

1/20/72

Dear Js,

You will never get the true significance of a Nixon State of the Union message by reading it. Never! Nor by hearing it, if Pacifica had an advance copy and the wit to perceive its great merit in time to cancel and air it. Whatever would have been cancelled could not have been as informative. Although hearing is not as good as seeing, it remains better than reading.

Except the what I have come to expect, a parroting of the JFK rhetoric. Even spoke, each time he exudes I note the JFK rhythm. That it is marching to a different cadence is not the point, naturally. It is the intended beat.

By the time man has been able to reach a true perspective, Nixon will go down in history (always assuming he will leave us a history) as The Great Imitator. He has perfected this new political technique to the point where he is imitating Nixon. As in proclaiming the third, as he did the second and the first, departures from the norm. (No, before Congress it is not accepted protocol to say "revolutionary".)

Somehow there is the warmth of a fat mother's breast, a feeling of security that comes from a Nixon "message", an all-enveloping comfort, for it is a reaffirmation of all the verities of American political life. His pronouncements are true dedication to Americanism, in the age of film and tape, an encouragement for one can be certain that no single outworn cliché, no ancient stereotype, will be forgotten, and thus future generations will be able to know The America That Was. To think that one man, alone and unassisted except for a flackery of the unimaginative, can resurrect these gems from the past and with them renew the spirit of the worst of the past, no single cliché slighted! We are The Fortunate Generation, for we know what those words mean. The new generation lacks this experience. When they hear Peace they think Not War, but we know better. When they hear Freedom, they think no restraint, but what can one expect of callow youth today? And prosperity? These poor ones of today, they never heard of Two Chickens in Every Pot. (Curses! He slighted that one!)

There never was a President whose face so clearly said that now that I have learned to look more like I mean it you know I don't and can't, and its contrived smile, each lasting just long enough and not too long, reaffirming true dedication to the totality of the synthetic man.

You have to see Nixon deliver to appreciate him. Look into those eyes that do not smile when the teeth do. Watch the hand that is awkward in its gestures of friendship, as it paws in awkwardness never quite making it around the neck of an old friend. Or, at least he recalls from long ago. Perhaps "friend" is inappropriate for the mutation of a Madison Avenue test-tube.... We have finally found the man of whom it is not possible to say too little good. That it also is not possible to say too much bad is inadequate, for among those many bad of the past there was an occasional aberration, a tiny fragment of good. But of this one, it seems he has succeeded in making it possible for an honest man to say with honor that he can say nothing good of his President. Considering our history, particularly our recent history, this is no inconsiderable accomplishment.

There was something in this speech for everybody. Nothing for the poor, phrases/and shams of plagiarism for George Wallace to make, every billions for the war industries and the fulsome promise of new careers for the makers of wars. All the things we do not need are to be provided, just as certainly as all the things we do need are not.

Of course, such a message is always the occasion for the recall of political clichés. But somehow Nixon's take the steam out of his opponents. Humphrey's criticism was so reserved he could summon but one typical redundancy.

It is appropriate that this appearance coincided with my remembering a strict injunction

to change a bandage, that a bandage in this case consisted of a small splint and adhesive tape, both somehow suggestive of the way the country keeps going.

Even if he is from your State, you can't fully appreciate the New Nixon from his words, for they are not his. He always has some of John Kennedy's, awkwardly copied (and with the passing of time delivered more flatly and with less feeling). Full appreciation requires a TV- YOU LUCKY PEOPLE!

Despite everything, one has to respect the consummate skill in the use of knees and nails. This is the master of the dirty drick. He is not simply Dirty Dick. More, perhaps, Dirtiest Dick. The Democrats will be hard put tomorrow to catch up with all the mean little subtleties with less than 24 hours in which to detect them. Why it will take all their time to show how the Man of Peace is The Man of War, a task made no easier for them by their own anointed, going back from but not forgetting LBJ.

He is now running Washington, too, in case the cold printed word doesn't let this shine through. Controlling Washington police - and the source of all statistics - he has reduced crime. He did this by inspiring an increase in the number of crimes. If not in admiration, need not one lose one's self in something?

Now that you've gotten your raise (from the a.m. wire copy), you don't have to wonder what to do with it. Besides new corpses it will get you newer and larger atomic submarines. They will lurk with those oysters I used to love in the Chesapeake, able and ready to fire multimultimissiles, as they will in the once blue Mediterranean, in the Indian Ocean with which we are becoming so familiar, off the shores of Viet Nam unless the election seems to close, in which event they'll have to shift a few miles (carefully, not to disturb the oil well that will by them be supplying us with still more pollution.

Seeing some of this on the evening TV news, unfortunately, did not depress my appetite, especially not when Lil whips up stuff better yet with the third reheating. But it sure depresses everything else...

We are fortunate that all our company (now) is too our liking. The last of those scheduled by date left this a.m. We've enjoyed them since Xmas, sometimes with as much as a day between them, sometimes with them overlapping. Maybe tomorrow I can get back to writing. I sure want to finish the add to the conclusions of POST MORTEM and then start what can't now be finished, the epilogue on the Lattimer stuff. I think I have more than I can use on him now, unless I can get proof that he really is a Bircher. His stuff reads like it. I now have one 1966 piece in which Oswald is the Communist enemy twice. I think I've enclosed a carbon of my letter to Teddy's keeper. Fred Graham has already been quite helpful, helping tie all of this more snugly into the past covered in the book in ways he can now only faintly see. My letter and questions seem to have reached him. Both ways. I'll have some nice quote on how he got an exclusive on the thoughtfulness of the Archivist in forcing a copy of the GSA-family contract on him under the Freedom of Information law when he had been and was denying it to me. Graham didn't even ask for it! Rhoads told him to! And Marshall had decided on Lattimer before Graham reached him by phone. According to him, a desk man had put his ~~tickler~~ story on the contract in the tickler, which reminded him to remind Fred to ask at the end of the fifth year. But there is better stuff you'll someday see. God how I wish I thought I could reprint this! Some of the best lines I'll have.

Excuse me for using you as a catharsis and the making of a few notes and for trying to work an illness of of everywhere, not just the stomach.

When something like Nixon is on, you are lucky not to have a TV. The image lingers. But it is true to say that you can't fully appreciate him in any other medium.

Best,