

The Great Pants Flap

By Beverly Stephen

MANY of the world's most stylish fashion plates and millions of working women virtually spend their lives in pants today, but apparently the news hasn't reached the White House.

On Monday UPI White House correspondent Helen Thomas was teased by President Nixon about wearing pants to a bill-signing ceremony in the Oval Room of the White House. The President asked "Do they cost less than gowns?" and Miss Thomas replied, "No," "Then change," he said, to the laughter of the others present.

Reached in Washington by The Chronicle, Miss Thomas said the President "is a gentleman of the old school.

"I know he was teasing partly but there was a lot of truth in what he was joking

about — he doesn't like pants on women, particularly on women in the White House.

"I usually don't wear pants to the White House per se, but I do wear them when we're covering the President in Key Biscayne or San Clemente. I don't wear them when I'm covering a tea on Mrs. Nixon's side.

"But I do believe they're very permissible. They're very co-ordinated now and look as good as some of the dresses," she added.

"The President has a right to his preferences but I have rights too. The press is free, thank God," said the veteran newspaperwoman, adding that she would wear pants again if convenience demanded (as it had Monday when a subsequent assignment took her out in the country).

Neither the Washington

Post nor the Washington Star has any written dress codes regarding the wearing of pants; nor does the White House or the Executive Office Building.

A White House spokesman said, "There is no written code but the girls who work here (in the White House) wear dresses during normal working hours. I don't think the question of pants has come up. There's very little office space here and very few people work here," he said adding that most people worked in the Executive Office Building. "I've seen many secretaries wearing slacks and pantsuits there. They're more popular in winter than in summer."

Washington Post correspondent Dorothy McCardle says she doesn't wear pants herself but thinks she has seen "reporters from all the

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papers wearing them at one time or another.

"Only the young and photogenic wear them. The middle-aged with the middle-age spread don't — or at least they shouldn't.

Of the President's comment to Miss Thomas, she said, "I think it would make one feel dreadful. It can be embarrassing to be singled out in public, even to be praised — and that certainly wasn't praise."

Washington Star correspondent Betty Beale said, "I thought he was ribbing Hel-

en a bit but I took it the way I'm sure he meant it — as a light comment. He's an old-fashioned man when it comes to women, you know."

Miss Beale added that she did not cover the political side but goes to the parties and teas. "I have seen pants worn by girls at some of these teas but I think of the White House as a very formal place.

"One tries to dress like the hostess and I know Mrs. Nixon is never going to receive anybody there in pants. It's a traditional place where traditional modes of behavior apply."