



Irwin F. Gellman. *The President and the Apprentice: Eisenhower and Nixon, 1952-1961.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. 832 pp. \$40.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-18105-0.

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On August 24, 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave one of the most consequential press conferences of his presidency. At the end of it, a reporter asked if Eisenhower could identify one moment when Vice President Richard Nixon gave the president a major idea or concept that he acted on. The president responded, “If you give me a week, I might think of one. I don’t remember.”[1] This first draft of history took hold and shaped the 1960 campaign as the Kennedy campaign used it to separate a popular president from his vice president. The notion that Nixon did little to help Eisenhower or shape his presidency continues to reverberate to the point that on the fortieth anniversary of the remark, the Nixon Foundation published a page describing how the remark was taken out of context. For many this remains the final word on Nixon and the Eisenhower years.

Nixon scholar Irwin F. Gellman set out to correct that view. In his book *The Presidency and the Apprentice: Eisenhower and Nixon, 1952-1961*, Gellman depicts Nixon as a valued subordinate who played an important function in foreign affairs. Historians familiar with the Eisenhower administration will welcome this book for uncovering Nixon’s underappreciated role in Eisenhower’s presidency. Gellman argues that Eisenhower admired Nixon’s Cold Warrior reputation and his

masterful handling of the Checkers controversy. In the presidential years, Gellman shows that Nixon contributed to American foreign policy, a helpful claim for those working on the 1950s. But Gellman also overreaches. He leaves open questions about domestic subversion and the effort Eisenhower made to push Nixon toward a cabinet post before the 1956 election. The 1960 election could also be better integrated into the book. In the end, *The President and the Apprentice* moves the conversation on Nixon’s role in the Eisenhower presidency forward and leaves much for future scholars to build on.

Gellman’s discussion of Nixon and Eisenhower’s early relationship, the first contribution of the book, like the book as a whole, has both positive and negative attributes. On the positive side, Gellman underscores how anticommunist Eisenhower was before and during his presidency. Gellman proves that Eisenhower admired Nixon’s tactics in fighting communists within the government. This is helpful for scholars trying to assess Eisenhower’s foreign policy as it shows the deep hatred Eisenhower had for communists and statism.

Gellman also makes a contribution by including an appendix of Eisenhower’s notes on the Checkers Speech. In that moment in the 1952 election, Nixon defended his decision to take money

from political backers. Nixon's response to the scandal created sympathy and kept him on the ticket. Gellman cites notes in which Eisenhower wrote he had "seen brave men in tough situations—None ever came through better" (p. 572). Including these documents gives more insight into the whole controversy and Eisenhower's thinking on the matter.

On the negative side, Gellman does not explain why Eisenhower did not pick Nixon for an early role in the administration's fight against domestic subversion. Gellman details Nixon's support for the House Unamerican Activities Committee and Nixon's important role as a liaison between the administration and Congress. But the argument stops there. Eisenhower's motivations for keeping Nixon out of policy on domestic subversion is not well explored or explained. Another, related oversight in this lengthy book is its handling of anticommunist Senator Joseph McCarthy. Gellman does not show how close Nixon and McCarthy were in their views on domestic subversion. More analysis here would have helped the book.

Gellman does a better job discussing foreign affairs. He reminds readers that Nixon presided over the National Security Council meetings when Eisenhower could not do so. Gellman also analyzes the important role Nixon played as something akin to a roving ambassador. Nixon's visits around the world helped the administration make its case at home and abroad. Nixon also advised the president on issues related to Asian security, a key problem area given the war in Korea that Eisenhower had to end and the Indochina and Chinese Straits crises that followed. Gellman concludes that Nixon was "a sounding board at cabinet and NSC meetings for many of the diplomatic issues in Asia and would serve as a public spokesman for the administration's perspective on Asian matters" (p. 194). It is now up to future scholars of the Nixon presidency to use this foundation to try to understand how the 1950s informed Nixon's later choices as president. Gellman

book's inspires questions about the connection between the 1950s and late 1960s.

While foreign policy analysis is a highlight of the book, presidential election politics is a weakness. Gellman falters in his discussion of why Eisenhower tried to convince Nixon to take a cabinet role during the run-up to the 1956 election. Gellman claims that Eisenhower's view that Nixon should be replaced as vice president reflected "the Army's way of grooming a promising young officer," whereby the army gave young officers a variety of assignments so that they would be prepared to undertake higher levels of authority that required a cosmopolitan point of view (p. 311). This analysis does not take into account Eisenhower's admiration for Robert Anderson, the person Eisenhower wanted to replace Nixon, nor does it take heed of Eisenhower's own, mature understanding of politics. Eisenhower knew that in shuffling Nixon away from the vice presidency he would be able to cultivate another person to take up the mantle of leadership.

The 1960 election is less analyzed than the 1952 or 1956 election in the book even though that election was important for Nixon and Eisenhower. Gellman captures Eisenhower's deep disappointment in the last years of his second term. Eisenhower knew the world was no less dangerous than what he had inherited from Harry Truman. Eisenhower had held the expansion of the state back, but a federal solution to both foreign and domestic problems was no less attractive going into the 1960s. But Gellman does not adequately explain how electoral politics, Nixon, and Eisenhower's legacy interacted. More analysis of Eisenhower's views on his own legacy and the future of the Republican Party in relation to the 1960 election would have provided a strong final part of this book.

These criticisms aside, Irwin Gellman's *The President and the Apprentice* does make an important contribution to how scholars understand Nixon and Eisenhower's relationship. It should en-

courage more research and analysis of Nixon's choices as vice president and how he shaped the institution of the vice presidency. It also gives insight into Eisenhower's priorities and ideas about leadership.

Note

[1]. "President's News Conference," August 24, 1960, *The American Presidency Project Online*, accessed December 27, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-240>.

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