

The Rise of Nixon

by Megan Kimbrell

Richard Milhous Nixon is one of the most central political figures in American history. Therefore, an analysis of how he rose to national prominence, and so quickly at that, is a worthwhile discussion. For example, Nixon entered the United States House of Representatives in 1946 by defeating the popular Democratic incumbent, Jerry Voorhis. Without previous political experience, Nixon was thrown into Congress where he was promptly placed on the infamous House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). There he gained national fame in the case of Alger Hiss, an accused communist spy. He followed this with a stunning victory in the 1950 senatorial race against Helen Gahagan Douglas. Soon after, Nixon was nominated as the vice presidential candidate in 1952. At the young age of forty, and just six years after his first political campaign, Nixon entered the White House as Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice president. Nixon's meteoric rise to power begs the question of just how exactly he accomplished this feat. The answer to this question is quite simple: Nixon used the issue of communist subversion to further his political career. In fact, the perceived communist threat of the post-World War II era was the chief catalyst in Nixon's rise to the forefront of American politics. His career gained momentum alongside the Red Scare of this era with his public battles against accused communist sympathizers.

Following World War II, Americans became obsessed with the fears of communist subversion. The Cold War produced unstable relations with the Soviet Union and other pro-communist countries, which made for a frightening future. As a result, "Red-baiting," or discrediting those associated with communism, became a way of life for some politicians hoping to get noticed. This was obviously the focal point for men such as Joseph McCarthy, the most notorious Red-baiter of all. In this era, reputations were made or ruined as were careers. Certainly, Nixon's career was furthered, chiefly by the communist

issue. The reason for this lies in America's deep concern about communists, and the press that capitalized on those fears.¹

The influence of the press cannot be overlooked in an assessment of Nixon's rise to fame by way of the communist issue. Journalists obviously understood that their publications sold when they discussed issues that truly concerned the population. The threat of communists in the government was one of those issues, and thus a favorite story for reporters. Therefore, a candidate in an election speaking to this threat or a congressman fighting the evils of communism were both given a great deal of attention, and many times favorably written about in papers and magazines across the United States. Nixon was one of these men to whom journalists paid attention; he was usually involved with an issue that made for a good, sensational story. A look at the influence of the press is important then, for it played a key role in Nixon's political ascendancy, beginning with his first election.

Nixon's entry into politics began in September 1945, when he received an offer to run for Congress on the Republican ticket the following election year. The offer came from Herman Perry, an influential banker in Whittier, California, and friend of the Nixon family. Nixon responded enthusiastically to Perry's offer even though he had never held a political office in his life. Shortly after the offer, Nixon heard that the nomination was to actually come from a Republican search committee in the election district of Whittier. This Committee of One Hundred was searching for a candidate that could defeat the popular Democratic congressional incumbent of the Twelfth District, Jerry Voorhis. Therefore, the nomination was not yet Nixon's, for the committee had to interview other candidates before a decision could be rendered. However, when Nixon interviewed with the committee's members, he made a favorable impression upon them. Nixon spoke the Republican credo of the committee when he essentially told them that he did not subscribe to the present government's liberal New Deal policies. Shortly after the interview, Nixon was informed that the nomination was his.²

Nixon may have received the nomination, but his challenger in the election was a formidable one. Jerry Voorhis had faced no real challenges to his seat since his entry into Congress in 1937. Voorhis was greatly admired not only in the Twelfth District, but throughout the country. He was also truly respected by his opponents. For example, in 1946 he was dubbed the hardest working member of the House by his colleagues. Even the mainly Republican district of

¹ Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University, 1990), 3.

² Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician 1913-1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 118, 120-1.

Whittier consistently elected this New Deal liberal. However, the postwar era witnessed a great deal of ideology changes around the nation. For example, the area of Southern California turned against government controls and a centralized bureaucracy, precisely what the New Deal represented. In this climate, Voorhis was somewhat vulnerable. Still, many political experts considered Nixon, or any other Republican candidate, a lost cause against Voorhis in a congressional campaign.³

Preceding the main campaign, both candidates received their respective party nominations, with Voorhis earning 53 percent of the total primary vote. This was a decent showing for Voorhis considering he had not yet begun campaigning. However, Nixon was busy planning how he could turn the campaign around in his favor. Indeed, he needed an issue that could grab the attention of voters. Nixon's future senatorial opponent, Helen Douglas, later claimed that Nixon had nothing to draw on in order to sufficiently debate Voorhis on the issues. Therefore, she argued, he had to wage a vicious campaign to get ahead. A vicious campaign was certainly what it turned into when Nixon claimed that Voorhis was endorsed by a communist organization. The organization was a branch of the local Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) called the Political Action Committee (PAC). This was by far the most explosive issue in the campaign.⁴

Shortly after the primaries, Nixon charged that the CIO-PAC openly endorsed Voorhis. Actually, the organization did not support Voorhis. Rather, the National Citizens Political Action Committee (NCPAC) did. Though this organization also contained communists, it was the non-communist liberals of the group that endorsed Voorhis. The NCPAC's communist members fought against this support because of Voorhis's condemnation of the Soviet Union's expansionist policies in Eastern Europe. In turn, Voorhis did not welcome the NCPAC's endorsement. Through all of this, Nixon understood that the CIO-PAC did not really support Voorhis. However, beginning at the infamous South Pasadena debate in September 1946, Nixon convinced the audience and many voters that the CIO-PAC endorsed his opponent.⁵

Nixon and Voorhis debated at the South Pasadena Junior High School on September 13. The most significant part of the debate came towards the end when Voorhis denied, as he had before, an endorsement by the CIO-PAC.

³ Kenneth Franklin Kurz, *Nixon's Enemies* (Los Angeles: Lowell House, 1998), 44, 46; Paul Bullock, "Rabbits and Radicals, Richard Nixon's 1946 Campaign Against Jerry Voorhis," *Southern California Quarterly* 55 (Fall 1973), 320.

⁴ Bullock. "Rabbits and Radicals", 324-5; Helen Gahagan Douglas, *A Full Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 244.

⁵ Kurz. *Nixon's Enemies*, 48.

Unfortunately, Voorhis demanded proof of the endorsement from his opponent. At that moment, Nixon confidently burst across the stage, handed Voorhis a paper, and stated that it proved the charges were correct. Though the paper only (correctly) proclaimed that he was endorsed by the NCPAC, Voorhis was visibly shaken. He tried to point out that the endorsement was from a PAC different than the CIO-PAC, but Nixon rebutted with the statement that the two organizations were virtually the same thing. Voorhis was not heard the rest of the evening over Nixon's accusations and boos from the audience. The damage had been done, as Voorhis's campaign continued to follow a downward spiral leading up to the general election.⁶

Close to election day, Nixon intensified his attacks as he Red-baited Voorhis. For example, the Nixon campaign ran an advertisement in local newspapers charging that, among other things, Voorhis was a registered Socialist and his voting record in Congress was more communistic than Democratic. In the last weeks of the campaign, Nixon came across as a warrior fighting the "Red tide." He told audiences that communist sympathizers were gaining positions in the government, which proved that there was a conspiracy to overthrow the present government in favor of a communist one. These charges helped to pull in more votes for Nixon as the election neared.⁷

On election day, Nixon prevailed in a big way, winning by a margin of 15,000 votes. Nixon was sent to the House with 56 percent of the vote, following in the foot steps of many other Republicans. Indeed, the Republican party enjoyed a large margin of victory in 1946, as they gained a majority in Congress. In the prevailing atmosphere of change, the Democratic party suffered a great loss. However, this does not take away from Nixon's overwhelming victory. Nonetheless, it is still debated by historians as to whether or not the communist issue played the decisive role in Nixon's victory, or if Voorhis's defeat can simply be attributed to the these other Republican victories. It is argued by some scholars that Americans did not even understand the issue of communism in 1946. In fact, it is often cited by historians that Nixon, years later in his memoirs, wrote that communism was not the central issue of the campaign. Nixon claimed that the PAC issue only provided emotional excitement, not motivation for voters. Even a *Time* magazine article from 1946 mentioned that Nixon plugged issues dealing with such topics as veterans' housing, but did not personally attack his opponent.⁸

⁶ Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1993), 126-7.

⁷ Kurz. *Nixon's Enemies*, 49.

⁸ Kurz. *Nixon's Enemies*, 52; Richard Milhous Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 41; "New Faces in the House," *Time*, 18 November 1946, 26.

Though these arguments may seem convincing, a close assessment of the race proves that communism was the main issue in the campaign. It was the difference between victory and defeat. As noted before, Voorhis was an extremely popular incumbent. Even in the climate of discord following the war, prominent Republicans still believed that Voorhis was unbeatable, and that Nixon running against him was simply a gamble. However, following the Pasadena debate, Voorhis found himself on the defensive as he had never been in his previous campaigns. He not only had to defend himself against an issue that he had never dealt with, but one that grabbed the attention of thousands of Americans following the war. Even Voorhis wrote years later that the tricky way in which Nixon discredited his voting record with the PAC issue, and related it to communism worked very well in 1946. In fact, Voorhis almost mocked Nixon's claim that the communist issue was not central to the campaign. It seems Voorhis himself realized that the frustrations that followed from working to deny the serious issue of endorsements from communist organizations, and a voting record sympathetic to communists, was too much. The PAC issue worked extremely well for many reasons. One reason was because Americans actually did fear communism in 1946. A poll taken in that year found that 52 percent of Americans believed communists should be exposed at whatever cost, even if that meant executing them. It is obvious that there was in fact a concern about communist subversion at the time of the election. Another reason this tool worked so well was due in large part to the press.⁹

Nixon was strongly supported by most of the newspapers in the 1946 election. Early on, the press realized what an explosive issue anything connected to the Soviet Union and communism could be. An example of this is seen in the October 3 issue of the *Monrovia News-Post*, a California paper that carried a story about Voorhis entitled, "Pro-Russian Votes Alleged." The article stated that it was now in doubt as to whether or not Voorhis was pro-Russian. It claimed that Voorhis was sympathetic to Russia because of the revelation that he voted for left-wing programs six times. These votes were seemingly not remotely related to the issue of communism, but the paper grabbed the attention of Americans by claiming that Voorhis was suddenly an enemy of the United States. The same things happened in other newspapers, including the prestigious *Los Angeles Times*, which heavily supported Nixon. This is significant because the *Times* dominated the Twelfth District with its campaign

⁹ Ambrose. *Nixon: The Education of a Politician 1913-1960*, 125; Jerry Voorhis, *The Strange Case of Richard Milhous Nixon* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, 1972), 10, 12; American Institute of Public Opinion, *The Gallup Poll, Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 587, 594.

coverage. More importantly, Kyle Palmer, a political reporter for the paper, picked Nixon out early on as a man with potential for winning campaigns. Accordingly, Palmer enjoyed accusing Voorhis of being a Socialist while praising Nixon. Obviously, Voorhis suffered from a lack of positive coverage from this large newspaper. In fact, even when he tried to set his record straight, the *Times* and other Southern California newspapers did not print his story. Voorhis's daily schedules and rally announcements were also not usually printed in the biased papers. On the other hand, these same papers, especially the *Times*, printed the stories that made Nixon look good while ignoring those that might tarnish his reputation. Due to these circumstances, Nixon prevailed in the election and took off for Washington, where the communist issue changed his life forever.¹⁰

Nixon was sworn into the Eightieth Congress in January 1947, just a year away from the case that would give further life to his career. Nixon was appointed to HUAC, the House committee notorious for its investigations of alleged communists in the government. HUAC presided over the infamous 1948 Hiss case that pitted a former communist, Whittaker Chambers, against Alger Hiss who was accused of being a communist spy. In the center of the drama was Congressman Nixon. It was the Hiss case that truly started him on the road to fame.

The affair began in July 1948, when Elizabeth Bentley, called "The Red Spy Queen," testified before HUAC. She accused several government officials of being communist agents. This seemed shocking enough, but HUAC had no proof that Bentley was correct. Nixon began his role in the case by persuading Robert Stripling, HUAC's chief investigator, to find a witness that could corroborate Bentley's accusations. That witness turned out to be the senior editor of *Time* magazine, Whittaker Chambers.¹¹

The affair intensified when Chambers took the stand a month later, and proceeded to corroborate Bentley's charges. Then, Chambers added another name to the list of supposed communists. That name was Alger Hiss, a former Department of State official. The charge seemed positively ridiculous. When a suave and handsome Hiss took the stand two days later to deny the charges, HUAC was persuaded to drop the case. Most of the committee seemed pleased with Hiss's flat denial of never being a communist. Nixon was not convinced, however.

¹⁰ Frank Mankiewicz, *Perfectly Clear: Nixon from Whittier to Watergate* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 44; David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 256-8.

¹¹ Aitken. *Nixon: A Life*, 150.

Nixon told the story that Hiss's behavior seemed too suspicious. He felt Hiss went overboard in his role as the innocent man wrongly accused. He believed Hiss's performance was too good, and therefore not a convincing denial. When HUAC met to discuss ending the investigation, Nixon took the lead in arguing his point. He claimed that Hiss denied ever knowing anyone by the name of Chambers. However, he felt that it was quite possible Hiss may have known Chambers, only by a different name. Nixon said if Hiss was not truthful about this, he also may have lied about not being a communist. These arguments were obviously quite convincing, for years later in his book *Witness*, Chambers wrote that congressmen rallied around Nixon as he "became the man of decision of the first phase of the Hiss case." Thus, HUAC decided to continue an investigation into a possible relation between Chambers and Hiss. From that point on, Nixon became Hiss's "unofficial prosecutor."¹²

The investigation and prosecution was launched a few days later. First, Chambers was interviewed by Nixon's subcommittee. Chambers revealed that he knew a great deal of personal information about Hiss during the meeting. Then, on August 17, Nixon told Stripling to summon both Chambers and Hiss before the subcommittee. The confrontation took place in New York City at the Commodore Hotel. The most striking part of the confrontation was when Hiss asked Chambers if he had ever gone by the name of George Crosley, to which Chambers denied in a strangely cocky manner with a smile on his face. Following this revealing meeting, Nixon determined that somehow Chambers and Hiss knew each other. The next day, the front page of the *New York Times* read, "Alger Hiss Admits Knowing Chambers." The story provided details of the Commodore meeting, but more importantly, it referred to Nixon a great deal throughout the article. It definitely left the reader with the feeling that Nixon was taking care of the now escalating case. Also of significance, to the left of this article read the headline "Anglican Bishops Fear Communism as a World Peril." It cited that the Bishops considered the menace of communism to Christianity to be their biggest concern. Certainly, this only added to Nixon's role as America's chief investigator of communists. The public was, undoubtedly, now enthralled.¹³

The American audience was further excited by the Hiss case when on August 25, a public hearing of HUAC was broadcast on national television. It

¹² Nixon. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 55; Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (South Bend, Ind.: Regnery/Gateway, 1952), 557; Alger Hiss, *Recollections of a Life* (New York: Seaver/Henry Holt, 1988), 203.

¹³ Ambrose. *Nixon: The Education of a Politician 1913-1960*, 182; C.P. Trussell, "Alger Hiss Admits Knowing Chambers; Meet Face to Face," *New York Times*, 18 August 1948, 1.

was the first major congressional hearing to be televised, and undoubtedly damaged Hiss's reputation. Nixon and other members of HUAC succeeded in building a strong case against Hiss as they grilled him for five hours. Magazines and newspaper articles swarmed with the word that Stripling, and especially Nixon, questioned Hiss most sharply, including a *Time* article which provided readers with Nixon's questions and Hiss's testimony. The drama was in full force.¹⁴

The affair heated up further with the revelation of the "pumpkin papers." In December 1948, Chambers produced evidence that seemingly connected Hiss to the underground communist movement. Chambers led HUAC investigators to a pumpkin patch where he pulled out five rolls of film from a hollowed-out pumpkin. The film turned out to be copies of confidential State Department documents concerning trade agreements important to the Soviet Union back in the thirties. Three of these summaries were believed to be in Hiss's handwriting. With this film, the case turned into the biggest and most sensational espionage case in the history of the United States. At the center of it all was Nixon, and many Americans realized this. After Hiss was indicted on two counts of perjury on December 15, 1948, Nixon's role in the case ended. However, the affair continued to affect Nixon's life in a dramatic way.¹⁵

The Hiss case positively transformed Nixon's career. He emerged from the event a national hero, especially in the eyes of the Republican party. His new reputation as the congressional communist warrior catapulted him into the Senate and the vice presidency. Nixon had a tool to employ in his following campaigns after the Hiss case. He was always able to remind voters of his major role in convicting a perceived communist. In the wake of the two momentous events in 1949: the Soviet Union's explosion of their own atom bomb, and Mao Tse-tung's communist victory in China, Americans became quite worried about communist subversion. Therefore, after a respected government insider such as Hiss was found to be a possible communist, Nixon appeared to many to be a godsend. Of course, Nixon used his new-found notoriety to his advantage. For example, he delivered many speeches following the case that reiterated his important role in the affair. Most notable was his January 26, 1950, speech to the House on this topic. In this speech, Nixon reminded his colleagues of the ways in which he kept the investigation on course. At the same time, he charged the Truman Administration with failure to rid the government of communists. The speech gained a great deal of attention,

¹⁴ Kurz. *Nixon's Enemies*, 79-80; "Burden of Proof," *Time*, 6 September 1948, 17.

¹⁵ Aitken. *Nixon: A Life*, 170-1.

for it reminded Americans what a crucial role Nixon played in the battle against communism.¹⁶

One example of the attention Nixon garnered following the case is seen in a Wichita, Kansas, "Prayer Circle Letter" sent out to subscribers by Reverend Gerald B. Winrod. This evangelist led a national movement to alert Americans of threats to their values, including communism. The particular letter in examination said that in searching for a piece of literature that covered the entire problem of communist subversion, Congressman Nixon's great speech dealing with communists in the government was selected. The letter announced that it would send copies of the important speech to those concerned about the issue. Obviously, Nixon's role in the case furthered his career with this sort of attention. The press helped a good deal in this regard as well.¹⁷

Nixon proved to be quite helpful in relating information of the case to journalists. In fact, he was one of the most outspoken members of HUAC. This is important to note, for reporters were themselves capitalizing upon the case. The hysteria that accompanied the Hiss case made it popular to report on the young Californian chasing a "dangerous" communist. One of the reporters that understood this was Bert Andrews, the bureau chief of the *New York Herald Tribune*. He liked stories that were exciting and dramatic. Therefore, he enjoyed the stories that were coming out of HUAC in 1948. Significantly, Andrews developed a close relationship with Nixon and proceeded to legitimize him with his fellow reporters. As a result, Nixon cultivated a very positive relationship with the press. These good relations were crucial to furthering Nixon's career. Voorhis, Nixon's former congressional opponent, came straight to the point when he wrote that the Hiss case for Nixon was "a publicity gold mine which was to stand him in good stead for years to come." One such group that paid attention to this notoriety was a coalition of California Republicans, which urged Nixon to run for the Senate in the upcoming 1950 election.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 150; United States House of Representatives, *The Hiss Case--A Lesson for the American People*, speech prepared by Richard Milhous Nixon, 81st Cong., 2d sess., 1950; Robert K. Carr, *The House Committee on Un-American Activities 1945-1950* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1952), 234-5.

¹⁷ Gerald B. Winrod, "Prayer Circle Letter, 1950," p. 4, Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, Ks.

¹⁸ Voorhis. *Strange Case of Richard Milhous Nixon*, 12-13; Theodore H. White, *Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 67-68; Halberstam. *The Powers That Be*, 259-61; "Fighting Quaker," *Time*, 25 August 1952, 15.

The senatorial race between Nixon and Helen Gahagan Douglas made use of red smear tactics never seen before or after. The campaign witnessed Red-baiting at every twist and turn by both candidates. However, a look at the tactics in the race demonstrates that Nixon used the issue of communist subversion much more effectively than Douglas, and therefore not only entered the Senate after four years in politics, but gained the vice presidential nomination shortly thereafter.

The issue of communism was used even before the main campaign commenced. Strangely enough, Nixon did not even begin the Red-baiting. That was left to *Los Angeles Daily News* editor, Manchester Boddy, the Democratic candidate in the 1950 primary. Prior to Boddy's entry into the race, he had favorably covered Douglas's political career for five years.¹⁹

However, close to the primaries, Boddy dubbed Douglas the "Pink Lady," a tag that epitomized the whole campaign. Boddy and his followers decided to link Douglas with the socialist congressman, Vito Marcantonio, whose voting record led many to believe he was a communist sympathizer. This was accomplished by selling the story that Douglas had voted in the House along the same lines as this left-wing New Yorker. Therefore, she could be considered a socialist herself, or worse, a communist. Years later Nixon wrote that the most damaging accusation for Douglas came before the Democratic primary, when the incumbent, Senator Sheridan Downey, publicly stated that Douglas voted against aid to Greece and Turkey. This was seen as a risky vote since these were countries that could possibly fall into communist hands. In reality, the accusations that Douglas and Marcantonio were voting together were a large misrepresentation given that a good deal of the matching votes had been along party lines. Indeed, Marcantonio was voting the same as most of the Democrats in the House. That did not stop Boddy from claiming that Douglas was a communist sympathizer. However, the accusations also did not prevent Douglas from losing the primary. Her wide margin of victory set her up to face Nixon, as he easily gained his party's nomination as well.²⁰

Though Douglas won the primary, many of her supporters worried about the communist label Boddy had pinned on her. *Newsweek* reported that Douglas's backers feared that Boddy's pro-communist attacks on her would end up helping Nixon in the election. In the United States, there was anxiety about

¹⁹ Ingrid Winther Scobie, "Douglas v Nixon: A Campaign on the Conscience," *History Today* 42 (November 1992), 19.

²⁰ Congress, House, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Proceedings Against Gerhart Eisler*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record 93, pt. 1 (18 February 1947): 1129-30; Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 74; Scobie, "Douglas v Nixon: A Campaign on the Conscience," 20.

McCarthy's Red-baiting as he smeared hundreds of alleged communists. More importantly, in late June the North Korean communists invaded South Korea. Certainly, Nixon realized that he had to turn these public anxieties stemming from the new developments into his own political gain. The Korean War surely simplified Nixon's job.²¹

When the campaign kicked off following the primaries, Nixon began to use the "soft on communism" slogans. Nixon was actually told by some of his campaign strategists not to employ the communist issue so heavily in light of McCarthy's overboard attacks. Nixon insisted that he must use the issue, though, because he found that he received the strongest response from audiences when he discussed the Hiss case. Keeping true to this statement, early on in the campaign Nixon suggested that Douglas voted against efforts to support the Korean War effort. To counter these charges, Douglas went on the attack. She accused Nixon of voting against an aid package for South Korea. She claimed the vote proved Nixon did not understand the communist threat in the Far East. She went so far as to say that Nixon possibly influenced the decision of the communists to invade Korea.²²

The Nixon camp effectively responded to Douglas's charges by going on the offensive, a tactic that proved to be important to Nixon's victory. The Nixon camp claimed Douglas, herself, had voted against actions to thwart communism, such as voting against military aid to Greece and Turkey. They even charged that she voted against appropriations for HUAC. On all of these occasions, they said, she voted with Congressman Marcantonio, the perceived communist party-liner. They claimed Douglas voted with Marcantonio 353 times. Then, in an innocent but calculating tone, they asked how Douglas could accuse others of communist leanings when 'she had so deservedly earned the title of the Pink Lady?' Through all of this, the Nixon camp was ecstatic about Douglas's earlier charges, for they realized she was attacking Nixon's strengths. Was he not the man who made the Hiss case possible, they asked. Certainly, Nixon realized this, for as *Newsweek* reported, he constantly invoked the Hiss case in his foreign speeches about communist conspiracies and appeasement. The article noted that Nixon's most consistent applause getter came when he demanded that the State Department be cleaned out for its

²¹ "California Foot Race," *Newsweek*, 5 June 1950, 27; Scobie. "Douglas v Nixon: A Campaign on the Conscience," 20.

²² Greg Mitchell, *Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady* (New York: Random House, 1998), 65.

failure to combat communism. Obviously, Nixon knew how to use his prominence from the Hiss case.²³

The accusations continued to heat up, and the Red-baiting escalated as the election approached. Even name-calling entered the race, with Nixon referring to Douglas as the Pink Lady and accusing her of being “pink down to her underwear.” At the same time, Douglas called Nixon “Tricky Dick,” a label that stuck with him throughout his career. Both candidates searched everywhere for anything they could use to link their opponent to communism. However, while Douglas delivered long and boring speeches denying communist leanings, Nixon stayed on the offensive and worked on manipulating her voting record. Certainly, turning her record into one sympathetic to communists went a long way in convincing the voters of Douglas’s inability to serve in the Senate. As if this was not bad enough, the most devastating tactic was yet to come.

Douglas most likely brought on the Nixon camp tactic that turned the campaign around. It began when the Douglas campaign distributed a yellow leaflet, which will be referred to here as the “yellow sheet.” This leaflet told voters to examine Nixon’s voting record and in so doing, “pick the Congressman the Kremlin loves!” It went on to say that Nixon’s votes could actually be compared to those of Marcantonio’s. The Nixon camp simply turned around and praised the yellow sheet. They viewed it as a fatal mistake on the part of Douglas because once again, she was attacking Nixon’s strengths. Nixon easily and convincingly defended his position. The front page of the *Los Angeles Times*, among other papers, reported Nixon as saying that the yellow sheet terribly distorted his voting record and meant to confuse the public. He continued with the accusation that this merely concealed the fact that Douglas actually voted over 350 times with Marcantonio since they had served in Congress together.²⁴

The yellow sheet not only sent Nixon on the offensive again, but prompted him to distribute a leaflet of his own, which made a huge impact on voters throughout California. That leaflet became known as the “pink sheet.” It accused Douglas of voting with Marcantonio just as Nixon had done previously. The difference was that these accusations were printed on pink paper, an obvious reference to the successful Pink Lady issue. It was an excellent technique that proved quite effective. The bright leaflet easily reached thousands of voters who possibly missed the other smears. Nixon later wrote

²³ Mitchell. *Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady*, 80; Scobie. “Douglas v Nixon: A Campaign on the Conscience,” 21; “Roaring Races,” *Newsweek*, 30 October 1950, 21.

²⁴ Aitken. *Nixon: A Life*, 186-7; Nixon. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 77; “Vote Record Falsified, Nixon Says: Senate Candidate Accuses Opponent on ‘Big Lie’ Issue,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 1950, sec. 2, 1.

that one of the worst mistakes made by Douglas was the distribution of the yellow sheet claiming that his voting record was more pro-communist, because it only brought on the pink sheet. Even Douglas attested to this fact when she wrote, years later, that the pink leaflet was by far the most damaging tactic used against her. She went on to say that the pink sheet only turned leading Democrats against her, citing that they could no longer support her due to her voting record. Rather, they proceeded to gather support in California from Democrats who would vote for Nixon. More helpful to Nixon, though, was Douglas's response to the leaflet. Instead of returning an attack on Nixon, Douglas presented her very long, rather laborious voting record. This obviously did not stand up to Nixon's tactics, especially in a climate of fear and uncertainty stemming from the Cold War.²⁵

In the end, Nixon defeated Douglas in a large way. She was defeated by a margin of 59 percent to 40 percent. This was, in fact, the largest majority achieved by any candidate running for the Senate in 1950. This is not surprising when one considers the time period. As Douglas later wrote, a congressman that chased spies and traitors in an atmosphere of atomic bombs and communist victories "could quickly be seen as a savior." Of course, in the context of the Cold War the press was once again extremely active, and consequently helpful to Nixon.²⁶

Nixon discussed nothing but communism in 1950, and therefore he received a huge amount of support from the majors newspaper in California. These papers were out to capitalize on the frightening climate as well. Papers in Los Angeles and San Francisco often reported twice daily on how Douglas could be connected to communism. More importantly, the *Los Angeles Times* once again played a crucial role, for the paper was especially built around reporting on dangerous foreign influences, such as communism. Thus, this paper was extremely harsh on Douglas and certainly made no effort to print stories that portrayed her in a positive light. Douglas could have been on to something when she later wrote in her autobiography about a study conducted, years later, at Stanford dealing with press coverage of the campaign. She claims the study found that 70 percent of the unfavorable statements about her were reported, whereas only 30 percent were reported about Nixon. Accordingly, Nixon was sent to the Senate in 1950, but he did not stay there for long. Soon afterwards, he received the offer to serve as Eisenhower's vice presidential candidate.²⁶

²⁵ Kurz. *Nixon's Enemies*, 117; Nixon. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 76; Douglas. *A Full Life*, 315.

²⁶ Aitken. *Nixon: A Life*, 192; Douglas. *A Full Life*, 296.

Nixon's selection as the vice presidential candidate in 1952 is not that surprising when one considers the time period in which Nixon lived. In the first couple of years of the 1950s, developments in the world proved to be ideal for Nixon's career. These developments included the Americans' defeat in North Korea by the communists, Hiss imprisoned for perjury, and McCarthy's vicious attacks on suspected communists. All of this presented the perfect opportunity for Nixon. The young politician was the Republican party's key speaker. Also, he was extremely successful in terms of fund raising for his party. Anywhere he went, he had the proper credentials to blast the Democrats for their failure to curb communist problems. The combination of his record of bringing supposed communists out into the open, and the atmosphere of the 1950s, meant Nixon was able to capture a great deal of attention. Therefore, when the Eisenhower camp selected Nixon as the vice presidential candidate, not too many could have been shocked.²⁷

It was obvious from the start that Eisenhower, and most of the Republican party were impressed with Nixon's credentials. A well-known story concerns Eisenhower telling Nixon, in May 1951, that he was impressed Nixon "not only got Hiss," but that he "got him fairly." Nixon continued to impress the Republicans when in June, he delivered a speech to the National Young Republican Convention in Boston. As always, Nixon stressed the Truman Administration's failure to combat communism and reminded his audience that the Republicans had no fear of finding communist skeletons in their own closets. Next, Nixon spoke at a Republican fund raiser at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City. Nixon felt that this speech helped him to be selected as the vice presidential candidate. Following the speech, New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey suggested that the Republicans consider Nixon for the vice presidential candidacy. Another man the Republicans considered for their vice presidential candidate, however, was William F. Knowland, California's other senator at this time. Knowland was very similar to Nixon in that they were both young and had congressional experience. He was missing the reputation of a communist warrior, though. This was important, for as an article in *Time* magazine put it, the two primary issues in the 1952 presidential race were communism and corruption in government. Therefore, Nixon was perfect, as he even wrote in his memoirs that his "anticommunist credentials from the Hiss case were what most

²⁷ Mankiewicz. *Perfectly Clear: Nixon from Whittier to Watergate*, 52-55; Halberstam. *The Powers That Be*, 113, 263; Douglas. *A Full Life*, 328.

tilted the decision” to him. Eisenhower understood these credentials, and as a result Nixon was chosen as the vice presidential nominee.²⁸

Obviously, Nixon’s selection as the vice presidential candidate served an important purpose for the Republicans. While Eisenhower’s role was that of the father figure staying above the fray, Nixon’s job was, as a *U. S. News and World Report* article wrote, to do the rough political fighting and pick at the Democrats’ failure to combat communism. Nixon gladly did this, and did it well. His record made him an expert on the issue. *The New York Times* captured this when it wrote that Nixon understood his role in the campaign as the political hatchet-man for the Republicans.²⁹

Nixon began his hatchet work with accusatory remarks aimed at the 1952 Democratic presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson. Nixon cast doubts on Stevenson’s loyalty to the United States, with shocking and downright cruel remarks. Nixon, along with McCarthy, served as Eisenhower’s troops bent on shocking the public with accusations that the Democrats were cowards in the face of communism. One infamous example of this was Nixon’s attack on Dean Acheson, Truman’s secretary of state. Nixon later wrote that he caught the attention of the voters when he told them about the “Dean Acheson Community College of Communist Containment.” Nixon continued with charges that the United States was losing in Korea because of the Truman Administration policies. All of this was a great asset for the Republicans, as no one could claim Nixon or his associates had anything to do with the communist problems. Indeed, this was the man who prosecuted a communist and revealed a congresswoman to be a possible communist sympathizer. Despite these credentials, Nixon came close to being scratched from the ticket when the “slush fund” crisis surfaced.³⁰

The issue arose on September 18, 1952, when the *New York Post* carried the headline, “Secret Nixon Fund.” It went on to report that a slush fund “keeps Nixon in style far beyond his salary.” Nixon’s campaign managers, and Nixon himself believed nothing would come of the story since it was considered to be a legal and ethical fund by most politicians. In fact, funds of this sort were kept by countless other politicians. They were simply war chests set up to cover political costs, and the money was supposedly not used for personal reasons.

²⁸ Nixon. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 88; Jeff Broadwater, *Eisenhower and the Anti-Communist Crusade* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 35; “Wanted: Bright Young Man,” *Time*, 21 July 1952, 19.

²⁹ “Why it’s Nixon: He’s Young, Californian, a Vote Getter,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 18 July 1952, 36; John H. Fenton, “Nixon Takes Role of Naming Names,” *New York Times*, 3 September 1952, p. 19.

³⁰ Kurz. *Nixon’s Enemies*, 132; Nixon. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 110.

Even an article in the *New York Times* noted that one hundred other representatives also had a fund of this sort. It said that these congressmen used these funds to fight the evil powers in Washington. However, as the Democrats were taking a beating from the communist warrior in Nixon, any possible controversial issue they could find on their opponent had to be used. Therefore, the Democrats attacked Nixon ferociously. Some newspapers even demanded Nixon resign from the ticket. With all the buzz, Eisenhower became uncertain about his running-mate. In fact, most of Eisenhower's campaign managers began looking for the right time to dump Nixon from the ticket. However, they and most everyone else had temporarily forgotten about Nixon's brilliant use of the communist issue, which had already gotten him so far in his career.³¹

Nixon dealt with the crisis right from the start by reminding voters of his communist warrior background. For example, at a campaign whistle-stop in Marysville, California, Nixon told an audience that he worked on investigating communist subversion, and therefore ever since he began that line of work, the leftists had been trying to smear him in return. He went on to say that he intended to continue to expose the communists the more they smeared him. This defense one again struck a chord with Nixon's audience, and therefore played a role in saving his candidacy at the beginning of the crisis. However, it was the "Checkers" speech that truly saved his career.³²

Nixon was well aware of the fact that he needed to win back the support of voters if he wanted to remain on the ticket. The fund crisis broadcast, popularly known as the "Checkers" speech, did just that and more. The Republican National Committee paid a handsome sum of money for a thirty minute nationwide television broadcast in order for Nixon to air his side of the story. In the famous September 23 speech, Nixon often made references to his record, such as a referral to his role in the Hiss case. He also discussed his family's dog, for which the speech was named, that was a gift he admitted should have been returned. Nixon almost tearfully stated that this gift could not be taken away from his daughters. This statement showed Nixon's softer side. Nixon then went on to once again discuss his fight against communism. Finally, toward the end of the speech, Nixon told the audience that he loved the United States, but felt it was in danger. Therefore, Eisenhower was the man to elect in

³¹ Ambrose. *Nixon: The Education of a Politician 1913-1960*, 276-77; "Gwinn Says He Got a Fund Like Nixon's and 100 Other Representatives Did, Too," *New York Times*, 24 September 1952, p. 26.

³² "Republicans: The Remarkable Tornado," *Time*, 29 September 1952, 12.

order to save America. In the final emotional seconds, the television screen went blank. The verdict was left to the public.³³

The public was enthusiastic about Nixon's speech. A *Newsweek* article focused on the part of Nixon's speech in which he claimed that the fund had gone to defray the expenses of his battle against communism. The following line read that the public reaction was tumultuous. Indeed it was, for the Republican National Committee received over 160,000 telegrams and 250,000 letters that supported Nixon 350 to 1. The most important vote, though, came from Eisenhower. The general could not turn his back on Nixon now, as he had proved that he was still more popular than ever. Certainly, this was due in large measure to his prominence stemming from the Hiss case and his previous elections. Even Nixon wrote in his memoirs that the further prominence he gained after the fund speech revived interest in the Hiss case. Therefore, even something like a fund crisis allowed Nixon and Eisenhower to emphasize the communist subversion issue. Voorhis wrote that following the fund speech, Nixon claimed communists were smearing him with regards to the fund. Therefore, Voorhis argued, who would dare to question Nixon? Obviously, Nixon was kept on the ticket.³⁴

On election day, Eisenhower won the presidency by a landslide, garnering thirty-four million votes to Stevenson's twenty-seven million. Nixon became the second youngest vice president in United States history, turning forty years of age following his inauguration in January 1953. Nixon's meteoric rise in American politics can only be compared to John F. Kennedy's ascendancy to the presidency in 1961 at age forty-three. This fast rise to the top can be attributed to the time period Nixon lived in. The decades in which he gained political fame provided an intense issue for him to focus on. His election to the vice presidency in 1952, and again in 1956, witnessed Nixon's polished Red-baiting. His use of the communist issue was his key to political ascendancy. Once again though, the press also played a crucial role.³⁵

The press understood more than ever how explosive the issue of communism was in the 1950s. One of the more influential men regarding press coverage of communist subversion was Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines. He worked a great deal on the promotion of national anti-

³³ Aitken. *Nixon: A Life*, 213; A. Craig Baird, ed., *Representative American Speeches: 1952-1953*, vol. 25, *Apologia*, by Richard Milhous Nixon, New York: H.W. Wilson, 1953, 81-82.

³⁴ "Vice-Presidential Elect Nixon," *Newsweek*, 10 November 1952, 25; Aitken. *Nixon: A Life*, 218; Nixon. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 110; Voorhis. *The Strange Case of Richard Milhous Nixon*, 14.

³⁵ Aitken. *Nixon: A Life*, 223.

importantly, it said that Nixon was “the most convincing and successful product of them all.” Indeed he was.³⁸

³⁸ Who is Richard Nixon,” *New Republic*, 8 September 1952, 9-10.