feelings about the rhetoric, the critics were almost uniformly unfavorable to the President and assumed that their readers agreed. If the poll reports are accurate, critics probably were correct in assuming that their readers agreed with their position.

Impressionistic criticisms sometimes included reactions to Nixon's speech preparation, expectations about the speeches, as well
as post-speech reactions. Both the expectations and the reactions after the speeches became almost cynical and unyieldingly unfavorable by the middle of August.

Poll reports were a dominant type of impressionistic reaction throughout the period studied, often receiving front page treatment in the newspapers. Since so many writers used that form and since articles and poll reports were so characteristic of the impressionistic level of criticism, perhaps this level of criticism is as much a result of the requirements, characteristics, and limitations of those journalistic types as deliberate efforts to "be impressionistic." The article and the poll report dominated and epitomized the kind of writing one finds in the majority of the materials in any newspaper—less so in magazines. Writers produce articles and poll reports in the terse, economical, and disorganized fashion popular among journalists today.

Usually columnists and editorial writers, probably more experienced as writers, had and took the time to reflect and to evaluate in a more developed and thoughtful fashion than was characteristic of impressionistic writing. Thus, the existence of so much impressionistic criticism suggests that writers wrote in that fashion not so much by deliberation as by default—limited by their medium and, perhaps, by their training.

Impressions should not be dismissed as unimportant, however. Readers may very well provide the "between-the-lines" kind
of reading of such impressions which, may, in effect, turn such writings into more fully developed criticism as they filter through the readers' minds. Impressions of potential importance appeared; critics sometimes expressed what appeared to be genuine insights. Because these responses appeared in great numbers in virtually every source, and because reactions to earlier speech events in the series could dispose the speaker and the audiences to speak or react differently on subsequent occasions, the potential for importance of impressionistic reactions is greatly enhanced.

Impressionistic criticism provided immediate, and sometimes thoughtful, subjective reactions of a large number of citizens, both ordinary and prominent, revealing wide-spread interest in the President's rhetoric. These reactions surrounded the President's rhetoric and affected the other critics' evaluations as well. Numerous critics on other levels or on the same level based their evaluations on poll results or included them as support for other assertions.

Although such writings are not an end in themselves or a final form of criticism, they can, and did in this series of criticisms, provide an initial kind of response and evaluation which can be built on and developed later by other critics—and sometimes by the same critics. This happened in this series of criticisms, and one sees in reading the lot of them obvious development and maturation of viewpoint.
Further, the terse, simple, direct statements seemed, if the poll results were even close to accurate, to reflect the majority viewpoint of Americans. In addition, the responses had potential to focus attention on the central aspects of the case, and on key ingredients in Nixon's speech-making. By focusing on the issues of credibility and content in clear terms, the impressionistic critics may have helped to clarify issues and to increase the level of appreciation and understanding of the issues. On the other hand, these responses may have confused and over simplified to the point of a fault. At the least, they did focus attention on the speeches. They had potential as well to create interest and help create an audience for later, more detailed, criticisms.

While Thonssen, Baird, and Braden are justified in describing this type of criticism as the least important of the four, they are equally justified to suggest that impressionistic criticism has merit. Impressionistic reactions cannot be ignored; they are a part of how journalists reacted critically, and their impact potential was great.

It might be unrealistic to expect reporters to criticize in a much more complicated fashion or for the public to be expected to read enthusiastically more sophisticated types of criticism. Perhaps serious speech critics and students of rhetorical criticism should give more attention to such responses. Speech professionals might seek to help pollsters and interviewers, particularly journalists, to
secure more valuable impressionistic responses to speech-making, by developing questionnaires designed to elicit responses which reveal more of how people are responding and specifically why.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYTIC CRITICISM

Introduction

Although not a dominant kind, some responses to Nixon's rhetoric were primarily analytic in nature, dealing almost exclusively with content of the rhetoric and almost wholly concerned with the speeches after they occurred. Most of these assessments were articles, and the remaining were in the article form of writing. Some appeared as columns and editorials.

"Analytic criticism," according to Thonssen, Baird, and Braden, "is a methodological examination of all available facts relating to the speech itself," which, they continue:

... may take the form of word counts, classification of arguments, ratios of exposition to argumentation or of description to narration, surveys of sentences according to length and structure, listings of figurative elements, itemizations of pronoun usage, and many other classificatory arrangements.

According to the authors the objective of analytic criticism generally "is not revelation of the nature of a speech in its social setting, but an understanding of the speech in its own right."  

In the examples of analytic responses studied, the writers tended to focus on one concern, that of analyzing the nature, consistency, and merit of the ideas and arguments of the speaker. Some engaged in word counting, a type of content analysis, or assessments of the relative amounts of various ingredients in the speech texts. More often than not these writers discussed specific arguments or passages in the President's speaking. Exercising considerable selectivity, they did not write from a subjective standpoint. They did not react to audience or occasion, and to the speaker much less directly than responses whose emphasis was not on the ideas and arguments directly.

The small amount of analytic criticisms suggests that most of the critics whose works were studied generally either took a subjective, impressionistic approach or involved themselves in analyses calling primarily for synthesis, application, interpretation, and judgment. Assuming the readers knew the basic content of the speech texts, most writers emphasized background, motivation, mood, purposes, audience, and occasion, or provided evaluations and interpretations. Analytic critics emphasized the ideas and arguments of the speaker's texts more than did the reporters who wrote other kinds of criticisms.

**Characteristics and Examples**

Analytic critics focused on several elements for criticism, primarily on invention. The critics evaluated the nature, merit, and
consistency of Nixon's arguments and pointed out what they felt were significant omissions. In regard to invention, some critics built their responses around their estimates of the moral or philosophic origins and implications of Nixon's rhetoric. They wrote nothing about organization and little regarding the manner of delivery.

They said little about Nixon's choice of words or his use of language to accomplish his purposes. Several implied that Nixon deliberated over word choices, and at least one explicitly stated that Nixon had taken care in choosing his words.

Several critics found materials and ideas which they thought reflected on the President's credibility and on how the audiences felt about Nixon. Thus, analytic critics sometimes discussed the speeches on the basis of ethos or credibility.

The following discussion suggests how analytic critics focused upon issues of invention, delivery, style, and organization.

**Invention**

**Logical Content**

Confirming or Refuting Arguments

Some analytic critics confirmed or disputed specific arguments, sections, or phrases in the President's speechmaking. Particularly vulnerable were Nixon's claims that he did not know of the burglary until March 21, and that Haldeman and Ehrlichman were fine, "public servants," and that Watergate was the outgrowth of
Civil Rights agitation in the 1960's.

In an article entitled, "Nixon Claims of Dem 'Burglarizing' Disputed," the reporter cited specific statements from the August 22 press conference when Nixon had used these arguments: that because others were guilty of the same offense, therefore, the recent burglars are not to be condemned; that Democrats had been guilty of the same kinds of political tricks; that he disliked the fact that his office conversations had been bugged; and, that, besides, he had not begun these activities. Thus, the critic reported contradictions and inconsistencies in Nixon's statements and quoted authorities to accomplish his critical analysis. He cited, for instance, Nicholas Katzenbach who, responding to Nixon's thinking on the issue, said, "If the President is going to say things like that he ought to say who authorized it and who knew about it."2

Responding to Nixon's admission that his party and his aides had been guilty at least of over-zealousness, but that they were not really guilty of anything bad, William F. Buckley, Jr., carped at these explanations and at the presidential insistence that Watergate was not a major concern of the people. Buckley found those arguments indefensible, but, considering Nixon's apparent presuppositions, not unexpected. Specifically, Buckley suggested that Mr. Nixon's Watergate speech was disappointing but, short of something

genuinely dramatic, about the only thing Nixon could have said. Buckley concluded: "It is reassuring that a Republican Administration should prove as inept at systematic dirty politics, however sobering it is to realize that there are people in authority disposed to do that sort of thing."³

Peter Steinfels examined Nixon's arguments in the August 15 speech and found particularly inadequate Nixon's argument that Watergate resulted from Civil Rights activists' disrespect for the law. Steinfels wrote: "Having largely foregone the pleasure of coming out slugging in his speech, . . . the President did slip in one left hook. The mentality behind Watergate, he explained, had its roots in the 1960's." Steinfels rejected Nixon's analysis of the origins of Watergate and concluded that "we can lay to rest the theory that the real Watergate conspirators were Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King."⁴ The critic also was rejecting Nixon's implication that all who disagree with Nixon are lawless men.

In responding to Nixon's August 20 New Orleans address, an editorial writer criticized the President's acknowledgement and defense in that address of the "secret" bombing of Cambodia in 1969.


The critic maintained:

The President deserves credit for candor in bringing the record into the open, but the fact remains that, despite the plausibility of his explanation now, the American press and public were kept in the dark at the time about a matter of concern to them.5

The Chicago editorial focused exclusively on Nixon's statements about bombing Cambodia. That same Nixon rationale also provided motivation for the writing of several comparable responses in other sources. Numerous critics considered Nixon's defense of the Cambodian bombing not only illogical, but immoral and ill-timed. Numerous critics suggested that Nixon chose this argument as a smoke-screen in front of the real, live issues of the day.

Most of the critics focused their discussions on a simple argument or fact in dispute. A typical newspaper or news magazine approach to that task can be seen in the U.S. News and World Report article, "Phase I of Watergate Ends--Now It's Nixon's Turn," in which the critic responded to Nixon's April 30 speech and to the intervening summer of Senate hearings with these words: "After weeks of conflicting--and often confusing--testimony, it all came down to this: only the President could unravel the tangle of Watergate charges."

The reporter compared the April 30 statement in which Nixon claimed that on March 21 he "personally ordered investigations" with the

5"Nixon Defends the Bombing," Chicago Tribune, August 22, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 16.
testimony in the hearings. Thus, in implied refutation, the reporter wrote: "All three of the August witnesses--Mr. Gray, Mr. Kleindienst, and Mr. Peterson--testified that they received no such orders" from Nixon at that time. The article further predicted that the expected next speech (which came on August 15), was widely regarded as "fateful" for Nixon's Administration.6

A few publications, usually the news magazines and the large, big-city newspapers, were more comprehensive in coverage, including at least some articles which criticized several or many arguments in a speech. An example of this approach was another U.S. News and World Report article, a comprehensive analysis of the April 30 address.7

Omissions in Content

Some critics found omissions and lack of answers the most striking features of Nixon's rhetoric. William F. Buckley, Jr., for example, asserted, "I count it . . . the most inexplicable of Mr. Nixon's silences that he should have refrained from expressing his disgust over the famous Dean memorandum."8 Buckley referred to John Dean's list of "enemies" of the Nixon administration which

had been exposed as a result of Senator Ervin's hearings. Many critics reacted to that same omission, but they only pointed incredulously to the absence of any reference to so startling a document. Most did not see in that omission a possible clue to Nixon's inventive skills and his possible analysis of the audience.

Nixon's arguments received continuing scrutiny, and the President's August speeches began to strain large numbers of critics beyond the point of courtesy and forbearance. This cumulative effect was particularly evident in the responses which focused on the issue of omission or on questions Nixon failed to answer.

Clark Hoyt, of the *Miami Herald*'s Washington Bureau, also wrote about the lack of any specific Nixon answers. In a response to the August 15 address organized around questions oft-asked and the President's responses, Hoyt said:

Q: Did the President take part in the . . . coverup?
A: Nixon repeated earlier denials. . . .
Q: Why didn't Nixon act after a coverup warning . . . ?
A: Without denying it, Nixon did not acknowledge the warning.
Q: Who was ordered to conduct the new investigation?
A: No answer.9

Disorganization was a feature of most of the analytic responses. The Hoyt critique is typical of the disjointed nature of these criticisms. He briefly quoted remarks made by the President and responded to them. He selected only a few statements for

comment and had no obvious plan for the remarks.

Motivation Basis

A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article illustrates a critic's analysis on the basis of Nixon's motivation for his selection of ideas and materials in his speeches, and on the basis of his deliberation and planning. Referring to the August 15 address, the St. Louis writer summarized the arguments and then remarked, "Nixon junked a voluminous Watergate statement because he was worried it would prolong the Senate hearing." The critic noted that the President had conceded that the speech did "not answer many of the contentions raised during the . . . hearings."¹⁰

That presidential admission prompted numerous other respondents to ask "why?" Many conveyed clearly that the President's efforts were empty and futile because he had no real defense. Many stated that Nixon's unwillingness to provide answers and explanations constituted no defense.

Moral/Philosophic Bases

Some writers based their remarks on ideas and arguments from the standpoint of the moral or philosophic bases and implications of Nixon's rhetoric. Seizing on Nixon's statement that what America needed was a return to "decency and civility" (in the August 15

¹⁰"President Junked Detailed Rebuttal," August 17, 1973, p. 4A.
speech), George McGovern, whom Nixon defeated in the 1972 campaign, criticized the philosophic presuppositions behind the statement. After agreeing with the need for those two qualities in politics, McGovern countered:

But I reject Mr. Nixon's view that we can now leave to the courts the issues spotlighted by Watergate. We must recognize how dangerous it is to place political expediency, materialism above the claims of law and conscience.¹¹

McGovern's running mate in 1972, former Director of the Peace Corps, R. Sargent Shriver, was even more cutting in his assessments of Nixon's speech on moral and philosophic grounds. Shriver reacted strongly to Nixon's remarks about Civil Rights activists in the 1960's:

What he shows is a total lack of moral sensitivity to the idea of civil disobedience. He has no conception of the morality of standing up for what you believe in, compared to undercover, devious, efforts to serve a partisan cause.¹²

Another critic, a Lutheran pastor in San Francisco, challenged the President's August 15 speaking on the basis of theological and moral inconsistency. Referring to the President's implacable stand on the issue of legalizing marijuana sales, and remembering Nixon's "law and order stance," Pastor Ralph L. Moellering could not reconcile those with the Nixon statements on August 20 and 22 about the rightness of bombing Cambodia, nor with the Nixon attitude


¹² Ibid.
on burglarizing and bugging. Moellering said:

Notwithstanding the clouds of suspicion hovering over his former staff, the President steadfastly refused to disavow those who have remained loyal to him. In his press conference . . . he pointedly praised Haldeman and Ehrlichman and refused to admit . . . anything incongruous in permitting Haldeman, after his dismissal, to take several tapes home with him to evaluate their content. . . . and if he mildly deplores . . . "dirty tricks," . . . he does so reluctantly. . . . In his speech on August 15, the President pursued the same theme and the same logic.¹³

Although regretting the demerits of Nixon's arguments, some respondents focused on what positive features they could find. For instance, James Reston, not a friend of the Nixon cadre, found in Nixon's messages more of a measure of hope than did most of the critics. Emphasizing the miniscule ray of hope he placed emphasis on the silences, omissions, and lack of substance he found in Nixon's rhetoric, and said with strained good will:

The essential policies of the administration are the same.
The defensive and even deceptive arguments are the same. In short, the Administration is backing into the future and clouding its movements as it goes, but it is moving.

Reston then summarized the arguments in Nixon's April and August speeches, asserted that the questions remained unanswered, but could see in it all the seeds of change and hope. He concluded:

In these melancholy days of contention and confrontation, even if the fundamental questions of the past have not been resolved, these tentative symbols of change . . . "may be

even more important than the President's arguments that he was right all along, and if he wasn't it was somebody else's fault, and anyway, was no worse than what other President's did in the past. \(^\text{14}\)

All the foregoing examples have demonstrated that the critics subjected Nixon's content to examination on the basis of the consistency and merit of his ideas and supporting development in his rhetoric.

**Credibility**

Some writers analyzed Nixon's ideas on the basis of how they revealed the speaker's character and reputation and on the basis of how those features affected the audiences' perception of the speeches. Many focused their analyses on the kinds of responses the President received from his audiences as indicative of his credibility level with his hearers, or how his ideas tended to enhance or reduce his credibility. One reporter suggested Nixon deliberately sought to re-establish his credibility; the reporter said, "In fighting for the reputation of his Administration, Mr. Nixon said 'until March he had believed his aides' assurances that no one in the White House staff or Committee to Reelect the President'" was "involved in the illegal activities." \(^\text{15}\) An editorial critic in the same publication said Mr. Nixon's April 30 "decisiveness" had "been a long time coming, . . .


but is welcome." Both critics criticized on the basis of how Nixon's personal credibility affected his audiences' reception of the messages. Both seemed to suggest that deliberation and planning were expected and commendable. Both illustrate the general fairness in the approaches.

Nixon's past performance and reputation were the focus of a response by William V. Shannon, who found Nixon's August 15 words subject to question simply because Nixon uttered them. Shannon rejected Nixon's protestations of innocence, saying that such uninvolvement and ignorance were inconsistent with Nixon's reputation. Shannon pointed out that Nixon said on August 15, "I launched an intensive effort of my own to get the facts." Shannon then expressed the problem in consistency in these words:

The President now says that he first entrusted the task of getting the facts to Mr. Dean. But why would he turn . . . to the very man who, according to Mr. Nixon's own account, was responsible for all the untrue reports he had been receiving for more than nine months?

In short, the . . . explanation of what he did in those three weeks lacks credibility. 17

Thus, analytic critics found much to write about in evaluating the impact of the President's character and reputation on his Watergate speaking.


Style

Very few of the critics focused on Nixon's use of language or on the significance of his word choices. References present in this category were implied, not stated explicitly.

Some respondents suggested that Nixon's words were deliberately chosen to accomplish his rhetorical purposes. For instance, *The Milwaukee Journal*’s critic wrote about Nixon's style of language in an analytic evaluation of the press conference speaking. At that time Nixon had gingerly supported his Vice President, then under fire for misconduct, and shortly thereafter indicted. The reporter clearly suggested that Nixon had deliberated in his choices of words. Language was the basis for the Milwaukee critic's observations when he said, "Nixon's remarks about Agnew appeared to be carefully worded. He seemed to draw a distinction between his confidence in Agnew's performance as Vice-President and his activities before he was Vice President."\(^{18}\)

Sometimes critics placed quotation marks around certain word choices, presumably to indicate words of particular importance. For example, an anonymous correspondent of *The Christian Science Monitor* remarked that in the San Clemente press conference "Mr. Nixon pledged to accept a 'definitive' ruling on the tapes," and that "he expressed continuing, controlled annoyance at a 'constant

barrage 12 to 15 minutes a night' on major TV networks." In this manner critics suggested that Nixon deliberated in choosing or in emphasizing the terms, or that the terms deserved attention of the readers.

Analytic criticisms, however, did not dwell on word choices, and mentioned them rarely. No critic emphasized language as a basis for evaluating Nixon's rhetoric. The reactions which did appear to be based on language choices were oblique and unorganized.

Organization

No critic who sought primarily to analyze the texts of Nixon's speeches referred to organization of the materials and ideas in the speeches. The lack of criticisms using arrangement as a basis for comment reveals that arrangement of Nixon's ideas simply was not important to these respondents. They did not seek or find any of the clues to understanding the rhetoric that may have been related to order of presentation.

Delivery

Mention of delivery also was scarce. Only comments such as "he read" appeared in reference to a section of the New Orleans speech. No articles of the analytic type included comment based on manner of presentation or vocal characteristics, matters

related to the speaker's delivery.

**Summary and Implications**

What seemed to be the consensus was expressed in the title of an article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: "President Added Little, Both Faithful, Foes Say." Without exception, writers who developed responses to the content of the President's messages found that the substance of his remarks was slight, and their observations became more explicitly stated, more fully documented, and more insistent in the assessment of the August speeches.

The analytic criticals were fewer than any of the three types. In contrast to others they examined the President's speeches primarily from the standpoint of the actual substance of his arguments. Not many engaged in writing impressions or in synthesizing or in predicting or suggesting what the President might be expected to say. Rather, they evaluated the consistency and merit of the ideas and supporting details and, to a lesser extent, how those ideas and materials reflected on the speaker's credibility and how they revealed motivation and the speaker's philosophy. The critics showed no concern for how the speaker might have deliberately chosen materials and ideas for his speeches which would tend to appeal to the audience's emotions.

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20 August 16, 1973, p. 2A.
In some reports, the writers refuted or confirmed Presidential arguments and supportive or illustrative details by commenting on their acceptability. In all cases studied the writers concentrated on only a few arguments, or in some cases on only one argument. No critic discussed the total content.

In defense of these critics, it should be noted that arguments in Nixon's speeches were few in number—usually no more than four. These premises were simply stated and then amplified, but not supported. The organization in Nixon's three speeches was simple, probably requiring no particular attention to order. Essentially Nixon's arguments were these: that he did not know about the illegal activities until after they occurred; that he had tried to get to the truth about the matter; that while he deplored the illegal practices, they were common; that he promised to prevent re-occurrence of such activities; and, finally, that he had no intention to resign as President.

Because of the few substantive answers to the real Watergate issues, writers had little specificity upon which to react. While many critics apparently felt that the presidential statements were too vague to invite logical analysis, they did, however, invite and receive considerable attention on the basis of what they left unsaid. Many critics were obviously and deeply concerned about the lack of substance and the lack of specific answers in Nixon's speeches.
Some reporters found a basis for criticism in the possible motives behind the Nixon statements. Many analytic critics were concerned about determining or commenting on why Nixon said what he said or why he did not say something they thought he could have or should have said.

A number of critics suggested that clues for understanding the ideas and materials in Nixon's speeches lay in his moral, theological, or philosophic assumptions. Some indicated these attitudes and assumptions explained Nixon's statements, while others pointed out that the only clue to unlocking the mysteries of Nixon's rhetoric lay in his legendarily devious, secretive personality. They found his conduct, words, and personality oddly out of step with traditional American values. Although these respondents generally failed to understand or condone Nixon's unwillingness to speak candidly on the issues, and found it increasingly difficult to analyze his words with anything less than amazement and contempt, they were fair and restrained in their analyses.

When a critic tended toward an analytic level of response, he often implied some kind of evaluation, but either left more judicial response for another critic or took up the task himself another day. Several columnists wrote essentially analyses of the April 30 speech and later, particularly after the August 15 address, concentrated more on synthesis and evaluation.
It is not without significance that most of the responses with analytic emphasis were in an article form of writing. Articles, whether by-lined or anonymous, were probably the more hastily written of the writing types, authored by harried and hurried reporters who left the evaluations primarily for columnists and editors.

Although not a dominant mode of criticism, the analytic approach provided description, analysis, and some interpretation of the speeches. In so doing, these critics may have been filling an important role for those readers who may not have been familiar with the ideas and materials used in the President's speeches. According to the polls, an unusually high percentage of Americans knew about and were concerned about the Watergate episode. Even for those readers who saw or heard the speeches, the analyses had potential to enhance understanding and appreciation in a manner not possible in other kinds of criticism. Both impressionistic and judicial criticisms tended to presume knowledge of the speeches. Synthetic criticisms tended to emphasize the setting and other such concerns more than content, and neither probably filled the role of analytic criticism in reacting to the total body of Nixon's speaking. Perhaps analytic responses also helped readers to evaluate the rhetoric in a less hurried fashion and encouraged for some engagement in more reflection on the speech content than could have been achieved in only viewing the speeches.
Since the complete texts of the speeches and the press conference were published in most of the newspapers, analytic criticisms, if combined with a reading of the texts, could have enhanced greatly the possibility of intelligent responses by the general public. If ever such intelligent, informed responses were made possible, it would have been in this period and about these speeches. During the period studied the people virtually were bombarded with texts, TV and printed media criticisms, reactions, and comment on every hand. Probably at no point in our history has so much specific reaction to specific speeches been available for public scrutiny. Whether all this really matters in affecting the course of events remains to be seen.
CHAPTER V

SYNTHETIC CRITICISM

Introduction

Thonssen, Baird, and Braden describe synthetic criticism in these words:

Synthetic criticism is the third general type. Here, as in the analytic, the critic collects an abundance of facts; but he goes further. He gathers the data which deal not with the speech alone but with the other elements in the total situation, with the speaker, the audience, and the occasion. His principal aim is to collect and arrange these facts so that a faithful reconstruction of the original situation can be achieved. As far as he goes, the critic employing the synthetic method may conduct an effective piece of work. He falls short of the ideal in criticism, however, if he fails to interpret his results.¹

About 20% of all the criticisms in this study illustrated clearly the process of synthesis in criticism. As the Speech Criticism definition suggests, such responses often have effective, if incomplete, criticism. They included in the series studied not only reactions, opinions, and references to the substance of the messages, but also analyzed and described mood, setting, audiences, and occasions.

They placed an address into its context of surrounding events, previous addresses, and reactions to the time, content, and speaker.

This level of criticism tends to synthesize as many diverse elements as possible, measures the milieu of the speech, and recognizes that a speech is more than just words or only an expression of the image of the speaker. Those who wrote synthetic responses helped readers to recognize and to appreciate the complicated matrix of the total speech situation.

**Characteristics and Examples**

As was true in the other types of responses, synthetic critics focused on invention, that is, on selection of arguments and materials. Primarily they commented on the nature, consistency, and merit of the speaker's ideas, and on evaluations of the personality and reputation of the speaker.

Discussing the speaker's word choices and language usage, setting, occasion, and audiences, some dealt with predictions and estimates of effect. More than in the other three types of criticisms, these critics commented on delivery, or the speaker's use of voice and body in his presentation.

The following discussions show how synthetic writers blended all these varied elements into a kind of synthesis. Their efforts had much potential for increasing the readers' understanding and appreciation of the President's speaking on Watergate.
Invention

Some critics commented only on the logical merit or consistency of the speaker's ideas (logos) or on his credibility (ethos). They did not comment directly on how the speaker's invention might have had an emotional impact on the audiences (pathos). Often the writers combined the logical and ethical bases for discussion.

Logic and Credibility Combined

Usually in evaluating the invention of the speaker, writers blended their comments on logical and ethical appeals in the speaker's choices of ideas and materials. The critics discussed the nature, consistency, and merit of Nixon's ideas along with the ways Nixon's personality and reputation affected the selection and reception of those ideas and materials.

For instance, an article in the *San Francisco Examiner* combined analysis of speech content with comments about the speaker's activities in the preceding week and political and legal developments which charged the atmosphere in which the speech event occurred. In the article, "Mr. Nixon Answers His Critics," the writer pointed out that Nixon directed the August 15 speech at "a public widely skeptical of claims of White House innocence." The reporter connected comments about the President's speech preparation to observations about White House advisers at work on a rebuttal to Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox's court-ordered request for tapes of
Nixon's conversations in the "oval office." Characterizing Nixon's mood, the article compared some of Nixon's August 15 statements with April 30 and subsequent public statements. The response dealt with alleged discrepancies in these statements and focused attention in commendable detail on the President's oral discourse.²

Charles Gould, also of the San Francisco Examiner, taking a similar approach, reacted to the nature and merit of Nixon's ideas and commented on Nixon's credibility, character, and reputation. Gould praised what he described as the consistency of Nixon's arguments and complained:

His critics have prejudged him. They would have been satisfied with nothing less than a confession of guilt.

I believe the President is telling the truth. I also believe he is correct in suggesting that the Watergate investigation be conducted in the courts.

Referring to Nixon's critics, to context, and to audience, Gould's response tended to increase trust and respect for the President and his ideas. One of the few to express public faith in Nixon, Gould also listed Nixon's "achievements" and sought to diminish the damaging effects of John Dean's Senate hearing testimony and other unflattering Watergate developments.³


Logical Emphasis

As they sought to find the bases for Nixon's arguments or as they commented on the consistency and merit of his ideas, the writers seemed to be struggling. By the very variety of the materials, issues, and bases used in their responses, the writers revealed that they were searching for explanations for the Watergate phenomenon. They struggled with the spectacle of an embattled, embittered president fighting to retain his position. Not knowing how to express their ideas on the volatile Watergate issue, the critics expressed their feelings of frustration and inadequacy in having to write what they did.

For example, in writing of the April 30 address, Hedley Donovan speculated on why Haldeman and Ehrlichman had been countenanced by Nixon for so long. Commenting on Nixon's working methods and attitudes, the critic synthesized his response by illustrating how a speech critic could go beyond discussion of speech content while shedding critical light on how or why the speaker said what he said. Describing one of the paradoxes of the April 30 speech, Donovan related one Nixon statement to past events:

Until the past fortnight, the White House was treating journalistic pursuit of the Watergate story as though it were malicious or downright unpatriotic. In his April 30 speech, belatedly but generously, the President actually praised the press for its work in exposing Watergate.⁴

Credibility Emphasis

Many of the writers constructed criticisms which focused on the probity of Nixon's character or the effect of his reputation on his speeches and on his audiences. A number of reporters used poll results to indicate how the President's esteem with the people affected or could affect his speaking. Putting the poll results after the August 22 news conference into perspective, a *Time* reporter wrote, "Even after President Nixon's recent TV address and press conference, most Americans still believe that he is not telling the complete truth about Watergate." Citing the study done by Daniel Yankelovitch, Inc., on the basis of surveys before and after August 15, and after the press conference on August 22, the *Time* writer concluded:

The polls' general consistency . . . seems to confirm that the public verdict is in, and it is not likely to change. That verdict is . . . that the President is guilty of personal complicity in Watergate. But partly because they see no practical way of doing something about the President's actions without damaging the country, a majority (54%) . . . say that they are becoming bored by Watergate.5

The foregoing selection clearly illustrates synthesis and not subjective reactions. The writer only implied evaluation.

Some respondents sought to be fair, but their statements nonetheless had a negative effect. Relating Nixon's efforts to the Senate hearings, to Congressional reactions, and to the general public's reactions, a critic in *The Christian Science Monitor* reported,

"It seems uncertain that Mr. Nixon's appeal will be successful."
Certainly that was an understatement. "Even among conservatives,"
the article continued, "an air of doubt, at least, is evident. Mr.
Nixon's speech delivered in a sober, temperate tone, left many
questions unanswered."⁶

Unquestionably these reporters had a plethora of materials
and issues to use in their responses. All indications were, however,
that the credibility of the President, at an all-time low, was the
lively issue of the day. Writers who emphasized synthesis used
details of Nixon's personality and background liberally. Without
question, Nixon was not believed by a large number of these reporters,
and the details about the President personally were generally employed
to support negative assessments.

Another emphasis was to compare Nixon's rhetoric in these
cases with the President's own "standards" for bluster and evasion
which they suggested was Nixon's usual style. Shana Alexander
insisted Nixon was "the Master quick-change artist in American
politics," and called him "our Chameleon in Chief."⁷ Most of
the responses were not that caustic, but unquestionably Nixon
seemed to have with these reporters generally a reputation for slick,
opportunistic, and impassioned rhetoric.


On the other hand, some critics who shared that view found Nixon's Watergate speaking pale by comparison with past rhetorical efforts. Several found Nixon's Watergate rhetoric oddly inept. A notable instance occurred in The New Republic where Gerald W. Johnson compared the April 30 address to the style of Lincoln's and Franklin Roosevelt's speaking, and, as did several other critics, compared the same speech to Nixon's 1952 "Checkers tale." As in all such comparisons, The New Republic's critique was unfavorable to Nixon. Using sarcasm, Johnson declared Mencken would be sad to find "the greatest boob bumper of then all brought low, apparently by the startling ineptitude of his hired hands."
To Johnson, "Boob bumping" apparently meant what more sedate citizens might recognize as "pulling the wool over the eyes."^{8}

Some syntheses involved contrasting Nixon's previous position with his post Watergate position, specifically in terms of security. For instance, after describing the President's 1972 election victory and apparent secure position, Johnson, synthesizing analysis, description, context, and judgment, asked:

How . . . does it happen that the President felt it his duty, just four months after the most astounding electoral triumph since James Monroe got every electoral vote but one, to go before the country and assume the technical, although not the moral responsibility for some of the dirtiest skul-duggery ever exposed in a national campaign?^{9}

^{8}while the Art of Boob Bumping," May 19, 1973 pp. 7,8.

^{9}Ibid., p. 8.
Fred L. Zimmerman in the *Wall Street Journal* also compared Nixon's Watergate speaking to Nixon's "tear-jerking Checker's speech," and concluded that Nixon "showed he still is counting heavily on public relations tactics." After quoting Nixon's claim of having uncovered nameless "major developments," Zimmerman countered: "But that statement failed to diminish the pressure on him. Yesterday's shake-up was far more pleasing to Congress and Republicans, who fear Watergate's impact in next year's mid-term elections." He further suggested Nixon's "law and order" stance and his Administration's "smooth government" claims would now be hard to "put across."  

As these critics developed their evaluations around a variety of bases, Nixon's ideas, personality, and reputation received unfavorable treatment. They did so more by implication than by analysis in depth. In reading the responses, it seemed that the critics did not take either the President or his ideas seriously. The writers also seemed to presume reasonable readers would agree with their assessments.

**Delivery**

Responses by these critics, more than the others, commented on manner of representation. The vocal and physical dimensions to Nixon's speaking were factors in these assessments which helped

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to convey a composite, synthesized picture. They provided the reader with bases for understanding and appreciation of the varied characteristics of these moments of distinctly oral communication.

References to delivery occurred in several of the responses cited in preceding sections, but in those the references were incidental. Those in the following section contain emphasis on how the speech was delivered, or manner of presentation.

Describing Nixon's appearance and his method of presentation as emotionally intense, deliberately subdued, or different from his delivery of some previous speech, the critics implied that such descriptions might aid in understanding the President's words.

**April 30 Speech**

Referring to Nixon's first Watergate speech, several critics commented on the emotional intensity revealed in the speaker's delivery of the April 30 speech. John Herbers wrote:

Tonight Mr. Nixon was tense and grave. At the start of the speech he stumbled several times as he shuffled the pages from which he read. Afterward, technicians in the room said, the President brushed tears from his eyes and said, "It wasn't easy."¹¹

Jan Denison found Nixon "plaintive and even humble" and suggested it was a mood which "most Americans had never seen."¹²

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his evaluation, James Deakin suggested that Nixon's speaking "with almost feverish intensity," arose from the President's efforts to secure his presidency and his place in history. That was the point apparently of most such references. The critics probably correctly sensed how important the ethical position of the speaker was in getting his message across and how important it was to Nixon personally. The feeling of the public about Nixon, as revealed in the polls taken shortly afterward, seemed to confirm the reporters' presentations of Nixon.

Critics generally seemed unable to avoid describing Nixon's appearance. In numerous instances writers seemed to be searching for clues in appearance and delivery to understand the man and the message. For example, a correspondent for The London Observer described Nixon's appearance in scrupulous detail:

When President Nixon stepped up to the microphones in the White House recently to make his electrifying "major developments" statement about the Watergate scandal, he wore a small American flag in his button-hole . . . his sideburns came down to the mid-point of his ears—the very length, as it happens, permitted by the police department of Oakland, Calif.

Norman Mailer once described Mr. Nixon as looking like an undertaker: but as he took to the rostrum to make his historic announcement, it seemed to me that he resembled less an undertaker than the manager of a medium-price motel who had emerged from his office to quieten complaints from the guests. The President almost entirely lacks presence; he is the most powerful man in the world, but the power does not show. By comparison with his predecessor, President

13 "Nixon Accepts Blame," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, May 1, 1973, pp. 1A, 6A.
Johnson, whose slow, watchful entrance into a room instantly heightened the tension of everyone in it [sic]. Mr. Nixon seemed quite ingratiating and nervous.  

Critics generally seemed to be implying that Nixon's manner of presentation revealed a deeply troubled man who struggled vainly in April to appear confident and who seemed almost frantic in his efforts of August 20 to build a following. Critics seemed to sense that Nixon apparently made a determined effort throughout this period to alter the impression the majority of the critics reported.

The August 15 Speech

If the evaluations of Nixon's August 15 rhetoric are accurate, the President on that occasion had determined to reveal less inner trauma and to convey more confidence. Richard L. Strout noted that Nixon delivered this speech "in a sober, temperate tone," and Cragg Hines wrote that Nixon's appearance was "not as grave" as on April 30. Most of the critics suggested that the difference was calculated. "He was a grim man," Rudy Abramson found, "carefully following a text he had worked on for many days in the seclusion of Camp David, speaking from the Oval Office to millions of Americans, shown

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by polls to have deserted him in alarming numbers in recent weeks.\textsuperscript{17}

Several critics found the manner of presentation was so unlike Nixon's previous efforts when under stress, Ronald J. Ostrow of the \textit{Los Angeles Times} pointed out that Nixon's delivery on August 15 was largely devoid of drama. Ostrow suggested the manner of presentation was almost anti-climactic, coming as the first speech by the President after three months of dramatic Senate hearings: "Nixon conveyed no emotion, no feeling of having been betrayed by trusted aides and told little that was new."\textsuperscript{18}

Finding the President's uncharacteristic reserve a clue to understanding the way Nixon was approaching his task, some critics agreed that the August 15 address represented for Nixon a determined, if belated, effort to restore his sagging esteem. To them, he expressed his determination not only in his words but in the use of voice and body.

\textbf{The August 20 Speech}

Events apparently shattered that outward calm and calculated reserve of President Nixon by the time he delivered his VFW address in New Orleans. These writers suggested that delivery was an important clue to understanding the speech. Indeed, without some


reference to the manner of the President's presentation, the critic could not convey what the audience actually saw and heard. Without a synthesis of delivery and audience response, readers could not appreciate the significance of Nixon's apparent failure to accomplish his purpose.

Critical remarks about the President's gestures and vocal characteristics were unflattering. Describing his erratic platform conduct, several writers suggested that Nixon forgot what he planned to say. He seemed agitated. James Deakin, a Washington correspondent for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, said of the scene and the physical aspects of the President's speaking:

Yesterday was a hot, muggy, August day in New Orleans. It turned out to be a tense and difficult day for President ... Nixon.

The President blew his lines in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He blew up at Ziegler and gave him an unceremonious shove, and he had to change the route of his motorcade because of a reported assassination plot.  

A critic in the *San Francisco Examiner* found Nixon "visibly tense," with a "combative tone" which was reminiscent of the 1972 campaign speaking. This reporter described the loud cheering when the President criticized those who disagreed with his bombing policy and he reported that Nixon's "voice rose" at times of emphasis.  

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19 "President Fluffs His Lines, Has Altogether Bad Day," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 21, 1973, p. 1A.

Deakin, however, said Nixon’s "voice trailed off" at times and that "he mumbled some words." When Nixon suggested what would happen if the United States renounced its role in the world, the correspondent noted Nixon’s words were: "Then our children will live in a very different kind of war," apparently meaning "world." At another point, Deakin reported the official stenographer heard Nixon’s words one way and others heard him another way. The implication was that Nixon’s delivery at times was not clear.

Some reporters disagreed about Nixon’s behavior at New Orleans, but they were not typical. Gaylord Shaw, for instance, reported in The Times-Picayune that the President "closely followed" the prepared text of his address and that he "held the text firmly in both hands and spoke calmly and firmly." Another writer found Nixon’s delivery "extemporaneous" after the initial section in which the President "followed closely if not verbatim, the text of a statement he issued ... before arriving in New Orleans." That critic found Nixon's audience "friendly" and implied that Nixon spoke with relative ease in a friendly situation—an evaluation not in agreement

21 "President Fluffs . . . ," p. 1A.


with the majority of the critics' findings.

The August 22 Press Conference

Not agreeing in all of their evaluations and all of their descriptions of the President's voice, gestures, and appearance at his San Clemente press conference two days later, reporters generally found Nixon's New Orleans delivery erratic. Since the two occasions differed greatly in setting and format, the type of delivery appropriate and expected was different. In New Orleans the President's speech was delivered before a convention of persons who viewed themselves apparently as patriots. It was not televised. In contrast, at San Clemente the President was not delivering a prepared speech, per se; he was on national television, delivering his responses and his remarks, between questions, before an outdoor assemblage of essentially hostile reporters--hostile, but not necessarily any more or less patriotic than the members of the VFW.

In writing about the press conference, critics referred to Nixon's voice, tone, and appearance, and expressed assessments of confidence or other qualities which his manner of presentation conveyed. Some suggested Nixon showed considerable strain. Some implied that the apparent pressure the President felt indicated Nixon felt guilt as well as frustration, while others indicated Nixon showed anger because he felt the press misused him. As the press and the nation finally heard the President field specific questions on the Watergate issue,
most of these critics expressed or implied that Nixon's vocal characteristics and the other physical indications of strain and anger were significant factors in understanding what happened at San Clemente.

A reporter wrote in The Milwaukee Journal that Nixon's face seemed "puffy" and that he answered some questions "with a show of irritation." The article's title, "Site Idyllic, but Mood Grim," revealed the writer's use of description and synthesis as he reacted to Nixon's press conference rhetoric. A writer for The Courier-Journal suggested the President's delivery "showed both the wearying effects of Watergate and a resentment against those who would 'exploit' the issue." Not favorable to the President, some critics expressed begrudging admiration for the way Nixon "had the situation under control." Even Carl Rowan, hostile to the President in most of his columns, said:

For all the perspiration, cheek-twitching, voice-cracking, and word-fumbling, President Nixon slugged it out with anger, sarcasm, humor, and no small measure of skill. His aides pretend to be so elated with the President's performance that they are predicting he will never again hide from the press or run from public questioning.

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26 "Nixon and the Press," The Atlanta Constitution, August 29, 1973, p. 4A.
Laurence Stern of the Los Angeles Times-Washington Post Service reported in *The Courier-Journal* that in spite of a voice that "quavered" and "the tension" that blazed in his face, "Nixon kept his Watergate defense perimeters intact" during "the 50-minute performance." That, Stern added, "can be called nothing less than a full-scale confrontation."27 Impressed with Nixon's relative cool, Stern found:

He summoned up all the old craft and artifices that had been forged in his earlier crises to do battle with the clamoring journalists.

At the outset, in laying out his case, the President was visibly uneasy, his face puffy, his words stammered. But he seemed to gain confidence and take command as it went along. The turning point seemed to be the burst of laughter he got when he referred to shoving of Press Secretary Ron L. Ziegler.28

One critic said that voice was a clue to Nixon's true feelings and corroborated other observations about what might be the effects. Concerning Nixon's delivery in the press conference, the writer stated, "He was terrified of that thing, you could hear it in his voice, but he did well. He always does well in news conferences."29 This selection illustrates how critical responses based


on delivery helped to clarify, amplify, or support other references. In this case the critic's "does well"reference referred to the speaker's delivery skills, his confidence, perhaps, and to his ability to stand up under harsh questioning. However, the reference also clearly supports the writer's earlier favorable remarks about the logical consistency and reasonableness of Nixon's answers. Thus, references to how the speaker delivered his addresses and remarks were the focus for critic's responses apparently because they were important in themselves and because they were ways of amplifying and supporting observations about the content of the speaker's message. It is also possible that such references and insight they represented were all the more important because of the long silences by the President, his lack of responsiveness, and the simplicity and repetitiveness of his rhetoric.

Organization

Comments about arrangement of the speeches' ideas were simple observations such as about what the President said "next," or about how he "opened" or "closed" his addresses. These remarks appeared to be unimportant to the critics. No evaluation in any of the sources examined emphasized organization or was based on organization of the speaker's ideas and materials.
Style

References to language and word choices were important in the same sense as were those to delivery, and essentially for the same reasons. References based on evaluations or remarks about Nixon's language seemed to serve primarily to support and to amplify critics' assertions about content or about speaker credibility. Illustrating how the critic usually implied rather than stated explicitly observations about language, the following are typical examples of references that illustrate their use as support and amplification. They fall basically into the following categories: discussions of the tone and mood, the speaker's language, or assessments emphasizing deliberation and objectives in Mr. Nixon's use of language.

Tone and Mood

Critics often expressed the assertion that Nixon created a "tone or mood" through use of certain words. Suggesting that Nixon's words were not usually consistent with his actions, James Reston wrote that Nixon's April 30 address "was full of self pity and unconvincing alibis." "It is wiser," Reston asserted, "to pay attention to what he does rather than what he says." Reston shared that cynical attitude with many of the other critics.

30"There's a Lot More to This," The Atlanta Constitution, May 2, 1973, p. 2A.
Deliberation and Objectives

Critics used descriptions of Nixon's language to suggest or imply motivation or to clarify the President's objectives. Presidential language consisted, one critic said, of "excuses and words of praise."31 His April 30 talk, The Wall Street Journal's Fred L. Zimmerman thought, was "sometimes maudlin," and surely would be compared with his "tear-jerking 'Checkers speech.'"32

Calling the New Orleans speech "a scathing counter-attack," and "combative," one reporter pointed out that Nixon termed the rationale of his critics "ludicrous and absurd," and implied that they were "hypocrites."33 The references clearly referred to both word choices and the energetic delivery of those words. Asserting that Nixon's language was as important as his ideas, Strout said:

The tone of the speech as much as its content roused deepest political interest. . . . The President did not mention Watergate at all in his speech but focused on foreign affairs: the Vietnam "peace with honor."34

31 "Other Voices: Watergate and Broken Confidence," The Atlanta Constitution, May 3, 1973, p. 4B.


An editor found Nixon's April 30 language "conciliatory."

Another critic felt that Nixon had revealed his contempt for John Dean by acknowledging "coldly" that Dean "has also resigned." Such references clearly imply presidential deliberation in language usage.

Going beyond implication, some critics stated explicitly that Nixon deliberated in choosing the terms and the tone of his language in the speeches. An example of this kind of response is found in The Christian Science Monitor's reprint of Harry Reasoner's ABC-TV comment of September 6, 1973, about the August 22 news conference. Reasoner said:

But he is well now. He dismissed the press in general as doing a slanted and incomplete job of telling the country what is going on and as incapable—the implication was that it is also unwilling—to help restore confidence in the presidency. He evoked a heartbreaking picture of a beleaguered leader pilloried nightly on every newscast by the "leers and sneers" of commentators.

I think he is neurotic about the press as well as inaccurate but it is one of the facets of this President that the country has to live with, and I suppose one of the least important, except as indicative of other attitudes. Leers and sneers is a phrase in the Nixon tradition—didn't he invent or at least popularize that fine old thing "prophets of gloom and doom"—but hard to document. I think it is mostly the President who sneers, which is, of course, his perfect right.


36 Loye Miller, Jr., "Power to Pick a Prosecutor Is Delayed," The Miami Herald, May 1, 1973, p. 15A.

Reasoner clearly suggested that Nixon is generally well aware of the possible impact of the effects of his words on his audience, that Nixon is, in fact, a conscious stylist. Implying that Nixon deliberately denigrates his opponents by labeling them unfavorably, Reasoner suggests that the President elicits sympathy of the audience by portraying himself through labels and epigrams as a wounded, misused person. This criticism seemed to be implicit in a number of responses, but the writers seemed to assume that such phrases as "the old Nixon," or "in the style of Nixon," conveyed to the reader what Reasoner described more clearly. This very incompleteness was one of the prominent features of the responses studied.

Some writers found that Nixon "attempted humor" during the press conference's prolonged questioning. One critic asserted firmly that: "Nixon's remarks about Agnew appeared to be carefully worded. He seemed to draw a distinction between his confidence in Agnew's performance and his confidence in Agnew's performance as Vice-president."

The foregoing examples of references to style suggest that the critics referred to word choices and language primarily to corroborate or to support other observations—usually observations

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about manner of presentation or credibility and reputation. Many of the references to style were only oblique or implied. No one wrote an analysis of Nixon's speaking clearly focused on stylistic characteristics, although some did suggest that language choices were deliberate. Writers generally suggested that language helped to set a "tone," or else they simply pointed up key terms in Nixon's speeches. In these writings, the approach about style was incomplete and suggestive, not consistently or exhaustively developed.

Audiences, Settings, Occasions

Synthetic critics described the mood of the speaking event, the audience, the occasion, the physical surroundings, and the events which preceded and followed the speech event. They did not amplify these observations or suggest explicitly how these circumstances and settings could affect the President's speaking.

In an apparent effort to increase understanding of the speech and of their criticisms, writers included information about who was in the audience and material on the nature of the occasion and setting. They implied that the speeches had to be dealt with in their contexts and not as isolated words. The potential effects of these observations were great. Readers had bases for understanding and evaluating the speeches because of these syntheses of events, background, and setting. Although synthetic critics did not engage in much judgment, and although the writers did not develop their
materials in very much detail, the criticisms provided some bases for judgment.

**Occasion**

Occasion was an important factor in some assessments. For instance, many writers sought to convey that the April 30 address was important because it was the first major address by the President on Watergate. They discussed the expectant attitude of the people, the President's reasons for waiting to speak, and the possible effects of the speech. Many made the point that the speech was a major disappointment because it seemed to contain no substantive answers.

Especially concerned with conveying how important the August 15 occasion was, writers cited the long silence over the summer, the voluminous testimony in the Senate hearings, and the fact that Nixon spoke at a time when polls indicated that his believability was at the lowest point ever for an American president.

Some writers pointed to the unique qualities of the New Orleans speech as Nixon's first effort to speak before a live audience after Watergate began. Critics suggested Nixon chose the occasion and the audience carefully, hoping to gain the maximum benefit from the effort. None developed in any detail possible implications of Nixon's choosing and his choices.

The press conference, journalists said, was a very important event: the setting and the timing were particularly crucial. Some felt Nixon had failed in New Orleans and that he needed badly
to gain support through the press conference. Reporters suggested
Nixon chose the San Clemente setting to help portray him as relaxed
and serene as the stately setting. Most of the critics expressed
the belief that Nixon wanted to appear unmoved by the Watergate
trauma, but the writers did not engage in assessing Nixon's moti-
vation.

References to occasion were present in all of the types
of criticism, and some brief references appeared in a majority of all
criticisms. Demonstrating how reference to place, occasion, and
timing could play a vital role in a response, an editorial asked after
the press conference:

Why did he wait more than five damaging months to
stand before the press and give direct, forceful answers
the public has been waiting to hear . . . ?
The occasion was a demonstration of the unique value
of such public conferences. Presidential speeches and state-
ments are not a substitute for the face to face exchange of
the press conference.

This is the exchange Mr. Nixon had been avoiding
since March. Had he appeared sooner he would have cut
the hostile edge of the questions pointed at him. . . .

Such remarks placed the speaking event in the context of
a specific occasion. In establishing the image of a relaxed, in-
control president, the observer suggested the importance of the
occasion in understanding the speaking event.

40 "A Visible Nixon," San Francisco Examiner, August 24,
Audience

More than others, synthetic responses referred to the nature and significance of the audiences. They did so in relation to the first two speeches (April 30 and August 15) largely by reporting results of polls and by suggesting whether audiences were or would be favorable or unfavorable to the President. Sometimes, as in the San Francisco article just cited, the critic wrote of audience expectancy. Only in relation to the New Orleans and the San Clemente occasions did synthetic critics dwell on exactly who was in each audience.

References to the New Orleans audience were the most specific. An article by Robert C. Toth illustrated how he developed his criticism in the *Los Angeles Times* with details of the speaker's audience, as well as by references to the speaker's ideas. In commenting on the New Orleans address, Toth described the number of people on the parade route, the number of onlookers and their mood, and the words on placards. He characterized the host organization as "one of the nation's more patriotic groups," timed the speech at 30 minutes, and described the "unusually large contingent of secret service men" who stood watchful over Mr. Nixon's audience of about 4,500 veterans and women's auxiliary members," implying that the audience's patriotism was responsible for the VFW audience's vigorous applause for Nixon's call for keeping the nation
Richard L. Strout said that Nixon's New Orleans listeners were "sympathetic" and that they received the address "warmly." Some others, however, described the response to the President as less than the enthusiasm the President might have expected, while several mentioned confusion in that the audience apparently was not sure how to respond to some of Nixon's statements.

Of the press conference there was uniform agreement that Nixon faced a hostile group of White House newsmen in his immediate audience, although critics did not agree on whether the questioners behaved in a hostile manner. Writers agreed that whatever the conduct of his questioners, the President saw in the press conference an opportunity to establish his credibility and to convince the people that he was a beleagured, innocent, hard-working president harassed by the press. Newsweek's reporter suggested that because the New Orleans and the August 15 speeches had been failures, Nixon was determined to redeem himself. Nixon went out reluctantly, many suggested, into "the bright sun" for "50 contentious minutes" where he "dueled, defended, and counter-attacked against a battery of accusatory reporters seeking answers and even apologies for the


Watergate scandals."\footnote{43}

According to *Newsweek*, the audience consisted of 100 reporters, many of whom felt as did one who said the questioning "was probably the bluntest and hardest questioning" he had "ever heard" at presidential news conferences. The same *Newsweek* article (and several others) pointed out that at such press conferences the President "can call on or avoid anyone he wants to. He can answer as much or as little . . . as he chooses, and there is rarely a follow-up, since each reporter is eager to ask his own question, not to reinforce others."\footnote{44}

Nixon's strategy seemed to be to bait the questioners in his audience and deliberately to "throw himself to the wolves," thereby demonstrating that reporters had unduly concentrated on Watergate. Nixon made several statements before, during and after the news conference that newsmen were totally consumed with Watergate. Several critics stated Nixon openly bid for sympathy and support by attempting to make the reporters look bad.

James Deakin of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Peter Lisagor of the *Chicago Daily News*, Clark Mollenhoff, a former Nixon aide and now a sharp critic of Nixon on the staff of a Des Moines newspaper, Dan Rather of CBS News, and many others were

\footnote{43}{"On the Rebound?" September 3, 1973, p. 22.}

\footnote{44}{"Presidents Always Win," September 3, 1973, p. 66."}
present. Kenneth Crawford of The Washington Post described the assemblage in an article in his newspaper:

Most of the reporters . . . were White House regulars—permanently assigned to cover the Presidency. They are in a sense an elite corps. . . .

The White House press room since the advent of the Nixon administration has not been a happy place. The camaraderie the press enjoyed with President Kennedy and his circle is no more. Information is hard to come by.

The consensus among reporters is that bad blood between Nixon administration functionaries and the press derives from the President's penchant for secrecy and withdrawal, . . . but on the other side . . . the complaint is that the reporters are implacable—that nothing Mr. Nixon could do would win him much favor in the press room. 45

Although reporters were the immediate audience, critics made it obvious that the President was distinctly aware of a larger audience—one to which he directed his answers—the people "out there." This playing over the heads of the reporters and his evasions of direct questions explains why many of the reporters became frustrated and angry at Nixon.

Virtually unanimous, writers concluded that Nixon had "won" the event if it were considered a contest, but that he did not heal any wounds, or answer questions adequately. The press conference provided many critics with material to develop syntheses of the rhetoric of the President, the uniqueness of the event, and the nature of his audience of "enemies." Providing helpful insights into the inter-relationships of the speaker and audience, many reporters furnished

Setting

Critics made reference to the physical setting, particularly the press conference at San Clemente. Illustrative of this was one observer's comments: "For his first news conference in more than five months, the President chose an open-air forum, the sun-splashed bluffs of San Clemente, overlooking the Pacific beaches where he likes to walk, seeking tranquility." Tending to cast the speaker in a hero-like role, a reporter for The Courier-Journal included this description: "Standing for 50 minutes in the bright sunlight on the lawn of the Western White House, Mr. Nixon answered every question put to him on Watergate." Using description, this reporter created an image for the speaker by conjuring up a vision of an embattled, stalwart leader facing relentless questioners.

Usually critics referred to setting in explaining why the speaker perspired or why he seemed nervous, or to explain and defend other observations. Sometimes the writers used setting descriptions apparently to heighten the drama of the moment or to indicate unique qualities which the speaker and his aides had created for the setting, such as the references to Nixon's backdrop of "blue


velvet"--a synthetic type of remark in a response of essentially judicial characteristics. 48

In Newsweek, for example, the reporter referred to the "props" used for the April 30 speech which were not present the next time Nixon spoke from the Oval Office: "When Mr. Nixon appeared before the television cameras . . . his performance was strangely muted. Familiar props--the bust of Lincoln, the family photograph--were missing." 49 The "muted" setting suggested the President's aides had sought to ameliorate some of the critics' negative responses to the trappings of April 30. Reporters' references to such matters tended to enlighten readers on possible motivation behind, and significance of, the speech events, but nearly all of the journalists' reactions tended to evaluate or criticize chiefly by implication.

Events and Issues as Background

Synthetic critics often developed background information about happenings or issues which tended to place a speech in its context. Without a knowledge of such related events a reader could not hope to understand either the speech or its significance. Writers assumed some reader familiarity of these events, but described the events in the longer articles. In addition, it should be noted that


In the larger newspapers and the news magazines critics probably depended on readers reading the critiques along with the many articles and other writings appearing in the same issue, often on the same page or opposite page. That rhetorical criticisms in the newspapers and magazines are surrounded by other articles and pictures about the same or related events is a feature not found in rhetorical criticisms in other sources. Reporters seemed to depend upon related writings filling in gaps in their own critiques.

An example of an article in which a writer synthesized occasion, speech content, and related events in criticizing a particular speech, is one previously cited by The Christian Science Monitor's Richard L. Strout. Suggesting that the New Orleans speech, which ostensibly had nothing to do with Watergate, was really an effort by the President at counter offensive, Strout maintained:

President Nixon completely ignored Watergate in his first speech since his nationwide broadcast last week and ... militantly counter attacked critics on another subject--Cambodia.

The fighting speech indicated the line that the beleaguered President may take in his effort to recoup his eroded prestige ... to attack on other fronts. ...

Reporters often related Nixon's erratic behavior and nervousness while delivering that New Orleans speech to such events as Nixon's now-famous shoving of Ron Ziegler when the presidential entourage entered the convention arena. Some mentioned the assassination plot which, James Deakin said, "was on everyone's mind as

Mr. Nixon's closed limousine sped into New Orleans." Deakin implied that those embarrassing incidents caused Nixon's distracted, "rambling," and "strained and tense" delivery of the speech. 51

More than with the other three speeches, critics tended to relate the April 30 speech to the events which preceded it. The address was the first of Nixon's Watergate-related messages, causing the reporters to develop background information about the Watergate events in connection with their assessments of the speech. Also, the April 30 speech occurred just hours after Nixon had received resignations of John Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman, his top aides, and John Dean, his counsel.

Sometimes writers referred to the events immediately preceding the speech. For example, a reporter wrote, "The President then indicated that, after Monday's jolting shake-up of top administration officials, he will not return his full attention to other affairs of state." 52 A writer in an editorial placed presidential statements in the April 30 address into a context of related events. The critic stated, incredulously:

But these excuses and words of praise come after Mr. Ehrlichman had already told the Federal Bureau of Investigation that it was he who assigned two of the men later convicted in the Watergate trial to investigate Daniel Ellsberg. When he learned that they had burglarized the

51 "President Fluffs . . .," p. 1A.

52 Loye Miller, Jr., "Power to Pick a Prosecutor Is Deligated," The Miami Herald, May 1, 1973, p. 1A.
files of Mr. Ellsberg's psychiatrist, . . . Ehrlichman . . . took no action. He merely told them not to do it again. 53

In The New Republic, an editor evaluated the New Orleans address and placed the event into context. First, he pointed out that Nixon's 1968 "secret plan" to end the war was ignored in the August 20 address; second, he pointed out that "within 24 hours of the President's speech," Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia was calling Nixon a liar. 54

In that same issue John Osborne, in his "Nixon Watch: A Closing Trap," compared, interrelated, and analyzed Nixon's Watergate speaking from April 30 to August 15. Osborne specifically synthesized his analysis by including discussion of Watergate-related events, summarizing what were the known facts, summarizing what testimony had been given in the hearings in the Senate, and then concluded of Nixon's rhetorical situation in mid-August:

Mr. Nixon had very little that was new to say for himself in his third plea in four months for belief that he simply didn't know what all of those associates and assistants . . . were doing, . . . and therefore could not have been a party to their misdeeds. The consequent sense of futile and empty repetition of stale denials, and of equally stale attempts to take responsibility without taking blame, had much to do with the patent weakness of the Nixon performance. 55


54 "Whose Right to Know?" September 1, 1973, p. 11.

55 Ibid., p. 18.
Osborne clearly evaluated Nixon's speaking on the basis of the President's remarks fitting into a context of known facts and being consistent with known events. He carefully pointed out that the remarks in Nixon's speech were repetitious and had to be seen in light of previous speeches and previous events.

Fred L. Zimmerman also placed the President's speech into its context of preceding events. A staff reporter for The Wall Street Journal, Zimmerman suggested:

President Nixon's dramatic personnel shake-up and his sentimental plea last night for public understanding may cut his mounting political losses over the Watergate scandal, but only at the cost of creating new problems. Despite yesterday's bold moves and last night's assertion that he had been misled by aides... Mr. Nixon can't command the messy affair to go away. Coming indictments, trials, and investigations assure that he'll be plagued by the scandal for months.56

The spectre of impeachment or resignation of the President was a feature implied or stated as a part of many of the synthetic responses. For example, in The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Reg Murphy illustrated how impeachment concerns were worked into a reaction to Nixon's April 30 address. Murphy said of Washington, D.C.:

Let it be said honestly, the town is terribly afraid of what it will find out about President Nixon... Impeachment... is at the heart of every private political conversation...

The President said... he already had spent too much time on Watergate... Any thoughtful American would agree

56 "Watergate (Cont.): Resignations...", p. 1.
with that. . . . yet, the fact is that people cannot quit wondering how much more there is to be uncovered.

People say it won't happen, . . . trying to convince themselves. After the President's talk, they pretty well have convinced themselves that it will not happen. But they are nervous—as nervous as politicians ever get. 57

Other critics related events surrounding the speeches such as the legal battles with Judge John Sirica and with Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, and they pointed out Nixon's speeches either answered, did not answer, refuted, or ignored the court order for his tapes. 58

Such references in criticisms were particularly emphatic in the post-press-conference period in late August and early September, 1973.

Estimates of Effect

More than impressionistic and analytic criticisms, synthetic criticisms tended to suggest possible effects of the speeches, often including predictions for the future. For example, in his column on August 29, 1973, Carl Rowan referred to Nixon's elation over what the President considered his success at the San Clemente press conference. Rowan said:

That is good. Especially if the President and his advisers understand that for the rest of . . . Nixon's tenure . . . he can expect just the kind of tough questions he got last week.


The only reason the press has been overly polite to Presidents in the past is that they feared the public would resent brash questions. Those last week were a clear indication that Richard Nixon vs. the press is going to be a feature attraction every day he remains in the presidency.59

Hedley Donovan commented on several possible implications of the Watergate affair generally, and of the April 30 defense by the President in particular. In the article "The Good Uses of the Watergate Affair," Donovan stated: "In his speech the President was much too quick to put Watergate behind him. . . . But his instinct is right for the longer run. His best preparation . . . will be redoubled effort on . . . domestic policy and follow through on . . . foreign policy."60

Finally, an article in The Washington Post, shows David S. Broder responding to Nixon's claim in the press conference that other administrations had approved burglarizing and that the practice "was quite well known" from 1961 to 1966. In refutation, Broder pointed out that the officials of the Justice Department denied that such activities existed; Broder suggested that Nixon's words had "triggered a new controversy."61

Several critics included bold predictions. John C. Bennett, the eminent theologian, predicted in a criticism of Nixon's

59 "Nixon and the Press," The Atlanta Constitution, p. 4A.


April 30 address appearing in Christianity and Crisis that:

One by-product of Watergate is that the moralism and the religiosity of the White House in this administration will be debunked. Doubtless many of the same words will still be used, as was the case with the President's television speech to the nation on April 30, but then hollowness will be perceived by millions of people who were taken in by them in the past.\(^\text{62}\)

And an editor of the same publication suggested that:

Possibly Nixon is clever enough to patch things up, maybe the country doesn't deeply care.

In one of history's ironies, we, who have been critical of the administration, must hope that it escapes disaster. We all have too much at stake in this country to wish on it nearly "four more years" of cynicism.\(^\text{63}\)

Not all writers were that willing to forget or forgive, and few gave any indication that the future was very bright if Nixon continued the rhetorical patterns established in the early Watergate speaking. Most critics revealed deep concern for the problem which Watergate not only indicated but portended.

Implications

Synthetic criticisms filled an important role in the body of evaluations prompted by Nixon's Watergate speaking. They provided valuable comparisons, discussed relevant background information, and described the context of the speeches in terms of mood, setting, and past and present related events. By reading these responses a


\(^{63}\)"Skandalon," May 14, 1973, p. 82.
citizen could make reasonable judgments about the presidential rhetoric during the crucial months of April and August, 1973. Those criticisms provided readers with opportunities for intelligent reaction based on knowledge.

Synthetic critics included features employed by analytic and impressionistic critics—reactions, opinions, and references to the content of the messages. Also, they sought to describe mood, setting, audience, and occasion, placing stress on the elements of the context which helped to make each speech event unique and without which knowledge a reader could not have understood and appreciated Nixon's speaking. Synthesizing such diverse elements of description and background with varying degrees of interpretation and evaluation, they recognized that speeches occur in a complicated matrix of words, actions, and audience reactions. Responses emphasizing synthesis were important because they provided material on which to base evaluations and reactions and because they blended analytic and impressionistic concerns with the additional materials.

Like the other critical types, reporters in this group used invention as their primary focus, usually blending considerations about the speaker's reputation and character with that of selection of ideas and the consistency, validity, and importance of his ideas. As pointed out before, most of the critics were unfavorable to the President, and some increased their antagonism by the time they wrote their August critiques.
Similar to the impressionistic criticisms, discussions of poll results played an important part in synthetic criticisms, particularly in many of the writings which centered on the probity of the President's character and on the importance of how Nixon's reputation affected his speaking. Even so, writers generally were willing to forego final judgment, revealed overwhelmingly that they found no pleasure in believing the worst about their President, and generally wrote their reactions in a mood of antagonistic waiting and hoping.

Reporters who wrote synthetically used a variety of methods and techniques to synthesize various elements in the criticism. Emphasizing different facets of the speech and speech-related events, these writers provided more variety in this group of responses than was found in the other types of criticism.

Predicting less about what the speaker might do in the future, critics in this group concentrated primarily on description and analysis of the speech after it occurred. They went beyond impressions, beyond content analysis, sought to explain what happened, and suggested answers to the stock questions of journalism: who, what, where, when, and why.

Describing audiences, occasions, and effects, they focused on discussion of the speaker's language, and quite often on how the speaker delivered his addresses. Responding to how the President looked, acted, and sounded, writers generally suggested that Nixon's
appearance and manner revealed Nixon, contrary to his words, was under immense pressure and strain. In April they found him at a frantic level making a determined effort to present a calm exterior. On August 15, because of adverse reaction to his earlier speech, the poll results, the Hearings, the Agnew troubles, and the threats to Nixon's life, Nixon was at a low point, appearing distracted, nervous, and erratic in movements.

They described now Nixon looked at this press conference: at first nervous, then confident and cocky. Critics suggested that Nixon's language and platform manner were clues to understanding the complicated dynamics of the speaking events. Most synthetic critics employed references to voice and body and language to support observations they made about the speaker's reputation or character or about the ideas and materials Nixon chose to use in the speeches. Most critics who mentioned language agreed that Nixon chose his words carefully and that he had calculated their effects on the audiences.

Most writers with their descriptions of setting and background events helped the reader to derive a feeling of the prevailing mood of the events. They added potentially to the readers' knowledge and probably helped many readers to understand and appreciate the speaking events more than they might have otherwise.

Although synthetic critics did not engage in very much judgment about the merit or value or quality of the speeches, as did
judicial critics, they were at times explicit in drawing conclusions and in interpreting the events. They left connections, interpretations, and value judgments unstated in most cases.

References to the audiences were more detailed and specific about the August 20 and August 22 speech events. Critics agreed generally that the New Orleans audience was "friendly" and the San Clemente audience was "hostile." Critics used the poll results to suggest the degree of friendliness or unfriendliness of the national TV audiences for the speeches of April 30 and August 15.

Using a variety of means, synthetic critics placed the speeches in their physical and emotional contexts. They dwelt on planning and preparation, on speech purposes and on providing background information about preceding or concurrent events, such as the firing of Nixon's aides, the Agnew investigation, and the legal battles with Judge Sirica, Senator Ervin, and Archibald Cox. A spectre implied and stated often was the impeachment issue.

Therefore, those critics primarily synthesized, described, and pulled together diverse pieces of comments and observations to create a critical response. Implicitly and sometimes explicitly, the synthetic critics seemed to assume that any knowledge about the speech, speaker, or occasion was relevant to an understanding of the speech event.
These critics provided many examples of helpful criticisms during this traumatic national episode. By providing vivid details of preceding events, setting, and occasion, the writers probably aided readers in understanding and appreciating the President's speaking.

Synthetic critics provided background on the origin, nature, and personnel of the attendant issues, philosophies, and events which the reader could use to form bases for rational reactions. These critics, giving readers bases for making judgments about possible motivations of the speaker, and audiences, focused on the importance of the speaking events. Although many of the interpretations and some of the descriptions themselves were in many cases only implied, the observations were helpful nonetheless.

It is appropriate that although these critics found delivery very important they also focused their reactions on the nature, consistency, and merit of the speaker's ideas. In addition, stress was placed on the factors in the speaker's reputation, knowledge, personality, and character which would tend to support or negate his words.

However, critics gave little attention to how the speaker arranged his ideas. No critic seemed to be aware of the research available to critics of public address. But, then, that lack of recognition or employment of any specific knowledge of rhetorical criticism theory and practice was a feature of all the responses.
The writer finds it salutary, however, that so many critics did see their task as more than the stating of raw, unsupported opinion. They had respect for and knowledge of the words spoken, and sought to genuinely synthesize the complicated ingredients of the speaking event. That they did so in the medium of journalism with its obvious problems is commendable. Publishing deadlines, editorial policies, space limitations, and the level of the popular audience to which they directed their reports, all are factors which militate against reporters writing meaningful criticism.

One simple improvement synthetic critics could make would be for them to organize their observations and findings more logically. Whether around the classical canons or some other plan, clear organization is needed to aide the reader to formulate a better picture of what the critic is criticizing and why. Clearer organization would provide a better understanding in the reader of the bases of the criticism.

For their chief contribution, these synthetic criticisms provided needed information and thereby may have greatly increased the possibility of informed public responses to the speaking of their President. Secondly, many of the critics seemed conscious of a need to make their responses and evaluations interesting and readable. By so doing they probably captured an audience which otherwise might not have read very much about these speeches which were of immense importance to America.
CHAPTER VI

JUDICIAL CRITICISM

Introduction

Approximately one-third of all the criticisms studied were judicial. Although only a few fulfilled all the requirements of this type, the label is useful in describing the most thorough of the responses to Nixon's Watergate speaking during April and August, 1973. Thonssen, Baird, and Braden described judicial criticisms in these terms:

The last type of criticism may be called the judicial. It combines the aims of analytic and synthetic inquiry with the all-important element of evaluation and interpretation of results. Thus it reconstructs a speech situation with fidelity to fact; it examines this situation carefully in the light of the interaction of speaker, audience, subject, and occasion; it interprets the data with an eye to determining the effect of the speech; it formulates a judgment in the light of the philosophical-historical-literary-logical-ethical constituents of the inquiry; and it appraises the entire event by assigning it comparative rank in the total enterprise of speaking.¹

No criticism in the series studied really fulfills the last requirement, that of "assigning" the rhetoric "comparative rank in

the total enterprise of speaking." But the judicial criticisms studied went well beyond opinion and impression. Containing analysis of ideas and arguments, they presented summaries of the content and synthesized varying elements of the total speech situation. These responses emphasized evaluation, interpretation, and the potential effects of the President's rhetoric while containing reasons for the judgments and the developmental and supportive details much more than the other kinds of criticism.

In these critiques the writers reacted, analyzed, synthesized, and judged. They generally responded with evaluations which had great potential for enhancing the reading public's capacity to react intelligently to the President's speech-making.

In these responses columnists and editorial writers played important roles. Well over half of the columns and editorials were characteristically judicial. This figure indicates a trend among critics who produced not just reports, to write genuine evaluations.

As Chapter I pointed out, the "top ten" newspapers published more criticisms that were judicial in approach than did the "other six." Some newspapers in both groups had many such responses if one includes syndicated columnists from other newspapers and news services.

The magazines with the most criticisms judicial in emphasis were The New Republic, The New Yorker, The Nation, and Jet. Predictably, the popular news magazines had some judicial
type responses but focused more on impressionistic, analytic, and synthetic evaluations.

**Characteristics and Examples**

Judicial critics were overwhelmingly unfavorable in their assessments of Nixon's rhetoric. They found Nixon's speaking inadequate primarily on two grounds of logic: that he was not telling the truth and that he was not answering many questions. The first was often based on comparison with testimony of others in the Senate hearings, with known facts, and corroborated with their perceptions of Nixon's character/reputation. Those reporters referred to language and word choices as bases for evaluations, but they seldom did to organization. The speaker's vocal qualities and physical mannerisms received some attention, but such references were not numerous.

Projections and estimates of effects were important ingredients as critics often discussed the influence, impact, and possible importance of the President's speech-making. More than any of the other types of critics, judicial ones seemed to have had a grasp of the significance Nixon's speaking. They sensed Nixon's Watergate rhetoric in its historic context and they wrote of it largely assuming the validity of traditional American values such as honesty, candor, and moral responsibility.

The following section discusses the judicial responses on the bases of the characteristics just mentioned.
Invention

Ideas and Arguments

Judicial critics were principally concerned with whether arguments were reasonable and whether the President had answered or could be expected to answer questions raised by Watergate. While most critics wrote in response to what the President actually said, some wrote predictive evaluations of what they thought he would say.

April 30 Address

Demonstrating concern for the appropriateness and accuracy of what the critic expected Nixon to say on April 30, an editorial writer for The Atlanta Constitution said:

The President himself has not leveled with the American people in this scandal. . . . As this is written, he is poised to speak to the nation. We didn't know yet the content of that message.

But recently the White House press secretary had to admit that many statements over the past year concerning the Watergate scandal were not "inoperative." A clever word. What it means is that the White House statements were untrue. Now the time for cleverness is past. . . . The time for honesty has come.2

Calling for responsible style and honest content, the writer's evaluation constituted a specific, if brief, prescriptive rhetorical criticism. Such criticisms had considerable potential for creating public expectations and for affecting public reception of the President's rhetoric.

2 "Watching," May 1, 1973, p. 4A.
Two days after the April 30 address a reporter for The New York Times questioned the merit of President Nixon's arguments in these words:

Although he has dismissed three of his senior aides and formally accepted responsibility for whatever misdeeds may have been committed, . . . Mr. Nixon basically has conceded nothing except what events have wrested from him. . . . He has played down the seriousness of the scandals and tried to blur responsibility for them.

"The President," The Times' editor continued, "offered this appalling excuse":

"I know that it can be very easy under the intensive pressures of a campaign for even well-intentioned people to fall into shady tactics. . . . And both of our great parties have been guilty of such tactics."

Mr. Nixon cannot plausibly say that in some vague way both parties and all of America are to blame. He cannot assert that Watergate "has claimed far too much of my time and my attention" and that he now intends to busy himself with other matters. He cannot play a game of musical chairs inside his administration and declare that . . . is sufficient. . . . Such acts and attitudes are an affront to the public. 3

Illustrating unfavorable assessments of Nixon's arguments, the foregoing excerpts also imply low credibility as the writers put their emphasis on analysis of the speaker's ideas. More consistently than other critics, they analyzed and held up for public notice what they considered the essential emptiness and inconsistency of Nixon's rhetoric.

In his oft-repeated column, "The Most Unkindest Cut of All," William Safire analyzed Nixon's ideas and evidence favorably.

3 "Broken Confidence," May 2, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 44.
Safire refuted objections by praising the content of the speech. He suggested that in the April 30 address Nixon "took off his right arm, Haldeman, and then took off his left arm, Ehrlichman," and that Nixon "praised the people who broke the case," promising "to insure that the guilty are brought to justice." Safire was the only critic to attempt to detail a defense of Nixon's specific arguments.

Safire illustrates how differently some respondents viewed Nixon's arguments. Probably it was desirable for the public to have some balance of pro and con evaluations, but it was appropriate for the public to see how strained, how thinly developed, and how out-of-step some of the favorable evaluations were with the majority of the responses. Safire's defense of Nixon demonstrates those qualities.

Most critics seemed disturbed by what they considered a lack of substance in the April 30 talk. In one of his columns, Vernon Jarrett reached a peak of directness in attacking the merit of Nixon's ideas. He cautioned his readers about the lack of moral integrity that Nixon exhibited in his performance:

If American people fall for President Nixon's "explanation," then we deserve Watergate. . . . Maybe we deserve Nixon. Monday night Nixon told us more about himself than he did about the Watergate scandal. He revealed through his own words that he is not upset truly about the crimes committed by his inner circle.  

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A few days later, Jarrett wrote that Nixon's strategy in the April 30 speech was not "honest," in making Nixon's listeners "feel the illusion of a forward motion while marching backwards." 6

A Newsweek critic, like others, compared the ideas and arguments in Nixon's April 30 address to his 1952 "Checkers" speech. In a section of the article entitled, "Son of Checkers," the writer asserted that the "content in the first of Nixon's Watergate speeches" was less remarkable for what it said than for what it left unsaid," and that in the speech "the President named no names and ventured no new facts." 7

The two preceding selections are typical of the kinds usually found in this group. They rendered judgment, suggested motivation, evaluated Nixon's ideas, and gave reasons for the assessments. Quality and extentiveness of development differed in the judicial group, and few could equal the thoroughness in development of details, of support, and elaborateness of evaluation found in William F. Buckley, Jr.'s response, "Impeach the Speech, Not the President." 8

Buckley assessed the President's April 30 arguments, discussed the effects of Nixon's words on the President himself, on the writer of the critique, and on the television audience. After watching


the speech with a group of Stanford University faculty and students, Buckley reported that some of the viewers felt that while the speech may have appealed to the people out there, they themselves had not been moved by the "heroic denials, the piety, and the patriotism." They felt that for most Americans the speech was relatively effective, an assessment the tone of which "was set by older members of the faculty, graduates of the Checkers speech which they had thought quite awful, only to wake up . . . to discover that it had moved the entire nation." Buckley, however, suggested Nixon's arguments were meaningless and his honor compromised:

The rhetoric apart, I thought the speech mortally flawed by low analytical cunning. Mr. Nixon sought to construct an august scaffolding for himself, whence to preside over the restoration of the public rectitude. He produced a spindle, on which he impaled himself.  

Demonstrating how pitiless some respondents were, Buckley proceeded in his later remarks to dispute the President's character and methods; his comments were laced with scorn and sarcasm. Suggesting reasons for Nixon's failure to convince the American people, Buckley intoned:

This was Richard Nixon's great error of April 30. He asserted his innocence, then . . . maneuvered to inhibit the executive from cooperating . . . to document that innocence. Thus, he activated the Puritan conscience, which, after so much foreplay, is not easily denied.  

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9 Buckley, p. 30.  
10 Ibid., p. 105.
Garry Wills also compared April 30 to the 1952 Checkers talk and found the chief problem Nixon had in April was that he no longer had "Crooks and Communists" to do battle with. Wills expressed what many judicial writers included in one manner or another in their evaluations. He said:

In the Checkers speech, he kicked hard while he wept. But he floundered, in April, when he tried to use television to recruit public sympathy, because he had no kickable foe. He was betrayed; . . . he had to praise them while dismissing them.11

No one can mock Nixon like Nixon himself, Wills suggested, mentioning the many comic impersonations of the President's mannerisms on recordings and on television. Wills found Nixon now lacked a crisis to use as a rhetorical focal point. Watergate was not the kind of crisis in which Nixon rhetoric flourished in the past; now the President had no counter-cultures or "bad men" to react against and his "presidency floundered like his speaking."12

An editorial critic in The Nation wrote a detailed analysis of Nixon's April 30 ideas and concluded: "He finally came down from the Mountain and gave us the word. But just what has he done? What do we know now that we did not know before?" The reporter stated boldly that the President "is the central figure . . . the spider at the center of the web," and that "the President has given

12 Ibid., pp. 21, 24, 25.
us not the truth but a preposterous alibi."\textsuperscript{13}

In terms of thoroughness of analysis, inclusion of background material, evaluation, and prognostication, one of the best responses was the \textit{Time} cover story of May 14, 1973. Following a summary of the events leading to the April 30 speech, the writer discussed Nixon's invention in these terms:

The Watergate speech was disconcertingly ambivalent. Nixon resorted to an odd and habitual rhetorical device, explaining as he often has done . . . that he was rejecting "the easiest course" and pursuing the more difficult one.\textsuperscript{14}

Judicial critics generally gave lack of substance and glaring omissions as the most important reasons for their negative evaluations of the logical merits of Nixon's invention. They became even more insistent and pointed in those assessments as they responded to the August speeches. The critics were more and more unimpressed by the President's ideas as the summer progressed.

August 15 Address

On the August 15 speech, an editor suggested that Nixon "added little, and nothing specific," to his earlier explanations, and the writer dismissed the content of Nixon's long awaited speech in these terse words: "He presented no further grounds," on which to base his arguments except "his reiterated plea of innocence." Strategically, the editor concluded,

\textsuperscript{13}"Too Little, Too Late," May 14, 1973, pp. 610,611.
\textsuperscript{14}"Nixon's Nightmare: Fighting to Be Believed," pp. 17-21, 24,25.
Nixon's speech on August 15 was "not the counteroffensive that many expected, but a holding operation."\(^{15}\)

The August 15 speech seemed genuinely to puzzle some critics. They could not believe that Nixon had said so little. Kermit Lansner, for example, complained:

Given his famed forensic slyness, it is difficult to tell just what the President is getting at here. Whatever it is, it will not wash. His logic is weak, his ethics indifferent, his history highly selective.\(^{16}\)

Numerous reporters agreed with Lansner that the President said nothing of substance on August 15. The Washington Post's John Hanrahan asserted that Nixon's speech "shed little new light" on the Watergate affair, and the writer developed his article around the issues to which the President "did not address himself."\(^{17}\)

Interpreting presidential deficiencies, a syndicated column suggested that Nixon's omissions were not accidental but revealed firm rhetorical strategy. In that column, "Buying Time on Watergate," Rowland Evans and Robert Novak said:

Bitter complaints by politicians of both parties that . . . Nixon's speech . . . broke no new ground and yielded up no new facts . . . entirely miss the point . . . .

Far from a detailed . . . refutation of the charges, . . . a course . . . discarded, . . . Nixon had one objective: . . . establish a new base or holding pattern.

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Illustrating how judicial criticism could go far beyond description or even evaluation, Evans and Novak cited excerpts from the address and wrote a candid, "clear warning" that Nixon "will not do any more to clear himself of the taints of Watergate because he cannot"; they concluded:

That was the motive of Wednesday night's uncharacteristically soft-spoken rhetoric. If the press and politicians pursue . . . he will become shriller in going over their heads to the voters.18

Subsequent events vindicated their judgment and prophecy. These writers' evaluation was based on knowledge of Nixon's past, on clear judgment of guilt. Their critique centers on omission and on character. Particularly, they reveal an understanding of Nixon's past rhetorical strategy. They are implying obviously that Nixon's rhetoric was carefully planned and that each speech was part of an overall rhetorical strategy.

The reader could see essentially the same emphases and judgment in a column in The Washington Post in which George F. Will, one of Nixon's most severe critics, called the address an exercise in "positive polarization" and claimed that Nixon was now using "the bully pulpit to preach nonsense." He maintained further:

Nixon's speech was empty of everything but divisiveness and from that we can learn something. The reason he went three months without saying anything is that he has nothing to say.

Will reveals another judicial quality implied in the design of this study—that these "types" of criticism are at least as much "levels" or "steps" as they are types. The kind of judgment in the excerpt just cited could only be made as the result of having a view of several examples of rhetoric or of having the advantage of the perspective a passage of time affords. In this instance, Will's estimate was based not just on the August 15 speech, but on the April 30 speech and on both as seen in light of the Hearings and Nixon's silence. Will also illustrated the use of characterization, the creation of terms to convey his ideas, and the use of loaded, connotative words such as "empty," and "nonsense." ¹⁹

The editors of the same newspaper concluded that Nixon's August 15 speech "was a speech of large silences and vague insinuations, hardly what the public had been led to expect." Complaining of Nixon's appeal for "the rest of us" to get on with the nation's urgent business," the editorial asked incredulously, "'the rest of us?' But surely this is Mr. Nixon's administration, and surely it was in his name that the misdeeds were committed." The editorial called for a candid and realistic appraisal by the President and complained that "this whole array of misplaced blame" was what the editor "found so disheartening" about the address.

¹⁹ "Divide and Conquer?" August 20, 1973, p. 22.
This evaluation illustrates criticism directed unswervingly toward the speaker, with personal feeling and appraisal included. The editor asserted that the President "cannot have it both ways. He cannot disassociate himself from those acts of his administration," and concluded that Nixon revealed he understood neither his own responsibility or the "justifiable dismay" of the people. ²⁰

The critic clearly based some of his evaluation on feelings—his own and what he perceived to be a consensus of "dismay." Most synthetic and judicial responses only implied that the consensus was a reason for rejection.

James Reston soundly attacked the merit of Nixon's ideas and strategy in the August 15 speech, particularly Nixon's equating of Watergate activities with the 1960 Civil Rights movement. The columnist said:

The President's effort to talk his way out of the Watergate tragedy has failed. . . . As a defense of his Administration's record on the Watergate, or an answer to many people, his televised speech after months of silence was a disappointment, if not a disaster.

Reston, more specifically than most journalists, got to the heart of his objections. He said the President "didn't deal" with the problem of "the abuses of the past," and added:

It wasn't because he didn't get good advice. The speech he gave us was only one of more than a dozen speeches suggested to him, and even drafted for him, by his associates. . . .

Most of these drafts suggested that he define the questions on the minds of the American people, that he answer them candidly, admit his own responsibility for the atmosphere, . . . and take his chance telling the truth. But he chose instead to defend everything and admit nothing. 21

What Reston was suggesting has great importance in understanding of Nixon's rhetoric. The columnist charged that Nixon's inaccuracies and evasions were deliberate and calculated—that the speeches were the result of painstaking preparation. Succinct and candid, Reston did not hesitate to use the term "chose" when he knew it to be fact. He summarized and attacked Nixon's claims with precision, courage, and good taste. Reston documented his comments, provided reasons for his evaluations, and seemed to have an understanding of the requirements and the nature of oral communication—the latter quality conspicuously absent from most responses of other writers.

Although Reston's was perhaps the best example of such criticism, generally newspaper critics commendably and appropriately emphasized the importance of reacting to the merit and consistency of Nixon's arguments and not to lesser matters. Other writers used approaches similar to Reston's analysis of arguments, evaluating what the speaker planned to say or the kinds of advice about his speaking that he was receiving.

"Suggestions ranged," *Time* reported of Nixon's planning for the August 15 address, "from 'mea culpas' to a two-fisted hard-line approach. But the consensus was that the speech should be 'moderate, dignified, strong in adherence to principle and hopefully presidential in character.' But *Time*'s writer concluded that despite Nixon's advice and planning the address "was at best a list of unmet challenges," and "at worst a catalogue of failure."\(^{22}\)

*The New Yorker* editor explicitly announced that he was setting out to analyze the President's arguments and the ideas. In the magazine's August 27, 1973, issue, the editor pointed out what the President said and where Nixon had failed. Peppered throughout the criticism were phrases such as these: "Mr. Nixon also failed to mention," and "that claim left out something, too, . . ." and "then he proceeded to deal with some of the more serious charges in sufficient detail—though at some points incorrectly and at other points misleadingly."\(^{23}\)

In *The Miami Herald* an editorial illustrated judgment of Nixon's arguments and ideas. The writer asserted:

> In a bald political power play, he pleaded to . . . bring pressure on members of Congress. . . .
> His speech . . . heralded as the most important of his career, came down to another appeal for trust and understanding despite a record replete with reason for suspicion.


We fear that the President's speech did nothing to resolve Watergate. Its effect was to raise new questions to encourage new divisions . . . and in the end to exacerbate rather than soothe the crisis.

The speech won't do it; the tapes might.24

Writers became even more increasingly disenchanted with Nixon's ideas because of the Senate Hearing revelations, the conflicts of Nixon and his aides with the courts, and Nixon's steadfast refusal to clarify anything. His credibility level was diminishing rapidly all the while (as pointed out in Chapter III).

August 20 Address

Few critics wrote judicial criticisms of Nixon's New Orleans speech, but those who did generally found the President's arguments lacking. Some implied that he deliberately misrepresented some of the issues. For instance, an editor of The New York Times questioned the merit of Nixon's inventive processes in these terms:

President Nixon seriously misstated the issue of the secret Cambodian bombing of 1969-70 in his address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in New Orleans.

The question is not the one he posed: "How could the United States make a secret attack on tiny Cambodia?" The real question is: "How could Mr. Nixon break faith with the American people two months after taking office?"25

24 "The Speech Didn't Do It--This Nation Needs to Know," August 17, 1973, p. 6A.

James Reston called Nixon's New Orleans speech "a raking over all the old arguments of the war," and said:

The President's last two speeches [August 15 and 20] illustrate confusion of thought and purpose. In the first, the President concluded with a plea to the people for understanding, for re-dedication to "the principles of decency, honor, and respect for our institutions," and for "a commitment by all of us to show a renewed respect for the mutual restraints that are the mark of a free society."

But less than a week later, after condemning those who put their ends ahead of their means, he was proclaiming that his objective of peace justified the bombing of Cambodia and keeping this secret from the American people.

Reston continued to question the merit and consistency of Nixon's arguments and pointed out that Nixon, "while calling for a new spirit of conciliation at home, . . . was attacking those who criticized his policies, . . . asserting that he was not only right, . . . but that he would do it again." The columnist pointed out numerous inconsistencies in Nixon's Cambodian arguments when compared with the President's Watergate position; for instance, in the VFW speech Nixon claimed immunity from the same principles he said were, without his knowledge or consent, violated by his over-zealous aides. Using such terms as "sees no conflict," and "but the fact is," Reston pointed up what he deemed was the bankruptcy of Nixon's appeals for "confidentiality," and of the President's call to get back to "matters of far greater importance to all the American people." 26

Continuing to illustrate progression and cumulativeness in the best of the journalists' criticisms, Reston concluded of all of Nixon's April-August rhetoric, particularly about the August 15 and 20 speeches, that Nixon's strategy was evasion. Reston found the strategy "frightening," a type of word found more often in impressionistic responses, but in this case the judgment was based on information and a long-term view. One passage in the critique is an excellent example of this quality; Reston said:

In one speech he plays the role of great conciliator, calling for forgetfulness of the past and in the next he is a glory merchant, forgetting nothing, forgiving nothing. It is all very odd and even a little frightening.27

An editorial critic in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch echoed that assessment of Nixon's New Orleans invention, writing:

Nothing describes President Nixon's remarks . . . in New Orleans so well as Talleyrand's famous observation about the Bourbons, that "they have learned nothing and forgotten nothing."

Throughout his political career, Mr. Nixon has countered criticism by attacking imaginary enemies, persons or institutions he considered vulnerable to demagogic abuse and which bore little if any relevance to the real situation at hand.

The St. Louis writer found Nixon's apparent effort to deflect public attention from the issues an "unfortunate counter-attack," and asserted that Nixon would choose to "go before the VFW with a ringing defense of "duplicity" was "evidence that he

27 "What's Going on Here?" Sec. 1, p. 37.
does not yet comprehend the gravity of his situation, nor the full significance of the nation's worst political scandal."\textsuperscript{28}

The foregoing illustrations of critical assessments show how critics used several key arguments on which to focus their evaluations. They illustrate also how judicial respondents asserted judgments about the speeches only after developing comparisons, quoting sections of the speeches, and utilizing supportive quotations and analogies, going well beyond the treatments in the other three types of criticisms.

Some columns and editorials illustrate the cumulative effect of writers who wrote increasingly more justified and developed responses as the period progressed.

August 22 News Conference

Treatment of Nixon's press conference rhetoric reveals how increasingly disillusioned were most judicial critics with Nixon's answers and his thought processes revealed in the rhetoric. John Osborne, for example, asserted that in the press conference Nixon's "evident purpose" was "to further the notion that snide journalists, sneering television commentators, and a hostile and dilatory Congress" were the reasons the President could not get on "'with the business of the people.'" Osborne concluded that: "The kindest possible

\textsuperscript{28}"The Nixon Counterattack," August 21, 1973, p. 2B."
"Judgment" about the ideas and arguments in the press conference "has to be that Mr. Nixon really ought to watch his words and respect the facts with more care than he frequently does."29

Osborne's evaluation clearly shows the restraint so many of the writers used in expressing their reactions. He was saying in essence that Nixon was lying, but he said so in indirect language. A New Yorker critic felt Nixon's "smiling contempt" demonstrated in the press conference revealed the President chose the content of his responses and the questions to which he would respond very carefully and with a sense of inherent advantage. The critic pointed out:

The forum of the press conference gives any President an insurmountable advantage. Even when reporters ask tough questions--and . . . they asked the toughest questions in memory--the President can easily best them. If he has an honest answer, his giving it will be made double effective by the dramatic tension; . . . if he does not . . . or cannot, answer honestly, he can seem to answer while actually evading the question and delivering an oration or a homily that is likely to appeal to the general public, and so disguise his failure.30

Expressing the consensus of critical evaluations of Nixon's answers at San Clemente, an editor commented:

In his first press conference in five months, President Nixon covered a lot of territory--and he left it strewn with suggestions and assertions that require more than a little scrutiny.


The President has somehow got himself astride a mountain of contradictions . . . contradictions in the very structure of his position.

The editorial critic specifically pointed out the contradictions many judicial writers noted: "In one breath," he said, "the President tells us, . . . his office possesses 'inherent' powers which are virtually uncheckable except by public opinion; and yet in the next he expresses his thinly-veiled contempt for those organs and agencies of the public that seek to have effect on the way he uses that power." 31 In other words, the reporter found Nixon's logical processes in error, an assessment most judicial critics pointed out in some manner.

William V. Shannon, chose to make the same point with sarcasm, his scorn shining through as he assessed the logical aspects of Nixon's press conference rhetoric in these words:

He invoked national security, spread the blame around among his predecessors, accused the press of prejudice, took refuge occasionally in a faulty memory, worked his "leave it to the courts" routine, and repeated the answers that H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman had given the senate committee. 32

Shannon's column on the press conference included numerous examples of strongly-worded reaction. Such unfavorable critics


generally tended to be more flambouyant and assertive; they wrote confidently and supported their contentions in a variety of ways. Those few judicial criticisms which tended to be favorable or neutral were much more cautiously worded and tentative in their assertions.

Stewart Alsop's Newsweek column, "The President and His Enemies," is an excellent example of judicial criticism which was genuinely, but neutrally, evaluative. Alsop compared the arguments and ideas of the August 15, 20, and 22 events but emphasized the last. He found in examining Nixon's invention in the press conference that the President had managed to extract some measure of victory, "a real plus," which was the last stage of what Alsop called a "three stage comeback attempt."

Using analogy, Alsop called the press conference's ideas and effect a "respectable base hit" and tried to "see the situation as it must appear through his eyes." Alsop asserted: "When he says that he did not know about the Watergate cover-up until March, he is probably telling what seems to him, or what has come to seem to him, the simple truth."

Alsop not only reacted to Nixon's logic but to his inventive strategy in a more general sense. Pointing to Nixon's alleged "paranoia," Alsop wrote:

It is . . . difficult to define the reasons for the hatred of Nixon, which of course existed long before Watergate.
One can dimly understand the combined sense of outrage and insecurity that the sense of being afloat in a sea of hatred must generate. . . . One can also understand [what] has become . . . Nixon's basic technique, why he reaches out beyond "the enemies he has made" to build a solid constituency "out there."  

A particularly good example of the kind of logical analysis found in many of the magazines appeared in *The Christian Century*. Surveying the April through August rhetoric as a whole, the writer identified several typical Nixon arguments and pointed out why he considered them fallacious:

In a simpler time the words might have been "So's your old man." In more formal terms, logicians . . . have referred to the technique as either *ignoratio elenchi* (irrelevant conclusion) or *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* ("after this, therefore because of this").

For example . . . in his April 30 television address President Nixon referred to the "excesses . . . of the other side," an obvious effort to encourage the public to relate Watergate to what the President regarded as the excesses of the 1960's. Since the public's concept of these . . . played a large role in his re-election, the President naturally assumed that his voting majority would respond to the fallacious connection.

This method is deliberately deceptive.

These arguments are not designed to convince, but serve merely to give the President's supporters something to which they can immediately relate. They are arguments that have nothing to do with leadership.

These critics, therefore, generally responded to the four rhetorical efforts with increasingly low regard for Nixon's ideas.

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Reporters agreed that Nixon's logical processes were invalid by the usual measurements, inconsistent and fallacious in the abstract, but wholly consistent with the man and his record. Most found his logical processes worthy of contempt. A few tried to be understanding and withhold final judgment.

Credibility

Because of Nixon's silence despite mounting calls for presidential answers, his critics found less and less reason to believe what he was saying. As the days passed, writers found fewer reasons to give the President benefit of the doubt. By August, critics agreed Nixon had strained that capacity in his critics to the breaking point. They did not believe him.

In this section, selected excerpts from the responses show that credibility was an important basis for the evaluations of Nixon's Watergate rhetoric. The reporters measured the President's believability in polls, they questioned his motivations, they recalled past offenses, characterized Nixon's behavior as erratic, pointed out the President's omissions, and expressed amazement at what they regarded as Nixon's capriciousness. Finally, they commented on Nixon's inability to "come across" as honest. Evaluators often combined comments on his credibility with statements about his style and his delivery. Judicial critics often emphasized the impact of the speaker's reputation on his ideas.
As previously pointed out, ethos as a basis for evaluation was a dominant characteristic of all the responses. In fact, many of the observations made about the matter approached almost ad hominem level, particularly as the critics' patience wore thin in August.

April 30 Address

Critics of Nixon's April 30 speech found that they and (they believed) their readers simply could not believe Nixon. For instance, Carey McWilliams railed:

In his speech he told us virtually nothing we did not know and he raised more questions than he answered. . . . Apparently he did not read a copy of The Washington Post for nearly a year. On its face, his statement is simply not credible. The American people would like to be able to believe their President, but the polls indicate that many of them, perhaps a majority, feel that Mr. Nixon was involved in Watergate in the sense that he at all times knew what Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Dean knew.

The editorial concluded that: "The President's problem is that he is responsible."\(^{35}\)

Most of the responses stated categorically that Nixon could not be believed. The writers generally did so after giving examples, making comparisons, and developing their reasons. Others developed their reactions around contentions that Nixon had failed in a deliberate attempt to bolster his sagging credibility. The latter emphasis can be seen in Art Buchwald's assessments.

\(^{35}\)"Too Little Too Late," pp. 610,611.
With satire and sarcasm Buchwald bore down strongly about what he felt was Nixon's lack of character and the apparent caprice of Nixon's inventive habits in preparing a major speech. Irreverently describing the scene at Camp David as Nixon prepared for the April 30 address, Buchwald reported, tongue in cheek:

Last weekend President Richard Nixon went to Camp David alone. . . . It has been . . . reported that the President went up to the . . . mountain to speak with God. "God, God, Why are you doing this to me?"
"Doing what, Richard?"
"The Watergate, the cover-up, the grand jury hearings, the Senate investigations. Why me, God?"

"Richard, I tried to warn you. . . . Your administration is involved in the obstruction of justice, the bribing of witnesses, the forging of papers, wire-tapping, perjury and using the mails to defraud."
"Good God, nobody's perfect!"

"You've got to clean house, Richard, get rid of everyone who has any connection with the scandal. You must make it perfectly clear you were hoodwinked, . . . that when it comes to the Presidency, no one is too big to be sacrificed on the altar of expediency."36

Buchwald satirically suggested what other critics stated more covertly or implied: that Nixon was apparently willing to do anything at that point to protect himself from the scandal. His speeches were seen as part of his plan to avoid entrapment.

The President's credibility was a crucial matter before and just after the April 30 address, and it was to become even more so in August. A Time critic asserted that "most of the people

apparently have remained unconvinced by his TV speech," and pointed out that "a quick Gallup poll disclosed that 50% of his audience believed that Nixon was personally a party to the attempts to conceal White House involvement in the . . . conspiracy."\(^{37}\)

The factor of credibility or ethos was a prominent ingredient in most of the criticisms and was dominant in the foregoing illustration and in such sources as Buckley's "Impeach the Speech, Not the President,"\(^{38}\) and in Garry Wills' "Richard Nixon's Seventh Crisis,"\(^{39}\) both previously mentioned.

Buckley's was excoriating criticism. He used satire, sarcasm, and reductio ad absurdum to criticize but concluded that the President did not deserve to be believed' Buckley pointed out that Nixon was "flawed," and needed to "be watched," but the critic cynically concluded that "the personal humiliation" of Nixon's ordeals "is probably enough punishment." According to Buckley:

> Impeachment is . . . available against the President who becomes or threatens to become a Caligula. Useful and usable against the despot, or the madman. Richard Nixon is neither [despite] his exercises in managerial tyranny.

Recognizing that America's tradition of innocence until guilt is proved was a moot question in the case of the April 30

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speech and audience, Buckley cited poll results and stated that Nixon's basic task that evening was to reach an audience already convinced of his guilt. He expressed Nixon's and the audience's dilemma in these words:

So here was the people to accept as truth that which half of them did not believe. And here was the President trickily declining to furnish the data on the basis of which they might accept the President's accounting.

Since that was Nixon's task on April 30, Buckley felt that Nixon failed on pragmatic grounds, if in no other manner. The columnist continued: "This was . . . Nixon's great error: that he asserted his innocence, then quickly maneuvered to inhibit the executive branch from documenting that innocence." 40

Wills asserted that Nixon "floundered in April, when the President tried to use television to recruit public sympathy, because he had no kickable foe." Illustrating in that critique several of the strains of criticism based on credibility, Wills not only suggested deliberate effort by Nixon to bolster his personal appeal, but Wills suggested that Nixon did not do as well in these efforts as he had in earlier years. Nixon simply did not do what he does "best," according to Wills: "expressing resentment." 41

Unyielding and eloquent in his negative reaction to Nixon's April 30 address, Robert Hatch expressed a kind of righteous

40 "Impeach the Speech . . .," p. 105.
41 "Richard Nixon's Seventh . . .," pp. 7,25.
indignation not often found in journalistic criticism as he responded almost wholly to the character of the speaker. In answer to the Rev. Billy Graham's call for the nation "to get down on its knees in repentance" because of Watergate, Hatch responded acidly:

That is always salutary behavior; but in the present instance the only deed of which the nation has cause to repent is its selection of Mr. Nixon in the first place.

Pointing to Nixon's statements about the need not to sully the presidency, Hatch said the presidency is "what the President makes it."  

A New York Times critic prophesied in an early editorial that the Watergate scandal had "become a crisis of Presidential authority," by April 30, and that because in that speech Nixon tried but failed to resolve the crisis, "the whole trend of the future events remains in doubt."  

James Reston also pointed out that "the restoration of public confidence in the integrity of the White House" had to involve actions by the President which were consistent with his words--"acts that match the rhetoric," Reston called them.  

He had hope then; but by August the critics did not express such hope.

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43 "Broken Confidence," Sec. 1, p. 44.

August 15 Address

In August the critics were unrelenting in assessing Nixon's seriously low credibility level as important in understanding and appreciating the President's rhetoric. As Nicholas von Hoffman put it after the August 15 television address:

A fair judge would say that President Truthful's latest speech was better than the previous attempts, and rate it only as dreadful. For President Truthful, poor mouthing and mendicant for our support, is waist deep, mired and wallowing in the Big Muddy Watergate. 45

Whether the newspapers were looking back at a speech event, or looking forward to an expected speech, the writers were concerned about the President's credibility; it was the issue of the whole series of events included in this study.

A critic of Nixon's August 15 speech suggested frankly that Nixon had set out to bolster his reputation:

Apparently reacting to the growing realization that Watergate and a loss of world-wide confidence in the administration's ability to govern are linked to rising prices and a weakened dollar, Nixon said, "This administration was elected to control inflation . . . to build a new prosperity . . . without war. 46

A few judicial critics dealt more kindly with the President. Charles Gould, one of the few, felt Nixon was consistent and


honest in his rhetoric. He maintained:

His critics . . . have prejudged him. They would have been satisfied with nothing less than a confession of guilt. I believe the President is telling the truth. I also believe he is correct in suggesting that the Watergate investigation be conducted in the courts. 47

August 20 Address

By August 20 some responses contained derision and name calling. They were rare, however. The most notable example was a well written, serious criticism by Nicholas von Hoffman. His ideas were relevant and reasonable, but his pen was dipped in Nixon's blood. Using strong language to raise questions many were asking about Nixon's behavior at New Orleans, von Hoffman asserted:

As an isolated set of temper we could hope it wouldn't scandalize too many school children, but coming as it does just after that strange looking man made that Watergate speech and right before his spooky stage performance for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a lot of people are beginning to wonder what's going on.

With his San Clemente press conference, the impression is gaining that Nixon is becoming dysfunctional, and the fear is growing that he may do something we'll be sorry for.

It's us who're left dangling with the most important questions about the government's integrity unanswered. But, on the other hand, think of what El Flippo might have said. 48

The President's reputation and character were reasons why respondents reported the speeches succeeded or failed. Although


critics often only implied connections between these factors and the rhetoric, judicial critics more often stated the connection explicitly and formed their judgments on those observations. Generally they concluded that Nixon's continuing lack of candor indicated simply that he was not to be believed.

An editor's statement illustrates the typical judicial conclusion based on ethical concerns:

That Mr. Nixon has learned as little from the public response to Watergate that he would go before the VFW with a ringing defense of duplicity is evidence that he does not yet comprehend the gravity of his situation, nor the full significance of the nation's worst political scandal.49

Putting it another way, but just as candidly, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak started their column on the New Orleans speech in this way:

Portraying not the self-confidence of a president convinced of his own rectitude, Richard M. Nixon launched a counterattack here on his legion of political enemies that even in the pro-Nixon bastion of the Veterans of Foreign Wars fell short of the mark with a sometimes painful thud. "You noticed," a delegate to the VFW national convention lectured us later, "that no one here booed the President. That's why he comes to places like this because he knows he will get a polite reception."50

Some critics in August gave the President benefit of doubt; they felt nothing the President could do in his speeches would tend to change his level of credibility. William S. White

49 "The Nixon Counterattack," p. 2B.

wrote such a reaction in his column, "Sees Value in President's Watergate-to-Court Appeal." But most agreed with Don Bacon that Nixon had no believability and that, in fact, Nixon had revealed in his August 15 speech that the President tacitly accepted that fact himself. Bacon asserted that Nixon by August 15 was more concerned with survival than with credibility.

August 22 News Conference

For that reason, although most of the writers agreed Nixon continued to try, numerous critics of the press conference rhetoric sensed that Nixon had virtually given up on establishing personal credibility on any level other than that he was the President, the only one we had, and that his "enemies" were tormenting him unjustly. In short, Nixon began to appeal more for sympathy in the last two speeches, and respondents generally agreed he was more successful in that effort than in seeking to regain the lost confidence of the American people. The President and critics alike seemed to realize the longer the crisis stayed with them, and, as an editor put it, "the more the President says," the more "the questions" accumulated.  

Some critics felt that Nixon's press conference had been a plus for him, whether confidence was bolstered or not. They felt,

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51 *The Times-Picayune*, August 18, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 10.

as one writer expressed it, that the news conference had dispelled "some of the doubts about his emotional state." 53

Nevertheless, by the time the press conference ended, the consensus of the critics discussing credibility was not favorable to the President. Stewart Alsop framed the problem succinctly when he reminded his readers that Presidents often have to come in times of crisis "to say to all the people: 'Trust me,'" but that for Nixon, by August 23, "even those who love him for the enemies" he had made, did "not much trust him." 54 Thus, the negative critics generally agreed that Nixon's speaking lacked substance, that he sought to be believed only on his own word, and that he did not have a reputation for candor.

For many of these writers the possibility for resignation or impeachment became a more viable possibility. Many of the judicial critics would have agreed with William V. Shannon's statement quoted in an editorial in The Nation that resignation was "inherently logical and grows slightly more probable with each passing week." 55

Shannon earlier had placed the matter of Nixon's believability in clear focus when he claimed:


54 "The President and His Enemies," p. 92.

The gravest question ever raised concerning the personal integrity of an American President, the question of his personal involvement in a conspiracy to obstruct justice and in related crimes, casts a dark shadow across his path. Until that question is resolved one way or the other, he can hardly function as President.  

The President's reputation and believability were significant reasons why numerous criticisms were written, an understandable and an appropriate emphasis. The ethical issue was a basis for them in nearly all of these responses, which were generally calm, restrained, and focused on specific acts, statements, or omissions.

Delivery

Judicial critics expended little effort on such matters as choices of words and language usage, or organization, or on voice and gestures. They did not in any case base an entire critique on such matters, but did refer to them occasionally. Observations about delivery provided bases for statements in the responses which seemed to support critics' assertions about content or credibility, and, rarely, about the speaker's use of language. Judicial critics made the same kinds of observations noted in earlier chapters, but they emphasized them less.

Generally the observations seemed intended to depict an effort on the part of the President to convey deliberately a mood, or the observations helped the critic to describe a mood of tension and

56 "Desperate Hours," Sec. 4, p. 17.
anxiety that the President and his audiences felt. William Greider, for example, describing Nixon's appearance and apparently calculated mannerisms, wrote:

With a small catch in his voice, President Nixon looked eye-to-eye with the national audience of television . . . and accepted the burden for what was done . . . .

The President's expression was somber. His voice hushed with sincerity . . . .

At the end . . . Mr. Nixon set aside his prepared text and folded his hands dramatically. A bust of Lincoln stood by his left shoulder.

"God bless America, he said strongly. God bless each and every one of you." 57

John Herbers also employed reference to Nixon's "manner on stage" and demonstrated how, even briefly, a writer could draw conclusions about delivery and relate those to the context of the speech. Referring to Nixon's New Orleans speech, Herbers asserted:

What was remarkable about the performance was his manner on the stage. He paced about smiling and gesturing in an exaggerated way. He stumbled over his words several times. His voice fluctuated in volume and speed. All this raised in many minds the question . . . whether the strain of five months of Watergate disclosures was beginning to take its toll. 58

Notably explicit about delivery was The New Republic's John Osborne when he described Nixon at New Orleans. After commenting on Nixon's unfortunate shoving incident as the President entered the Rivergate convention center, Osborne continued:


During his VFW speech, the President slurred a distressing number of his words. Reporters who have been observing him for years thought they saw something indefinably but unmistakably odd in his gait and his gestures. Some of them thought that he was drunk. None of them, so far as I know, was sure enough of that impression to report or even suggest it in published and broadcast accounts. Because the impression was so much a feature in the remembered scene, I report it without apology. I also accept the assertions of Nixon's assistants that the President does not drink at midday, certainly not before he is to make a public address, and drinks very little at any time.59

Critics generally agreed that Nixon revealed tension at his press conference, but that he was more in control than he had been in any of the other preceding speech occasions. Critics who mentioned Nixon's appearance, gestures, voice, or posture agreed that he seemed to orchestrate the occasion at least in part by his control and use of these physical aspects of speech-making.

For example, Shannon vividly portrayed the President using voice tone and facial expression to reveal and emphasize his feelings and meanings; Shannon said of the President:

Mr. Nixon's loathing for the reporters was unconcealed as rage, fear and self-pity successively creased his countenance and shook his voice. Short of his being called as a witness in a trial, this was as close as he would come to a serious cross-examination, and he did not like a minute of it.60

One judicial critic used reference to Nixon's appearance to convey the tension of the moment when Nixon confronted the


60 "Desperate Hours," Sec. 4, p. 17.
hostile newsmen at San Clemente. John Herbers wrote of the importance of that even as he sought to convey why the President was nervous. Describing the setting on the lawn of Nixon's estate with the "blue velvet curtain" as a background behind the President in the midday sun," Herbers reported that "Mr. Nixon appeared precisely on time, wearing his customary dark blue suit, nervous as he faced into the sun and began."61

In two separate editorials in The New York Times responding to the press conference rhetoric, each writer showed in brief references to tone of voice or platform manner how Nixon managed to survive the news conference as well as he did. In one the editor said the President gave a "blunt" report to one questioner, and pointed out the "vehemence of his manner."62 In the other the critic implied that Nixon's platform manner was a reason for his "success" in conducting the news conference. Implying that facial expression, posture, and gestures were involved, the editor said:

Mr. Nixon's mood through the ordeal of fifty minutes of often harsh questioning, stood in marked contrast to the imperious burst of ill-temper with which he had ordered his press secretary to shield him from reporters only two days earlier. Indeed, the President conducted himself with such self-confident and conciliatory good humor that it is hard to understand why he had postponed for more than five months a televised interrogation for which the American people have clearly been waiting.

61 "At Last a Torrent . . .," Sec. 4, p. 1.

If Mr. Nixon wanted to show himself in command of his temper in what was clearly an uncomfortably adversary situation, he succeeded admirably. This is all the more remarkable because the sharpness of the questions—including outright reference to the possibility of impeachment and resignation—could not have failed to show how severely the scandals, their cover-up and the unresolved suspicions affected the Presidency. No previous occupant of that office has had to face such harsh public questioning.

While relating that Nixon outwardly revealed confidence, the editor pointed out that Mr. Nixon had "acquitted himself before the cameras" with "aplomb," but the performance could not "obscure the fact that Nixon added nothing of substance toward illuminating the issues or resolving . . . conflicts." 63

The preceding selection also shows that the critic extracted a basis for evaluation from the reference to the President's manner of presentation. Judicial writers did not stop at description, or even interpretation of the relationships; they always took the next step, that of evaluating and judging on the basis of their observations.

Although the President's speech delivery was not a matter of major concern to any of the critics, comments about the mood, setting, gestures, and appearance of the President take on more importance as one reads the criticisms. The volatility of the issues and the related question of presidential credibility made such references very important.

In fact, comments on the President's delivery stand out because they exist at all. Those responses which did refer to delivery stand apart from the usual media reports of presidential rhetoric which ordinarily deal almost exclusively with content.

Style

Not nearly so important or numerous were the criticisms based on language and word choices. Some critics did comment on the President's language as a part of their development of evaluations.

Deliberation in Choices of Words

Referring to what they considered ambiguities in the August 15 address, Evans and Novak said Nixon evoked "memories of . . . Kennedy's appeal for help" following the Bay of Pigs fiasco. They commented on Nixon's "obliquely criticizing" the Democratic Congress and termed Nixon's word choices "uncharacteristically soft-spoken rhetoric."

Another example of critical comment about Nixon's having deliberately chosen certain words appeared in an editorial about that same speech; the editor called Nixon's address "a speech of large silences and vague insinuations," a speech characterized by an aura of a "curiously detached status." The writer picked at the President's use of such obscure terms as "mandate" and concluded that "it

64"Buying Time . . .," p. A25."
was ... this studied sense of remoteness that vitiated his more straightforward statements" in the address.  

James Reston, moreover, found "unworthy deceptions and even hateful distortions" in the August 15 address. He implied strongly that these deceptions and distortions were deliberate choices the speaker made to evade the real issues, an important critical assertion.

Tone

James J. Kilpatrick found Nixon's language in the same speech "lucid," and assertive. But Robert Boyd found "a pleading tone in the President's words." Another writer expressed gratitude that Nixon's August 15 speech "was softer in tone," and that it "reflected . . . an attempt to be conciliatory."  

In other words, these critics were convinced that Nixon's language conveyed tone or mood and felt that observation important enough to record. One reason they did was to compare Nixon's

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68 "President Took Cool Approach," The Miami Herald, August 16, 1973, p. 26A.

Watergate speaking with earlier efforts in the same series of speeches or with speeches in other periods.

In *Time*, a writer found Nixon's August 15 speech "In some respects . . . a brilliantly crafted speech, straightforward sounding" and "without the self-pity" of "last April's performance." Remarking on the tone of hope in some of the President's remarks, the same writer said: "Yet even as he did so, he could not resist a partisan shot or two." In a particularly sharp rebuke to the Ervin committee, Nixon seemed, the critic continued, "to be implying that all Government good works had been stalled by the Senate investigation of Watergate." The "scrappy touches in the Nixon speech" suggested to the *Time* writer that "the President might be getting ready to fight his critics harder from now on." 70

Such references demonstrate clearly that critics reacted to Nixon's rhetoric on the basis of stylistic "tone," and that they did so in order to understand what the President meant and what he was trying to accomplish in his speaking. The critical comments tended to aid in understanding and evaluation.

**Baiting Opponents**

Not only did the President deliberate on his choices, but he apparently baited his opponents with language. One respondent

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70 "Scrambling to Break Clear . . .," pp. 11, 13.
expressed that interpretation of Nixon's use of language by suggesting that Nixon deflected criticism by setting up straw issues and opponents, an inventive technique mentioned here to emphasize that it was accomplished through care in choosing words. Specifically referring to the press conference, a reporter claimed:

Where Mr. Nixon scored, I thought, was that he kept hold of himself, and did a little more polarizing against critics (the people who are "exploiting" Watergate, he said). The pattern is apt to be repeated. . . . Mr. Nixon identified opponents as he did in 1972 and will do again: people who oppose "peace with honor" . . . are exploiting Watergate, he says, "to keep the President from doing his job."  

Building Credibility

Some writers expressed explicitly that Nixon's word choices affected his credibility. They suggested that Nixon gained respect through his use of language.

For instance, one writer used a reference to language to contend that Nixon had exhibited confidence at the press conference, showing "flashes of unexpected humor," and, because he had responded to all of the questions "the press threw at him," "President Nixon regained a considerable measure of respect and credibility."  

That editor was also probably mistaken in his interpretation of what Mr. Nixon really accomplished that day. The polls


and subsequent events did not bear him out in his judgment. Nevertheless, it was a judgment based on the critic's assessment of the speaker's use of language.

Only one writer studied labeled stylistic techniques as a part of a judicial evaluation: Richard Dudman. More than all the others, he suggested that the President chose his style of language deliberately. "He included," Dudman asserted, "two truisms—ends cannot justify means and two wrongs do not make a right—and an apothegm—'There can be no whitewash at the White House.'"  

References to style of language, therefore, like those to delivery, supported assertions mainly about character or reputation or about the arguments and ideas in the speeches. Reporters generally implied, but sometimes stated explicitly, the importance of Nixon's use of language in accomplishing his purposes or in affecting the listeners' reception of the rhetoric. One labeled the techniques, and several suggested that the President deliberately chose his language in planning for the speeches.

Organization

Judicial critics hardly mentioned organization in Nixon's speaking. However, some referred to organizational order to point up the inconsistency of an argument, the relative importance of an

73"Nixon Stresses His Innocence in Emotional Broadcast," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, May 1, 1973, p. 1B.
argument, or the absence of arguments promised in the early section of a speech and not subsequently delivered. Other comments about organization were simple remarks such as "Nixon opened" or "closed" his talk with a particular statement.

James Reston, like a few other columnists and editorial writers, sometimes made statements based on brief references to organization. Suggesting that Nixon had promised early in the August 15 speech to answer questions which the President did not mention further, Reston was specific in responding to that organizational matter:

The odd thing about the President's speech is that he raised in the beginning the main questions, when he promised to answer, and then didn't answer them. He said it was his constitutional responsibility to defend the "integrity of the presidency against false charges" and then failed to define what was integrity and what was false.74

Reston's implication is clear: Nixon either deliberately or subconsciously separated his promises from his fulfillments in the speech—the former at the beginning of the speech, the latter at the last. Implied was obfuscation, evasion, and, perhaps, even misrepresentation. Certainly this was an important critical assertion.

Articles in only two of the magazines studied could be construed as having evaluated organization. In an editorial in The New Republic, a writer made the point that Nixon sought "toward

the end of his April 30 talk" to "dull the sharp edges of espionage by calling them 'shady tactics.'" The implication was that it was a conscious perorative touch to dull in the minds of his listeners the negative images undoubtedly already there.\footnote{The President Buys Time, May 12, 1973, p. 8.}

A writer for The New Yorker, referring to the order in which the President had handled his ideas, made the same point that Nixon did not do what he said "at the outset" of his August 15 speech that he said he would do. The journalist also noted that Nixon "again and again" used certain terms and that he skillfully piled absurdity upon absurdity until "in the end" the best reason he could offer for putting Watergate aside was his claim that public and private "obsession" with the Watergate issue was "dangerously hampering" his conduct of government.\footnote{The Talk of the Town ..., August 27, 1973, pp. 19, 20.} The critique seemed to imply that Nixon's words were ordered in such a manner as to focus on the climactic ending.

Pointing up what he felt was a logical fallacy, The Call's editor said one of Nixon's August 15 arguments was even more ludicrous because of how the speaker had ordered his materials. The editor contended:

In almost the same breath--certainly within the same 5-minute period--President Nixon vowed . . . "to continue to meet my Constitutional responsibility to protect the
security of this nation...." He lumped together the civil rights crusaders and the Watergate criminals.77

The polls suggested that most Americans agreed with The Call's editor that Nixon's arguments were inadequate and that his rhetoric contained only endless repetitions of vague words. Richard Dudman, Washington correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, pointed to that pattern of sameness and emptiness when he asserted: "Mr. Nixon's speech followed a pattern he had followed in most of his previous crises, even to outlining the easy course, and then saying that he was doing the more difficult but correct thing.78

Not many critics referred to order directly. Those who did sometimes found in the President's organization possible clues for understanding his meanings and his motivations, but critics usually only implied such possibilities.

Implications

Comprising about one-third of all the responses and well over one-half of all the editorials and columns, judicial evaluations were a dominant mode of criticism. If one accepts the implications of the Thonssen, Baird, and Braden categories, these constitute the most desirable and the most valuable of the responses because they


78 "Nixon Stresses . . .," p. 1B.
were genuinely evaluative, because they rendered reasoned judgments, and were relatively well developed.

More than the other kinds of responses, these were generally well organized and developed with more supporting documentation and amplification than the others. They discussed effect more and expressed reasoned observations. Although there was variety in these qualities within the various individual responses and in the quality of writing and comprehensiveness of the responses, generally writers of these evaluations provided genuine interpretation and judgment based on sound information.

None was judicial if by that term one envisions the kind of thorough analysis encouraged in academic departments of speech communication. None equaled in judiciousness the kinds of classic studies of public address in the literature of the field of speech criticism. However, one must consider in judging these responses that they were limited by the medium in which they appeared. Writers faced problems of deadlines, lack of space, and the need to appeal to readers-on-the-run. Despite those problems, many writers produced thoughtful and relatively well-developed assessments.

The respondents whose writings were studied undoubtedly affected Americans' critical attitudes, but the critics seemed to be less unfavorable to the President's rhetoric than the polls revealed the general public felt. The responses were not nearly so candid or negatively critical as were the public's responses to pollsters'
questions. If the writers were out of step, they were probably behind, not ahead of the people.

Judicial critics may be commended for emphasizing invention as the most important basis for evaluation. In addition, they found creative ways to use the other classical bases for criticism in their assertions about the President's speeches. Sometimes, as did an editor of The Christian Century, journalists based specific suggestions for changes in conduct, policy, or personnel on their discussions of Nixon's arguments. Nearly always the writers indicated implications of the rhetoric which inclusions set their responses apart from the other types of criticism.

Many centered on the probity of Nixon's character and on the possible impact of Nixon's personality and reputation. This sort of evaluation often reached almost ad hominem level of attack on the President, but usually writers expressed their disdain guardedly. Those few whose responses were essentially favorable or neutral seemed to be searching for a positive picture to portray. Their efforts were studied and self-conscious and, almost without exception, they ignored the crucial points negative critics emphasized: that the President's speaking lacked substance, that he sought to be believed only on his own word, and that he did not have a reputation for candor. Favorable writers had to be favorable on the basis of finding

Nixon's tactics pragmatically acceptable, not philosophically or morally commendable. It is significant that almost all who thoroughly studied Nixon's rhetoric and who wrote judicial responses, could find little to commend.

Although the criticisms were overwhelmingly unfavorable, and some were strongly worded, generally the criticisms were restrained and constructive. As pointed out before, the favorable critics were self-consciously and only cautiously favorable and seemed to be straining to find something for which the President could be commended. Finally, the neutral criticisms presented both "sides" and described the speech's significance while declining to render much judgment or evaluative insight.

None of the criticisms contained any misquotations or serious flaws in logic. The writers reacted to the material at hand, compared Nixon's speech-making with previous addresses, suggested parallels with other scandals in American national politics, analyzed Nixon's arguments, described his voice and manner of presentation, summarized his ideas, suggested possible reactions of the public, and projected potential effects in generally denotative language. Nowhere could this writer find language apparently designed to be inflammatory or to distort the President's ideas or misrepresent the facts surrounding the speech events.

Considering the national upheaval over the misdeeds, the personnel involved, the secretiveness of the President, and the
apparently unending quality of the revelations, the press could have said what it said much more stridently. It did not. Whether that is commendable probably will have to await the final judgment of history. The reason for the indulgence is that the American people and the American press were in a state of shock. But there was also a bemused, almost naive detachment noticeable in many of the responses—a type of trust in the American system that could cause an articulate negative critic of the President's speech-making to say:

Mr. Nixon's speech was empty of everything but divisiveness, and from that we learn something. The reason he went three months without saying anything on his own behalf is that he has nothing to say. His employees went as long as they could saying (as St. Augustine said of God) that Mr. Nixon is "justly secret and secretly just." This was an unsatisfactory posture, but it was more satisfactory than "positive polarization." If Mr. Nixon really gets energetic about dividing the nation, we may soon be hoping that the cat again will get his tongue.  

Most writers of these responses agreed on what were the major arguments, although they did not always respond to the same arguments in their responses. They were selective in the rhetorical elements to which they responded, but, more than the others, tended to show how the various elements in Nixon's rhetoric could be seen as a coherent whole.

Judicial reporters also wrote more about effect of the speeches as they saw it or predicted it. More than others, they dealt with the significance of the speeches and their potential impact.

As much as any other quality, these estimates of importance and long-term effect set apart the judicial responses from the others.

These responses occurred more in columns and in editorials than in articles. No poll report was or could be judicial in nature. Columns and editorials were more thoughtfully written, thought-provoking, reflective, and logically organized. They were generally more sophisticated in developing coherent thoughts and in the language they used to convey them.

Some particularly distinguished themselves with creative insights, sophisticated use of humor and satire, and in the apparent effort many seemed to expend in trying to be fair and restrained in their judgments. The restraint, in fact, in some cases almost may have reached the point of a fault.

They could have written better criticisms if they had been more explicit in setting up rhetorical standards by which the speaking could be judged. They might have written more explicitly, in other words, about how Nixon's speeches compared to what the nation has a right to expect of its temporary monarchs in their communication efforts.

Especially since the poll reports indicated Nixon's credibility was alarmingly low and declining, judicial criticisms which were read by potentially large numbers of readers, became even more important. They were important because the public needed to be helped to think through the reasons for their feelings and evaluations,
and judicial criticisms provided bases for public action and reaction. Presumably reasoned response is the hoped-for result of rhetoric and of rhetorical criticism.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The Watergate crisis was for the United States a political upheaval of unprecedented dimension. The events included public speaking situations in which President Richard Nixon spoke on the issues, defending himself and his policies. In 1973 during the early days of that national trauma of Watergate, Nixon delivered three major addresses: April 30, August 15, and August 20, and held one press conference, August 22.

These public appearances captured the attention and raised the hopes of many citizens that the President would answer the questions about the Watergate episode. Specifically relevant to the President’s rhetoric was the issue of possible presidential involvement in the planning for and/or the cover-up of the burglary of the Democratic headquarters. The heart of the matter were the issues of the use of presidential power and the President’s veracity and responsibility.

The events and the speeches prompted an unusual amount of specific, pointed, and often thoughtful critical comment in the newspapers and magazines of the United States. Those responses
were the subjects of this study.

This investigation was predicated on an assumption that both rhetoric and rhetorical criticism are important, particularly so in a society which purports to be "free." Presumably reactions to rhetoric in such a context reveal how the public responded and what kind of evaluations were characteristic in the printed media. Further, because of their large numbers, the criticisms themselves possibly affected the direction and the potential outcome of the events.

This study considered 691 individual pieces of journalistic reactions from the "top ten" American newspapers, from six other newspapers from across the nation, and from twelve well-known magazines. The following sections of this chapter summarize the characteristics of the criticisms and evaluate the materials on the basis of journalistic standards and rhetorical criticism standards. A final section deals with implications of the study.

General Characteristics of the Responses

One obvious feature of the responses studied is that they were largely unfavorable in their assessments of Nixon's speaking. Except for a few small, southern newspapers and The Wall Street Journal, most of the newspapers and all of the magazines contained much more negative than favorable or even neutral reactions.

As pointed out in Chapter III, the opinion polls published in the period studied provided two findings which help to place the
journalists' negativeness in perspective. First, polls suggested
that the President's credibility was low at the beginning of the period
studied and that his popularity became even lower just after the last
of the four speech events involved in this investigation. Second,
polls also revealed that the President's speaking was a factor in
that declining popularity since the questions asked in the surveys
often focused on reactions to specific speeches.

The critics' disfavor apparently was consistent with the
mainstream of Americans' reactions to the speaking. Indeed, responses
by the journalists generally were less strident and insistent than were
citizens' responses as quoted in the various opinion polls.

The criticisms also exhibited considerable variety in
quality and complexity of development. Although the Speech Criticism
categories (outlined in Chapter I and utilized throughout the study)
describe more extensive, usually academically oriented analyses,
the terms suggest standards, levels, or types of speech criticisms
which were meaningful in considering journalistic responses. Not
discrete or absolute in the sense that one is exclusive of the others,
nevertheless the labels proved helpful in suggesting the progression
of complexity, the seriousness of purpose, the comprehensiveness,
and, presumably, the value of the assessments—-from impressionis-
tic, to analytic, to synthetic, to judicial reactions.

Impressionistic criticisms focused on opinions and were
undeveloped generally. Analytic writings centered principally on
evaluation of the speech content. The synthetic ones drew together materials related to audience and occasion, comparisons with other speeches or speakers, and included background of a practical or philosophical nature. Judicial responses included the features of the other three types in varying degrees, but had two other features: one, analysis was supplemented by serious reason-giving statements and other types of supporting materials; two, interpretation and evaluation was central, not incidental, and the responses were more thorough and better organized.

The Speech Criticism terms provided a useful framework in that they suggested the varying qualities and levels of the journalists' responses in two ways. First, some of the reactions seemed to be an end in themselves in the sense that they represented, perhaps, criticism at an arrested stage of development. Second, these truncated responses seemed to be a "type" as well as a level because of the limited nature of the emphases they included.

The best illustrations of that kind of criticism are the impressionistic responses, embracing all the poll reports which were separate pieces in the publications, the on-the-street remarks, and subjective outbursts from politicians and other citizens. Such writings tended to be an almost distinct type as contrasted with the other three. Some appeared to be only the beginnings of ideas and statements which would be developed later on a higher level.
The other three levels more clearly reveal completeness and complexity of development, particularly in columns and editorials. Some writers responded analytically in some pieces and judicially in others, revealing a kind of progression of complexity. However, since many of the estimates did not have by-lines, the progression of development cannot be documented systematically. Illustrations are cited later in this chapter regarding how some writers analyzed on different levels in various pieces of writing.

Looking at the criticisms as a whole, this writer is impressed at the number which can be described as essentially synthetic or judicial. Moreover, it is worth noting that despite possible deficiencies, and although abbreviated and simplistic in many cases, impressionistic and analytic responses also were significant parts of the body of critical assessments read by millions of Americans in the period studied. Such writings might not constitute so dominant a position in other times, but in this particular period, although they probably oversimplified some issues and confused some readers, at least they seemed to focus attention on the issues.

Perhaps the reasons for the disparity in types and levels in these estimates, is that writers had no guidelines for responding to such a situation as Watergate and they were responding primarily as reporters, not as critics. The unusual number of the criticisms and their dominance throughout many pages of the sources for a long time, insured that the quality and the variety of types of critical
assessments would be great.

Another characteristic of the materials studied is that the estimates appeared in varying forms of journalistic writing such as columns, editorials, articles, and poll reports. As pointed out in Chapter I, the first three are standard terms familiar to the general public as well as to journalists. The column is a regular, always by-lined piece of interpretive and evaluative news writing. The editorial unless syndicated is seldom by-lined, but almost always appears in the editorial section of a publication; editorials contain interpretive and evaluative statements and opinion. The article is a general term applied to a wide variety of materials by news writers, essentially any piece that is not an editorial or column; articles sometimes are only news reporting, sometimes interpretive, and sometimes, but seldom, by-lined. The poll report is a term used in this study to refer to the large number of articles the content of which was wholly or almost wholly devoted to reporting of poll results. Results of these surveys were also included in some other pieces of writing in the other three categories, but often the poll report was a distinct type in itself with particular importance because it related so pertinently to the speech events and issues of Watergate.

The writing types created diversity and helped to determine the nature of the responses. They are discussed more in connection with the sections of evaluation which follow.
The following section of this chapter consists of an assessment of these journalistic criticisms by looking at them from an internal view and an external view. That is, the evaluation will be centered on journalistic standards of evaluation and classical rhetorical criticism tradition.

**Evaluation**

It is not easy to evaluate the materials studied, for their variety in length, approach, and complexity militates against quick or easy assessment. Furthermore, the medium in which the estimates appeared affected their nature and quality. However, as the writer suggested at the outset of this study, the great numbers and the variety of the critiques and their potential for both reflecting and influencing public opinion, all point to the need for understanding these responses.

The materials in this study are evaluated in this section on two bases: from the standpoint of journalistic standards as expressed in several books on journalism, and from the standpoint of rhetorical criticism stemming from the classical tradition of Aristotle and others, summarized in *Speech Criticism*, by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden. The writer does not suggest that these are the only measures which could or should be applied. Also, the writer does not intend to force these responses into strict molds. Rather, the evaluation

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is more an attempt to understand than to judge.

Evaluation Based on Journalistic Standards

The principle traditional function of print journalism "consists of finding out the facts, and then presenting them as they are—clearly and concisely." For the most part journalists are apparently encouraged to write with the assumption that readers, especially of newspapers, "are after information and not inspiration or beauty."  

The "Code of Ethics or Canons of Journalism" of the American Society of Newspaper Editors declared that "the primary function" of a newspaper is "to communicate to the human race what its members do, feel, and think," but that "to its opportunities as a chronicle are indissolubly linked its obligation as teacher and interpreter." "Facts" and interpretation are valued by journalists, but some writers in the field of journalism take care to point out that "interpretive" reporting is not a return to "the old days of slanted news," but a placing of the facts in perspective by adding

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relevant background.\textsuperscript{5}

The Code included such standards as "responsibility," "accuracy," and "fairness." On responsibility, the statement suggested that a journalist's rights must be balanced by responsiveness to public welfare and by a sincere effort at truthfulness and accuracy.\textsuperscript{6} Accuracy seems to embrace clarity and comprehensiveness, as embodied in the traditional questions a reporter is supposed to answer: who, what, when, where, why, and how?\textsuperscript{7} "Here is the test," Brucker said, "does the reporter make an honest effort to present a fully rounded story that tells both sides of any dispute and includes all that is pertinent to the event?"\textsuperscript{8}

Journalistic standards are relative and are stated in general terms. For instance, the unfavorable stance of most of the publications might seem to indicate bias. But several factors must be considered. As pointed out before, these journalists were not out of step with the American people generally, except that they were apparently not as unfavorable as the polls revealed Americans generally were. Second, the writer of this study classified the materials as unfavorable not only because they may have stated

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Brucker, p. 28.
\item Gross, pp. 405,406.
\item Brucker, p. 28.
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unfavorable opinions about Nixon's rhetoric, but also because of the very nature of the ideas that some reporters emphasized, which would tend to have a negative effect on readers—regardless of what the motives or the intent of a writer may have been in a particular entry.

The Code referred to earlier states clearly:

Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion. News reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind... This rule does not apply to... special articles unmistakably devoted to advocacy or characterized by a signature authorizing the writer's own conclusions and interpretation.9

Generally the journalistic writers followed that dictum carefully. But when a reporter suggested, however innocently, that the President did not have an answer to a particular charge, he tended to produce a negative reaction, unless the reader was predisposed to favor the President. The polls reveal that the majority of Americans were not so predisposed.

One can, perhaps, say that there was an overbalance in the negative direction, with only a few publications even tending to have a balance, and none definitely favorable. However, the unusual nature of the events must be taken into consideration. The people generally did not accept Nixon's claims of innocence as sufficient refutation of the charges made against him. Even in some of the most unfavorable writings, statements appeared indicating that the

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reporter hoped he was wrong about the President. Often writers specifically call for Nixon to explain his position clearly in order to vindicate himself.

One cannot measure these writings' bias as one could if the journalists had been responding to an issue over which reasonable men in a variety of places disagreed and two "sides" were engaged in a lively debate. That was not the nature of the controversy in this situation. The issue came to be by summer, 1973, not whether abuse of power and obstruction of justice had occurred, but rather what to do about what Americans already believed to be facts.

The imbalance in terms of favoring or disfavoring the President's rhetoric was created by a number of otherwise conservative newspapers and magazines, such as The Houston Chronicle and the Chicago Tribune, sharing the predictable liberal stance of such publications as The New York Times and The Washington Post. A controversy which could cause the Chicago Tribune and Time magazine, both traditionally Republican publications, to call for Nixon's resignation cannot be seen as a kind of issue where one would expect to find a balance of viewpoints in the nation's print journalism.

In his survey Louis Harris found that, although Americans were growing tired of reading about the Watergate affair by September, 1973, they largely felt that the press had been fair and that the press had substantially contributed to their knowledge. Harris reported
that "Americans by a 66% to 24% majority expressed belief that the press was not out to get President Nixon on Watergate." By a division of 66% to 22%, those interviewed agreed that "if it had not been for the press expose's the whole Watergate mess would never have been found out."^10

The public, therefore, generally and increasingly thought the printed media was beneficial and fair. That criticism found a wide audience and must be considered important in the story of Watergate, if for no other reason, because so many people read and believed those critiques. The circulation of the daily publications used in this study is almost seven million (even more on Sundays). The weekly publications used have a circulation of 10,179,288, the bi-weekly ones 128,229, and the monthly sources, 130,000.11 That is a large audience, indeed.

Americans may have tired of Watergate, but polls also demonstrated the declining popularity of the President. Apparently his rhetoric and his conduct in general diminished his credibility with the American people. Sixty-eight per cent of Americans surveyed in a later Harris poll rated Nixon negatively, the lowest


esteem for an American president ever measured. 12

The idea that the sources were essentially fair finds further support in a detailed analysis the Los Angeles Times commissioned Edward J. Epstein to do. Epstein covered the period from the burglary in June, 1972, through the first phase of the Senate hearings, a period embracing the April 30 speech. He studied press responses in Time, Newsweek, Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and The New York Times. In his excellent study Epstein concluded that the American press "on almost any reasonable criteria, . . . showed a consistent—and unexpected—degree of fairness."

His conclusion was based on his judgment that there was general lack of bias, a balance of materials included, "saneness" of attitudes, and on his determination that the writings were characterized by accuracy as well. 13

Although no definite errors in statements of fact or quotations were discovered by the writer of this dissertation, Epstein suggested that he had found two errors in charges The Washington Post and Time made about Senate testimony; he reported finding no errors in the reporting of and criticizing of the speech covered in his study. In addition Epstein contended:

12 "Nixon's Popularity," The Houston Chronicle, January 17, 1974, Sec. 1, p. 17.

There is no reason to presume that the error ... reflected either deficient reporting or bad faith. ... Both ... were reporting leaks from sources that had apparently been ... accurate in the past. ...

Those few errors must also be put into context: The Washington Post and Time were by far the most aggressive vanguard of the press in reporting Watergate, and the vast preponderance of what they reported—and 99% of the factual statements—have proven accurate.\(^\text{14}\)

In assessing these responses as journalism, Epstein also clarified another point:

In the case of Watergate, in which almost all the witnesses ... were either hostile to the press or intimated by others in power, the newspapers could not have reported most developments in the case without relying on indirect, or "hearsay," evidence. As far as journalism is concerned, the crucial question is not whether a charge would be admissible in court, but whether it originates from a reliable source, and is therefore accurately reported and labeled.\(^\text{15}\)

Although Epstein was not writing only about critical responses to Nixon's rhetoric, his findings confirmed the essential fairness of the journalists who reacted to Nixon's speaking. They seemed to write about what they saw and heard with relative accuracy and with restraint and courtesy in numerous instances.

In assessing the accuracy of these responses the medium of print journalism itself must be considered—its nature and particularly its limitations. Journalists see their task as influenced greatly by the particular mode or modes of the writing and by the nature of the publication in which the writing appears. In Chapter I

\(^{14}\) Epstein, p. 19.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
this study used the traditional terminology of columns (by-lined opinions and interpretation), editorials (interpretation and opinions), and articles (sometimes by-lined, usually not, with emphasis on facts, but sometimes including "facts in perspective" or background and interpretation). Poll reports were also included as a recognizable special kind of article, the results of which also are found in the other three types of writing. These types, discussed in Kriegbaum's work on journalism, form a composite kind of reportage and have advantages and disadvantages in each case. In all of the kinds of writing one problem facing each writer was that of trying to report the facts clearly and concisely within the limitations the medium automatically imposed.

As Rogers pointed out:

Several aspects of newspaper writing are based on shortages. Usually the story is supposed to be written as briefly as possible because there is a shortage of space in the paper. Then, the most important facts are supposed to be told first. . . . This is because the reader has a shortage of time and must be told the essentials in a hurry. . . . Clarity, . . . is necessary because some readers have a shortage of ability to understand what they are reading. . . . This third shortage applies to reporters and editors, too, only more so because they are supposed to know something about everything whereas most readers have a limited number of specialities.


17 "Newswriting," in Herzberg, pp. 139,140.
The most comprehensive evaluations appeared in columns and editorials. Such assessments generally centered on selected main ideas, were logical in development, were generally carefully and thoughtfully phrased, and were evaluative in nature. They had the most reason-giving, supporting statements and generally were judicial in character. They tended to deal with invention, specifically the nature and the quality of the ideas and arguments and with the speaker's reputation more than did articles or poll reports. Articles were more varied, almost evenly divided among the Speech Criticism categories. Poll reports were almost totally unfavorable, were impressionistic, and criticized primarily the credibility of the speaker.

The articles and poll reports filled a vital role, however, in giving the American people quick, accurate information and succinct reactions to the speeches. Although not as developed or as carefully written, articles and poll responses were an important part of the spectrum of criticisms confronting the people, in part because they also included materials about delivery, and, somewhat less so, about style and organization. Such responses probably were read by more people than the editorials or columns and probably provided additional bases for understanding the more detailed, invention-based, sophisticated estimates.

Although some articles were almost wholly reportorial treatments, with only scattered critical comments, a few centered
on a particular aspect or used a comparison with another speech as
the basis for criticism. Articles which focused on limited aspects
of the speeches or which seemed to have relatively more logical
structure, were generally by-lined, syndicated articles. These
were not columns in the sense of being regular features in a source.

Since the writers' main task was reporting what Nixon
said, it is appropriate that they emphasized the speaker's ideas
and the speaker's character and reputation. While it is unfortunate
that more writers did not see in such matters as delivery, style,
and organization important clues for understanding the meaning of
Nixon's words, the paucity of such materials is probably under-
standable.

The journalists' use of language played an important part
in conveying their critical messages. Word choices were particularly
important in terms of whether or not the assessments were unfavorable,
neutral, or favorable. For the most part, the writer of this study
was impressed with the care exercised in the critical writing. As
indicated earlier, distortions, misrepresentations, or inaccuracies
did not characterize these reports.

The techniques utilized in the writing were generally
descriptions of the event, reporting the President's words, comparing
the recent Nixon speech with some previous public-speaking effort,
often relating these to public expectations or to related political
stories or events. There was nothing of the exotic or the irrelevant
which characterized these writings.

Reporters analyzed Nixon's arguments, albeit superficially in most cases; they suggested what were possible effects of Nixon's words, usually quite cautiously. Some showed insight into Nixon's rhetoric; most were not as creative or as inventive as might have been desired. In virtually every case the emphasis was on denotive language rather than on connotation. Some satire, sarcasm, and vivid, emotional language was employed, but the language in most entries was surprisingly calm and measured, considering the issues being discussed. These writers seemed to meet the journalists' own standard of fairness and accuracy in the use of language.

Ault and Emery suggested in their work on journalism that abilities of reporters can be measured by the way they "handle speech stories." These authors referred to the difficulty which the writings revealed clearly--the difficulty in reporting and reacting to live public addresses. But the authors recommended following the same procedure which seemed to cause the most difficulty for the critics. Ault and Emery suggested the best way to handle such writing tasks was to use the following familiar reporting pattern of organization:

The lead of a speech story is a summary statement. It tells the reader the essence of . . . the speaker's message. . . .
If the speaker discusses two or three major issues—there probably is no single main theme. Then the reporter decides which one of the major statements should be featured in the lead, and he very early summarizes the others.\textsuperscript{18}

Such a procedure as they outlined was the pattern found in most of the writing studied, particularly in the articles, most of which emphasized reportage as much as evaluation. In all cases, however, the writers followed this pattern of selection and emphasis. The procedure, perhaps, was appropriate from the journalistic standpoint, but potentially confusing in cases where, for instance, writers omitted needed transitions. Certainly no concept of the order of Nixon's ideas as expressed could have been derived from most of the criticisms studied.

In fairness, this peculiar style of writing so characteristic particularly of newspapers, while potentially confusing, did not constitute a major problem in the case of Nixon's rhetoric, because the President had only a few major points in each speech. Labeling them and ordering them was not as important as such procedures might have been in other situations. Nor was the process of selection of certain assertions for emphasis a major problem, again because of the small number of important assertions.

Although bias through selection was a potential problem in these responses, writers who wrote on a more evaluative plane usually clearly indicated that they were selecting only a limited

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Reporting the News}, p. 88.
portion of the rhetoric, or they asserted that they were going to
discuss what they felt was most important, usually stating why.

From the standpoint of journalistic standards, with
reporting as the primary goal, it is understandable and appropriate
that the writers engaged in this process of selection of arguments.
The major criticism which can be levied at this procedure is not
that the writers selected, but that they did not criticize any one
argument in much depth in most cases. Some critics did use
references to delivery and, rarely, to organization or language, to
develop the critiques; some examined the speaker's logical processes.
All probably were limited by space more than by any other concern.

Some of the writers, nonetheless, set a high standard in
their offerings and illustrated how some critics wrote on different
levels of criticism. For instance, although James Reston wrote
responses which were essentially judicial (several have been cited
already in this study), he also emphasized synthesis of several
factors relevant to Nixon's April 30 address in his column, "There's
a Lot More to This,"19 and focused more on analysis than on
evaluation in his column, "Finally, a Little Good News."20

Bill Anderson, a columnist, wrote essentially on a
synthetic level in "Behind the Scenes at THE [sic] Speech,"21

19 The Atlanta Constitution, May 2, 1973, p. 2A.
21 Chicago Tribune, August 17, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 12.
and was concerned almost exclusively with analyzing content of the press conference in his column, "Nixon in a 'Race' for Public Support." Anderson, along with Vernon Jarrett, of the Chicago Tribune, were writers who distinguished themselves for clear and interesting critical styles.

Others who represented their field well in terms of criteria of clarity, conciseness, accuracy, and over-all responsibility were columnist Ernest B. Furguson, of The Baltimore Sun, whose writings appeared in The Miami Herald, William V. Shannon, of The New York Times, and William F. Buckley, Jr. Peter Lisagor, Rowland Evans, Robert Novak, Nicholas von Hoffman, John Herbers, William Raspberry, Garry Wills, Mike Royko, and Stewart Alsop are additional names associated with thoughtful and clearly constructed responses.

The responses included writers at extreme ends of the pole. William Safire's columns were notable for their studied effort to give the President benefit of the doubt. Safire, now on the staff of The New York Times, is a former Nixon aide. On the opposite end one could read the biting, satirical comments of Shana Alexander or Art Buchwald.

The best newspaper editorials in terms of consistently high standards of comprehensiveness and documentation were The Chicago Tribune, September 10, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 10.
New York Times and The Washington Post. These sources seemed to have writers who had a consistent breadth of understanding, who drew on a variety of sources for documentation, and who sensed the necessity to develop reasons for the assertions used to develop their reactions to Nixon's speaking. These sources were not unbiased, but in their responses they set high standards for the other newspapers, most of which do not have the research personnel or facilities of the New York and Washington papers, nor are they publishing from those seats of power and influence.

Sources such as The Nation and National Review had much more explicitly stated opinions and evaluations than did the newspapers generally. The news magazines, by their very nature, had more comprehensive and varied types of estimates and dealt with such issues as delivery and style more frequently than other types of magazines.

Magazines generally centered their evaluations on ideas and the character and reputation of the speaker as bases of criticism more consistently than did even the most prestigious of the newspapers. Six of the magazines had responses in which the contents were wholly focused on those two bases of criticism.

The larger newspapers had by far the most critical materials. The Miami Herald, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Chicago Tribune had over 60 pieces each, and the second echelon was composed of the Los Angeles', Houston, Louisville,

Considering the limitations of the medium and the purposes journalists traditionally have in writing, the materials seemed responsible, fair, and comprehensive generally. By reading almost any publication, certainly by reading a combination of a large newspaper and any one other publication, a reader would have confronted a large amount of reports and reactions, some of which were genuinely critical assessments of Nixon's rhetoric. Sufficient writings existed to provide the public with a composite picture of what the President said and a sufficient number of responses to provide the reading public with bases for making their own assessments.

Evaluation Based on Standards of Rhetorical Criticism

This study has suggested that the writings studied ranged from simplistic impressions to relatively well developed judicial responses. The term "judicial" has been used advisedly, for the term may or may not apply to any of the responses, depending on one's definition of "criticism." As this writer stated in Chapter I, none of the responses were really criticism if the term is reserved only for those which follow the three criteria set forth, for instance, by Barnet Baskerville, who said:
The making of an intelligent critical judgment involves (1) thorough understanding of the thing being criticized, (2) formulation of acceptable criteria or philosophic principles of judgment, and (3) application of criteria . . . for the purpose of evaluation.  

Not all of them, but some did seem to constitute rhetorical criticism if that term is defined in more general terms, as did Donald C. Bryant, who said rhetorical criticism involves knowing and showing "what was and what might have been."  

The central differences between what a rhetorical critic might have done and what was done in these reactions lie in two spheres. The writers did not engage in development of details and background to the extent one would find in a classical rhetorical study, and they did not emphasize (and usually only implied) the criteria by which the speeches were measured.  

It is true that development, detail, and reason-giving were sparse in many of the estimates studied. In part this can be explained in that none of the writers had space to indulge in developing his ideas, whereas space is probably only a marginal consideration of critics who set out to engage in rhetorical criticism as such. 

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In regard to relative complexity of development, it must be kept in mind that, as pointed out earlier, the writers probably presumed readers would glean a relatively complete picture of the rhetorical events through what might be termed a "mosaic effect," whereby readers would get bits and pieces of reactions and analyses of various writers in a single issue or over several issues. The consummable and transitory nature of the journalists' medium created the writers' dependence on this effect. While it is perhaps understandable, the dependence and the resulting reduction in comprehensiveness and quality of the writings is unfortunate.

One reasonable assumption made by the writers was that the readers had probably seen and heard the President's speeches on television. Further, the reporters could depend on readers having access to copies of the speeches in the same issue where the critical responses appeared.

Moving to the second distinction, these journalistic assessments did not engage in criticism by reference to rhetorical theory or by appeal to speech models. It is not surprising that they did not utilize classical rhetorical theory; it is a bit more surprising that the writers did not use the simple technique of referring to familiar models of rhetoric, particularly to recent examples of crisis rhetoric, such as John F. Kennedy's Bay of Pigs speech or to Edward Kennedy's Chappaquiddick explanation even more recently, both relatively clear examples of prominent politicians responding to
crises in which their actions had been subjected to criticism. Only one source found a parallel in the Bay of Pigs speech. An underlying assumption of most of the writers seemed to be that Nixon is unique and that Nixon's rhetoric could be compared only with earlier examples of Nixon rhetoric.

Baskerville's depiction of "descriptive analysis" probably fits most of the materials used in this study; he called such writings valuable, but only "pre-requisites to appraisal." Evaluating such descriptive analyses, he said:

It is the means by which we achieve that thorough understanding which we have posited as the first step in the critical process. Analysis may also be an end in itself, as well as a means. Many excellent descriptive or historical studies are directed towards getting at the facts; they seek to answer such questions as what is it like? What really happened? What did he say? This is well worth doing . . . but in itself is not criticism. The critical study moves beyond this into the realm of evaluation in terms of explicit or implied standards.

Baskerville recognized, nonetheless, that, although such studies do not fulfill the requirements of the critical method, they employ a critical method. As he said, "the very act of selecting or rejecting materials implies evaluation."25 Thus, the position of this writer is that whether one calls these materials criticism or not is unimportant. Most of the writers whose works were studied did criticize and did evaluate, albeit in a truncated fashion. Journalistic criticism, as pointed out before, appears to be a critical genre in itself.

Comparing this journalistic criticism to some of the "standards" of rhetorical criticism can be helpful in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the body of materials studied, partly because journalistic criticism employs a critical method, and partly because the "standards" of the rhetorical criticism tradition are by no means absolute. The tradition stems from the theory and practice of classical figures such as Aristotle and Quintilian and has been expressed in more modern terms by a number of writers in the field of speech. The tradition is epitomized in and expressed clearly in the excellent discussion in Thonssen, Baird, and Braden's *Speech Criticism*.

This study employed the classical "canons" to describe the reporters' bases for their critical reactions, the same terms used in traditional studies of rhetorical criticism. They were helpful foci for describing and evaluating the criticisms—not because the writers consciously used the categories, but because the terms well describe the aspects of Nixon's rhetoric on which the writers commented.

The aspects are "invention," which includes the speaker's choices of ideas and arguments; "disposition," or how the materials were arranged; "style," matters related to the speaker's choices and use of language; and "delivery," or the appearance of the speaker, manner of presentation, and the use of body and voice. Included in the matter of invention are the "three modes of proof," ethos (character and reputation of the speaker as perceived by the audience),
pathos (the use of emotional appeals), and logos (the logical nature of the ideas and arguments the speaker uses).

**Invention**

A fully developed rhetorical criticism probably would include an examination of the speaker's logical processes, the nature of the speaker's ideas, the relevance of those ideas to the audience, and the integrity of those ideas. The speaker's materials would be subjected to scrutiny from the standpoint of "truth," relevance, and validity according to formal tests of logic. Authorities cited by the speaker and his supporting evidence would be subjected to examination on the basis of such factors as timeliness, relevance to audience, and clarity. The critic probably would be interested in evaluating the truth of the idea in its "functional existence," reflecting interest not just in formal validity, but in how the speaker actually used the facts.\(^{26}\)

A classical rhetorical critic would also be concerned about reflecting on the importance of another mode of proof, that of ethos, or the force of the speaker's personality, reputation, and character on the audience. This discussion probably would receive less attention than the speaker's logical processes, but would involve analysis of the speaker's remarks on the basis of if and how they reflected the qualities of sagacity, character, and good will and

\(^{26}\) *Speech Criticism*, pp. 393, 396, 397, 416.
on whether the speaker represented a cause or position which is in the best interests of society.27

A classical study would seek to determine if the speaker said anything in the speech or seemed to convey anything to his audience which would associate himself with what is virtuous or elevated. Questions such as these would be focal points: Does he convey tact and moderation? Does he display integrity, intelligence, and genuine interest in the audience through directness, identification, and candor? Does he associate himself with the truth? What is the over-all image of the speaker?28

Finally, in terms of invention, the classical tradition of criticism would involve a critic in assessing the third mode of proof, pathos, or those motivative appeals, the use of and appeal to emotions to convey the message. Here the critic would ask how the speaker made necessary adjustments to his audience in order to dispose them favorably to him and his ideas—particularly in this case, adjustments in the use of language and action which would tend to evoke emotional responses and thereby confirm the speaker's ideas.29

27Speech Criticism, pp. 458-460.
28Ibid., pp. 430-440.
29Ibid.
No critic in the sources studied entered into such a complex discussion of invention, but most of the sources emphasized, as a traditional study probably would have, the major ideas and themes of the speaker—far more than any other basis for evaluation. In fact, the attention paid to the President as speaker and to the nature, merit, and consistency of his ideas and arguments, illustrates that American journalists were intensely interested in the Watergate issues. A preponderance of materials assessed Nixon's character and reputation and related those concerns to his major ideas and arguments.

It is interesting to note that no writer seemed to use emotional proofs as a basis for discussion of the President's rhetoric. Writers pointed to emotional ingredients in the rhetoric, or suggested that the speaker himself was emotional, but none of the journalists seemed to suggest directly that the speaker may have used emotion deliberately or that elements in the speech might have an emotional impact on the audience, or that ideas might have been accepted or rejected because of emotional language. This element was simply of little concern to the writers, and they probably missed opportunities to reveal insight into the dynamics of the speech events by not giving some attention directly to the possibility that emotional proofs had been employed. Probably these critics, not schooled in the Aristotelian "three modes of proof," did not make those distinctions or did not see "emotional" proofs as on an equal
basis with considerations about speaker and ideas and arguments.
The critics were in the classical tradition in emphasizing the other
two modes of proof, but not in ignoring the emotional elements.

In a few instances writers applied formal logic to Nixon's
arguments, but usually the critics subjected presidential rhetoric to
careful, if unorganized, scrutiny. They analyzed in informal, every-
day language, not in terms of rigid logic.

The journalists focused on the two facets of invention,
usually by selecting only a few arguments for comment. While
that selectivity revealed some bias, it should be reiterated that
there were only a few arguments from which to choose. Nixon's
speeches were simply organized and contained few major assertions.

The critics wrote about such arguments as these: Nixon's
equating of Watergate burglars with Civil Rights activists, his
efforts to deflect criticism by defending other actions, such as the
Cambodian bombing, his contentions that Watergate was over-empha-
sized and would go away if let alone, and the presidential contentions
that the press had treated him unfairly and the issues irresponsibly.
Most reporters criticized the President's arguments as not only
illogical, but inappropriate and tasteless, as in relation to the
Civil Rights issue, or as ill-timed and extraneous, as in the case
of the Cambodian bombing remarks. Many forthrightly accused the
President of faulty thinking, especially in his efforts to link Water-
gate causally with the 1960's Civil Rights marches.
The foregoing characteristics one perhaps could have expected to find. A characteristic more surprising is that the writers seemed to have a capacity to get "upset." The capacity for moral indignation came through clearly in the writings. Indeed, there was much more of a moralistic and humanistic tone than a legalistic emphasis.

The reporters implied rather than stated explicitly what standards they employed in assessing Nixon's ideas. The writers dealt with the logical aspects of invention in a simplistic manner, but they responded to both halves of Bryant's description of criticism as knowing and showing "what was and what might have been." The reporters measured Nixon's statements against testimony of others, and measured its internal and logical consistency principally on the basis of a standard of known facts with which Nixon's remarks did not agree and with testimony of others involved in the affair.

Reporters generally dismissed Nixon's remarks off-hand, as "making no sense." They based those judgments on convention and "common sense." In relation to "what might have been" they expressed dismay and disappointment with what was said and seemed to assume the existence of some vague model of what they expected, but that model was not clearly expressed. The writers only hinted

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30 Rhetorical Dimensions in Criticism, p. 18.
at possible answers Nixon could have given, but usually called for "candor," for "answers" or otherwise expressed their discontent in generalities. Projections of what they expected Nixon to say in subsequent speeches were equally as vague.

Probably nowhere did the moral/philosophic basis of Nixon's ideas express itself more obviously than when the critics complained about the "omissions." No aspect of Nixon's speaking received more attention of his critics than did his silences. It was the President's failure to satisfy the writers' quest for answers that seemed to anger and puzzle his critics the most. Since their responses were contemporaneous with the speaker's words, their concern and emphasis seemed appropriate. Criticism in retrospect might appropriately have spent less time bemoaning such omissions since passage of time might have produced some of the answers Nixon's contemporaries sought.

Nixon's ideas caused favorable critics to react in at least two patterns. Reporters sought to justify Nixon's arguments and silences on the grounds that the President should be believed because he is President, or found the rhetoric acceptable simply because Nixon had said something. Such phrases as "all he could do," "good beginning," and "a start," demonstrate the effort favorable critics spent in seeking something to commend.

Significantly, all the favorable assessments were not moral or logical, but pragmatic. These critics often contended that
the presidency was endangered unless they could believe and support Mr. Nixon.

One feature of the criticisms was that writers generally seemed to assume that Nixon alone was responsible for his speeches—not his speech writers and aides. Although some critics remarked on aid the President received in writing his addresses, most reporters seemed to assume that he had carefully calculated his content and that the stamp of the man was on his speaking. The President was directly accountable for his words, and his choices of ideas and materials were deliberate, and, many felt, shrewd.

As the events began to unfold, reporters built their assessments on the earlier Watergate rhetoric, added to statements they had made earlier, and re-affirmed earlier, tentative positions, now more firmly. One could sense an almost cumulative effect throughout the responses to the August speeches, and some critics even said that their earlier reports were either incorrect or needed to be strengthened. Some writers conveyed frustration and exasperation. For instance, James J. Kilpatrick revealed dismay at having to be increasingly negatively critical about a man whom he formerly supported.

If the respondents looked back for comparison to earlier Nixon speeches, they did so almost exclusively in terms of presidential arguments or the speaker's character and reputation. Some approached analysis from the standpoint of attacking other critics'
assessments of Nixon's rhetoric, or reacted to press releases which flowed from Ronald Ziegler, the President's Press Secretary.

As in a classical analysis, many key assertions the journalists made about the speaker's reputation revealed the journalists felt that the man as speaker was inextricably bound to his message. They could not assess his words without assessing him. Basing evaluations on questions of Nixon's veracity, the responses ranged from bald rejections of Nixon's statements simply because Nixon uttered them, to documented descriptions of the President's personal characteristics and reputation which reporters felt tended to confirm or refute his words. The body of assessments studied provided many examples of criticism on all levels based on questions of Nixon's motives, his emotional stability, his honor, his integrity, and the accuracy of his assertions. Many implied that Nixon misrepresented or covered up. Some stated frankly that Nixon was not telling the truth, that he appeared to have acted capriciously, dishonestly, secretively, haughtily, or hypocritically. Some accused the President of being confused, duped, and poorly organized. Above all, the writers seemed most concerned about issues of abuse of power and distrust of the American people.

Although few respondents clarified the bases for their rejections of Nixon as a speaker, they seemed to reject Nixon's ideas primarily on moralistic grounds. They implied that the President was out of touch with the people and their values, and
the writers seemed to presume readers agreed on at least these moral values: fair play, honesty, and candor. Journalists assumed such a basis for criticism where academic rhetorical critics would probably have labored to establish what were the values of the speaker's audience. Journalistic responses did not seem to suffer in quality from that omission.

Approaches to criticizing invention varied in the different levels of criticism. Impressionistic responses were critical by simply refuting or confirming the major arguments in usually the simplest of terms. Analytic criticisms focused on the nature, consistency, and merit of the ideas and materials. Analytic writers did not discuss the speaker, per se, nor the audience, occasion, or effects, but they described, measured, analyzed, emphasized, and sometimes interpreted and evaluated. They seemed to assume readers had basic familiarity with the President's speeches, but they provided understanding and appreciation of the content of Nixon's speeches in an unhurried manner. Probably the greatest contribution analytic reporters made in their responding to presidential speeches was that they filled gaps in knowledge, provided worthy comparisons, emphasized key ideas, criticized the logical consistency and structure of the President's arguments, and showed in some detail how the rhetoric was developed.

Writers who emphasized synthesis were not idea-oriented, but focused on placing the speaker's materials into philosophic, moral,
and historical contexts. Emphases such as descriptive narrative provided for readers broad bases for evaluation. The syntheses in these reports demonstrated how sensitivity to the complicated matrix in which speech occurs enhances evaluation. Synthetic emphases conveyed clearly that Nixon's messages were not just words, but an array of symbols and atmospheres some of which he consciously chose or manipulated and some of which were inherent or accidental.

Judicial responses combined features emphasized at other levels, but focused on evaluation and interpretation. These evaluations of invention were relatively thorough in approach, were supported in a variety of ways, and contained reasons for the assessments rendered.

Poll results and Senate testimony were important ingredients in various assessments; writers used both as reasons for negative evaluations of the speaker's credibility. Even if the Hearings or surveys were not specifically mentioned, the President's low credibility rating and the witnesses' charges seemed to be matters about which writers assumed their readers already knew. Critics used references to speaker character and reputation to measure the accuracy and merit of Nixon's ideas, and the polls were employed often to suggest possible effects of Nixon's reputation and character on the audiences' reception of the speeches.
Pervading the criticisms was an air of distrust and disillusionment, and sometimes despair. Apparently sensing the magnitude of the issues, most critics were disturbed because they were increasingly convinced that Nixon and the presidency were somehow involved in obstruction of justice, in abuse of power and other serious misdeeds. The elements of struggle and incredulity are key features of the responses, particularly as the reporters wrestled with their primary task, that of reporting and evaluating the speaker's ideas.

While not well organized, thoroughly developed, or with explicitly revealed criteria, the journalists' reactions were invention-centered. They were concerned properly with the ideas of the man, an emphasis appropriate both to criticism and to reporting.

Organization

The traditional approach to criticism also involves consideration of how the ideas are ordered. Usually critics discuss the relative merits of the placement of various elements in the speech on the basis of a determination of what the thesis or central idea is; discussion of what came first, next, or last; and classifications of how the ideas were arranged by such orders as logical, topical, psychological, climactic or anticlimactic, spatial, or chronological. In other words, the critic seeks to find reason and planning and clues to understanding how and why the speaker arranged his materials.
in the manner he did.

Thonsen, Baird, and Braden also stressed the importance of critics' being thoroughly familiar with the audience conditions under which the speaker performed as a way of measuring and criticizing organization. They said:

It seems certain that in no other way will he gain the insight necessary to full understanding of why a speaker disposed his materials as he did. Essential as it is for the critic to know the craft of rhetorical disposition, and to be able to appreciate the plan which the speaker chooses, it is even more important that he determine the degree and success of the speaker's accommodation to the variabilities of audience behavior.31

Such determinations and concerns were nowhere in evidence in the reactions of the journalists. Virtually no writer gave any attention to how the President organized his ideas. In fact, the only references to organization were simple reports that Nixon "opened" or "closed" with a particular statement or said something "next." Writers seemed to attach no critical importance to such references, and, since Nixon's speeches had very simple structures, the respondents also apparently attempted to compress their remarks on organization in order to emphasize other matters they regarded as more pertinent.

It is possible that some additional attention to arrangement might have produced some insights into Nixon's rhetorical strategy, and that critics might have found some clues by seeing

31 Speech Criticism, p. 477.
the emotional nature of the introductions and conclusions, and possible clues to Nixon's thought processes in the transitions and in the order of the main points. However, space was a major consideration to these writers, and arrangement was probably not a crucial factor in a worthy criticism of the presidential rhetoric.

**Style**

The classical tradition of criticism generally would involve assessment of the speaker's level of language in such terms as "grand," "plain," "middle." Discussion would often revolve around estimates of the relative oral and literary qualities of the language, that is, did the speaker utilize language appropriate to the oral medium, such as contractions and simple sentence structure.

Emphasis would be placed on assessing quality of the language in terms of clarity or correctness, that is, the use of connectives, the use of specific as opposed to general language, and avoidance of ambiguity. Traditional critics also consider appropriateness of the language in the sense of asking whether or not the speaker's style represented him as a person: did it reveal the speaker, or did it confuse his identity for the audience, and was the language suitable for the occasion?

In addition, consideration would be given to the possible figures of speech and other specific linguistic techniques which the speaker might have used as important vehicles for meaning or which
revealed qualities of the speaker's mind or his ideas in some particular manner. A discussion of style generally includes sufficient quotations from the speech text "to give the reader a fair understanding of what was said and an appreciation of the relation between the critical comments and the text."

Traditional assessments of language are concerned not so much with style as some sort of "mysterious embellishment"; it centers on how language is used under a given set of circumstances to accomplish the speaker's purposes. Questions often asked are these:

Does the speaker's style serve as an instrument of adjustment...? Does it reveal him as a man of integrity who seriously cares about what he says? Does his expression contribute fully to the communication of ideas and the acquisition of the intended response?

In the sources studied, criticism on the basis of style was principally by implication. It almost wholly dealt with a vague description of Nixon's language as having a particular tone or that the word choices produced a particular atmosphere. Writers did not delve into linguistic complexities, but referred to style to develop, extend, support, and corroborate in a general manner assertions about invention. The reporters also seemed to assume that Nixon's style was familiar to readers, and, thereby, needed no emphasis.

References to style consisted only of vague assertions that Nixon's words were carefully chosen, or specific, important

word choices were set apart in quotation marks by the critic; or reporters suggested that Nixon's words were "typical," or that Nixon knew what "effect" his words would have. Only one writer labeled stylistic devices.

Journalists might have been expected to have a particular sensitivity to use of words, but generally they ignored this as a basis for comment. They might have paid attention to possible connotative elements in the speaker's language, but only a few found any possible clues for understanding Nixon's messages in the relative degree of accuracy or ambiguity in the President's word choices. Even James Reston, whose columns were relatively sophisticated, referred only vaguely to "unworthy deceptions" and "distortions." He did not develop in any detail a critique of Nixon's language. 33 References to language were tentative, incomplete, and only hinted at important considerations. In that sense the assessments do not compare favorably with the kind of analysis traditional critics might have executed. Even with the space limits, many of the reporters could have provided succinct, but valuable insights about Nixon's use of the most important of the journalists' tools--words.

Delivery

Traditional critics tend not to emphasize comments about delivery, which generally includes references to use of voice and

33 "A Quotation Sam Ervin Missed," The Houston Chronicle, August 21, 1973, Sec. 4, p. 6.
body, appearance of the speaker, and the mode of presentation of the speech. Thonssen, Baird, and Braden said the traditional critic appraises delivery not as an end in itself, but for these reasons:

To the end that he may the better understand why the audience responded as it did. He determines its congruency with the nature of the speech; its unobtrusiveness as a vehicle of communication; its intelligibility to the respondents; its agreeableness to the ear.34

Although not developed thoroughly, references to delivery in the sources studied probably came closer to being in the classical tradition than some of the other bases for comment. Reporters gave more attention to delivery, for instance, than to language or to organization, and seemed to do so for the reasons outlined above. The critics seemed to assume, and properly so, that readers could profit from interpretation and evaluation of the President's platform manner, voice qualities, and gestures. Even the brief discussions of delivery were important because the very repetitiveness and simplicity of Nixon's messages invited the critic and the reader to seek means to understand the speeches on bases other than invention.

Remarks about Nixon's nervousness and erratic behavior and the references to the grim and dejected facial expressions seemed in the particular circumstances of these speech events to provide clues for understanding and means to suggest and develop critical assertions about invention. These descriptions also may have

34 Speech Criticism, pp. 522, 531.
reflected what had become almost a tradition in comments on Nixon's speaking, since the President's platform manner, facial expressions, and tone of voice had long been subjects of humorous imitation and comment, particularly by comedians on radio and television.

One way the writers could have provided further insights related to delivery would have been for them to assess more specifically effects of various factors of delivery on the audiences. Even so, the journalists' comments about delivery did increase understanding, were not blown out of proportion, and were properly relegated to a position of importance less than that of remarks about invention.

These responses were reminiscent of traditional rhetorical criticism, but were not as fully developed and did not reveal clearly what criteria were employed in the remarks. In at least two senses they did not contribute to the readers' understanding what a more complete criticism might have: they did not demonstrate or seem to seek to determine elements which might be considered unique or distinctive about the speaker's efforts; second, they did not seem to distinguish between measuring the speeches from a humane standpoint as opposed to a strictly utilitarian or instrumental point of view. 35

While the journalists needed to establish more clearly their criteria for evaluation, in their defense, it should be pointed

35 Speech Criticism, p. 554.
out that even the most clearly stated criteria are relative. As Baskerville suggested:

We must apply . . . criteria accurately and dispassionately to objects which we have sought thoroughly to understand, to the end that "agreement among observers" may be as perfect as we can make it. But in the field of relative values we must never expect unanimity. Great difficulties attend the answering of the critic's three basic questions: What is he trying to do? How well does he do it? Is it worth doing? But the rhetorical critic must not seek to avoid the difficulties by simply ignoring one or more of the questions.36

It was in that sense that the journalists' responses were incomplete and unlike classical rhetorical criticism. In another sense, they made a contribution in a medium to which millions of Americans had access. Even in their truncated efforts many probably helped readers to see the speeches as units, to see them as creative communicative acts by the President in the matrix of the complicated set of circumstances and feelings known as Watergate.

In that the critics responded to each of the events as rhetorical acts, they reflected an emphasis of traditional criticism. Karl R. Wallace defined the "speech act" as something which "is capable of being reviewed," and he focused on the "end or intent of the speech and of the adequacy of the act to serve its end."37

The journalists were probably most successful as critics in focusing attention on the specific instances of oral communication as rhetorical


acts, and their critical efforts had great potential for increasing readers' understanding and appreciation of the meaning of those events.

Implications

Many of the journalists wrote criticism utilizing a critical method, even though they did so by following a journalistic purpose of reporting and by writing in journalistic style. They criticized incompletely, but demonstrated many of the same concerns associated with classical rhetorical criticism, even to the point of emphasizing the same bases for assessment. Some of the reporters did a commendable job of writing in spite of problems peculiar to their medium: publishing deadlines, space limitations, and editorial policies to satisfy, and readership of all stripes and intelligence levels.

Some of the responses, such as James Reston's and a few others', were well developed, clearly constructed, and revealed efforts to understand the dynamics of the speeches studied. A few came close "to the heart of the matter," as Baskerville described critical excellence. Indeed, identifying and emphasizing the essence of the President's speech-making was a real strength in some of the entries. Their brevity and lack of sophistication as

criticism was in some instances to their benefit in focusing on the essence of the rhetoric.

Some of the responses were eloquent, some were witty, and many revealed genuine insight, but many did not provide enough thorough criticism to provide bases for the kinds of informed public response one could hope for in a free society from a free press. Unless readers took an inordinate amount of time to avail themselves of other sources of comment, such as broadcast journalism, and unless readers carefully read the speech texts, they could very well have come away from many of the responses with an oversimplified, superficial picture.

While some of the reporters seemed to correctly identify and emphasize the essence of the speech events, nevertheless in looking at the lot of them, this writer could not escape an impression that in many there was an almost bemused and naive quality of hope expressed. The restraint evident in most of the responses—even in many of the most unfavorable ones—may not have been a fault, but it did seem to prevent the writers from expressing themselves with candor which would have made the responses more pertinent and valuable.

The restraint seemed to emanate from an understandable respect for the office of the presidency. The quality also probably issued from what several of the writers expressed as a sense of being overwhelmed by the uniqueness of the crisis and the magnitude
of the issues involved.

This study seems to point to some conclusions about the participants in the process of criticizing important public address in the mass print media. This study clearly reveals that the reactions reaching American readers are being executed by newsmen whose primary task is reporting and whose training, if any, in rhetorical criticism is probably limited. It is possible that there could be more cooperation and sharing of insights by rhetorical critics with specific training in the art with those whose primary interest is journalistic reporting. Perhaps writers in the field of speech criticism could sometimes be employed by journalists to supplement the process of reacting to important events of public address in the same manner that prominent historians are sometimes called upon to write supplementary essays in newspapers and magazines on issues relevant to their skills and training.

Such a suggestion does not imply, however, that the responses studied should be viewed as intrinsically without merit. Journalists sometimes provide a kind of succinct and immediate reaction which has considerable value in its own right. This study seems to suggest that students of speech communication need a greater understanding and appreciation of the role these reporters fill, and, in addition, effort should be made to improve the quality of reporters' reactions.
Several areas arise out of this study for possible attention by those interested in improving and expanding speech criticism of important contemporary American rhetoric. For instance, research could be done which would determine what specific knowledge and training journalists receive or have related to rhetorical criticism and speech communication. Another specific area already suggested in this study is this: since polls were one of the tools journalists prominently used in their reporting, one way scholars in speech could participate in the process would be to help devise poll questions which would help secure better responses about people’s reactions to and understanding of public address. In addition, speech professionals might aid journalists in interpreting the results of such surveys.

Finally, notwithstanding the qualities of the criticisms studied, the existence of such a large body of rhetorical analyses points out the importance public speaking still has in this nation and suggests that those who are concerned would want to continue to study and seek to improve our journalists' responses, if for no other reason, because such responses are so prominent and so plentiful. Perhaps even more important, the study illustrates how vital it is in a self-governing society for the public utterances of its leaders to be subjected to creative, fair, and informed speech criticism.
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VITA

MILLARD FAYNE EILAND

PRESENT POSITION: Assistant Professor, Prairie View A. & M. University
Prairie View, Tx., 77445

HOME ADDRESS: Houston, Tx., 77043

PERSONAL INFORMATION: Born: December 5, 1933
Married: 1956
Children: daughters, Laurie Lynn and Jennifer Dwire

EDUCATION: B.A., Baylor University, Waco, Tx., 1955
B.D., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1959
Th.M., Ibid., 1961
M.A., University of Houston, 1968

EXPERIENCE: Teaching Fellow, Dept. of Speech, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1958-60

Associate Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Florence, S.C., 1960-62

Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church, Bethel, N.C., 1962-66

Teaching Fellow, Dept. of Speech University of Houston, Houston, Tx., 1966-68

Assistant Professor of English (Speech area), Prairie View A. & M. College, Prairie View, Tx., 1968 to the present

Lecturer, Downtown School, University of Houston, 1967-68

Instructor, Houston Community College, Summer, 1973
MEMBERSHIPS:

Speech Communication Association
Texas Speech Association
Southern Speech Communication Association
Texas Association of College Teachers
Council of College Teachers of English
Alpha Psi Omega
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Phi Kappa Phi
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Millard Fayne Eiland

Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: Journalistic Criticism of Richard Nixon's Watergate Speaking of 1973

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

October 28, 1974