

Mrs. Fulbright on Martha

By Malvina Stephenson

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WASHINGTON — Betty Fulbright looks down her patrician nose and suggests that bubbly Martha Mitchell still has a lot to learn about the ways of official Washington.

Mrs. Fulbright, who grew up in Philadelphia's "Main Line," is the wife of the veteran Arkansas senator. His vote against Judge G. Harrold Carswell for the Supreme Court enraged the Arkansas-born wife of Atty. Gen. John Mitchell.

"If wives all took up cudgels for their husbands, nobody could speak in this town," Mrs. Fulbright declared.

In a rare interview, Mrs. Fulbright criticized Mrs. Mitchell's outspoken role in which she recently asked the Little Rock Gazette to "cruelty" Fulbright for his anti-Carswell vote.

"Mrs. Nixon certainly doesn't do it," Mrs. Fulbright declared. "She is marvelous about things like that. She keeps on an even keel. She just doesn't discuss politics."

Mrs. Fulbright said this has been the policy of all the First Ladies she has known in nearly 30 years of official life. The supreme test came when Fulbright, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, broke with President Johnson over the Vietnam War.

Mrs. Fulbright was not exactly "annoyed" by President Johnson's reported nickname of "halfbright" for her husband, but she did find it a "little corny."

"He used to get awfully mad at people, but

Bird (Mrs. Johnson) never did. She was never anything but pleasant to me," Mrs. Fulbright said.

Mrs. Fulbright thinks experience may modify Mrs. Mitchell.

"You see, she came here and she hadn't been in politics before. She had never been in Washington. I think if she stays here long enough, she will find that people can't carry these things into the living rooms."

She said of Mrs. Mitchell: "It sounds sort of impertinent, but I don't mean it that way. I feel very sorry for her in a way, because she does seem to lose her cool. He (Mitchell) doesn't seem to mind, but it would upset Bill (Fulbright) very much if I took his business in hand that way."

Except among intimates, Mrs. Fulbright's conversation is usually limited to casual pleasantries. Her discretion is born of an upbringing in Philadelphia society (Junior League) and years of self-discipline as a politician's wife.

In manner and appearance, Mrs. Fulbright and Mrs. Mitchell are as different as their political views.

Brunet Mrs. Fulbright is tall and slender, a grandmother at 63. She wears clothes of simple elegance and surrounds herself with 18th century antiques. The fortyish Mrs. Mitchell is blonde and bouncy. She likes short skirts and fancy French furniture.

Mrs. Mitchell apparently made no effort to get acquainted with Mrs. Fulbright until the controversy over the nomination of Judge Clement Haynsworth to the Supreme Court.

Mrs. Fulbright was surprised by her telephone call one afternoon.

"She started out, 'Betty, I want you to make Bill vote for Haynsworth,'" Mrs. Fulbright quoted her in a commanding tone. "She talked about how she loves the South, and I said, so do I. But, I told her I don't try to run Bill's business; he makes up his own mind."

In the Carswell case, what were the deciding factors for Fulbright, who had supported Haynsworth? According to Mrs. Fulbright, the judgment of "mediocrity" by the law school deans and professors at the University of Arkansas and elsewhere was very "influential."

Mrs. Fulbright branded as "insulting" the President's statement that a southerner and a strict constructionist couldn't get confirmed by this Senate.

"I don't think it was prejudice that defeated Carswell," she said. "The senators thought he was not qualified."

As for Fulbright's reaction to Mrs. Mitchell, Mrs. Fulbright said, "He's not a bit petty. He never has been. He's not vindictive. I get mad sometimes, but he rarely does."

But mostly, Mrs. Fulbright has met political controversy with serenity. "Life with Bill is never dull," she chuckles.

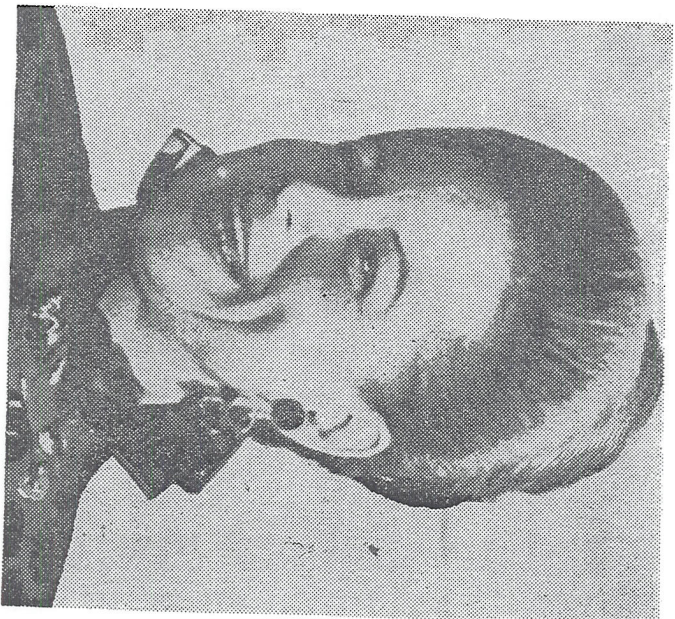
Ever since her marriage, Mrs. Fulbright said, Arkansas has been "home to me. Mrs. Mitchell (a Pine Bluff native) has been away almost as long as I have lived there."

So, she thinks the cabinet wife from New York is in no position to lecture the Fulbrights about the views of Arkansas.

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ACCORDING to long-time Washington resident Mrs. William Fulbright (left), outspoken newcomer Mrs. John Mitchell (right) will change her ways as she grows accustomed to the political scene.



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