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Kennedy Center Shenanigans

by Gary Wills

Many of those who remember his "Checkers speech" feel that Nixon's at his trickiest when he goes all over 'umble.

If that is true, there was reason to sniff tricks in the air when our President got all bashful and backing-out over the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. This is not only a long-awaited social night for Washington, but a symbol of governmental concern for the arts. In that sense, it would normally be among the President's assignments - not merely his prerogatives - to grace the opening with his presence.

But now he tells us he would not dream of stealing the show that night. In a paroxysm of humility he announced, a month ahead of time, that he would rather make it the Kennedy family's night - so he has surrendered the presidential box to Mrs. Aristotle Onassis and her party.

That sounds very nice of him - until one thinks on the matter a bit