

The Making of a New First Lady

Washington

MORE THAN four years ago, before the Presidential election, Nixon image-makers were busy projecting what became popularly known as the "new" Nixon. Today, gearing up for a second campaign, it appears they have been working on his wife as well.

Until recently, the 59-year-old First Lady, although hard-working, had accepted a mute, almost invisible second-place role to her husband. Richard Nixon was the star; Pat Nixon, the star's wife.

But something dramatic has happened.

Pat Nixon — or more completely, Thelma Catharine Patricia Ryan Nixon — has clearly begun to emerge as a star in her own right.

The Pat Nixon who sat stiff and wordless beside her husband on past trips, breaking away only occasionally to appear before a woman's group, has just earned the title of "Madam Ambassador" following a series of highly successful solo foreign (and domestic) missions where she wowed her hosts with a relaxed humor and good sportsmanship.

The Pat Nixon who said she would never wear pants in public (after her husband voiced disapproval of them) is casually modeling them in the current issue of a national magazine, participated in a recent lengthy television interview in a pantsuit, and was photographed in them last summer strolling along a California beach with the President's arm around her. **

Clearly, there has been a major change in the First Lady, although she, and the members of her staff, emphatically deny it. Her

press secretary, Mrs. Constance Stuart, does not even bother to hide her annoyance when asked.

"There is NO new Pat Nixon," Mrs. Stuart said. "I'm really getting tired of hearing that. She is the same woman she has always been."

Whether or not there is actually a "new" person, there is certainly a glossy new image for the First Lady, a new role for Mrs. Nixon much more defined than ever before.

"This is absolutely true," Mrs. Stuart said. "She is now an ambassador. She is a foreign diplomat on her own, which is a new role for her — for any First Lady, really. Last year she went on a mercy mission to Peru (to bring relief supplies to earthquake victims).

"Last month she went to Africa. She's going to Russia and China. I'm sure if it were up to the President and the Secretary of State, they would have her doing even more. But there just isn't enough time."

One essential question, however, is whether the impetus has come from Mrs. Nixon herself, or a high-powered White House staff concerned with getting Mr. Nixon re-elected.

Naturally, in a campaign year, a great deal of attention is given to anything an incumbent President seeking re-election and members of his family do. "You have to remember that since Mr. Nixon is President, his campaigning in the traditional sense — as is done by every other candidate — is restricted," said one seasoned reporter. "He can't spend as much time at it as the challengers, simply because he is President. So he sends his wife."

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** See 20 Apr 71,
this file

* See 19 Jan 71,
this file