

# Thee checkers speech rhetorical analasis essay sample

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In “ The Checkers Speech,” Richard Nixon responds to criticism regarding an alleged “ secret fund.” At this time, 1952, Nixon was running for vice president with presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower was enjoying enormous popularity when the rumor surfaced one month before the election. Nixon was accused of accepting a supplemental salary of \$18,000 dollars, contributed by a group of supporters back in his home state of California. There were also rumors that Eisenhower would drop Nixon from the ticket. So Nixon was forced to come up with a remedy for the untimely situation. Not only did he have to convince the American people he was an honest politician, he also had to show Ike that he should remain on the ticket. He prepared a speech himself and arranged to go on a nationwide television program and “ tell the truth.” The Republican National Committee purchased a half-hour of prime time on the NBC and CBS television networks and the Mutual radio networks.

Nixon was on air, and did just what he planned to do; speak in his defense by allegedly telling the truth. He also used the media opportunity to achieve other goals. After arguing for his innocence, Nixon attacked his opponents and supported Eisenhower, in tern supporting himself by association. Nixon targeted “ the people” as his largest audience. He strove to appeal to the common, hardworking, honest men, women, and families of America. He was careful to identify himself with this audience all through out the speech.

Nixon frequently displayed his strong family beliefs and their importance to him. For example, when he explained the wages of a Senator, he stated, “ He gets enough money to pay for one trip a year, a round trip that is, for himself and his family between his home and Washington, D. C.” Another

example of his family man image was displayed in his summary of his living situation. He described the number of houses that he owned and what he still owed on each. Nixon made sure to include this statement, “ My folks are living there at the present time.”

It shows that he does not own excessive things and it lets his audience feel his commitment to family. The relations of Nixon’s finances were based on Nixon having no more money than the common man. He compared the struggles that he and his wife had, just after marriage, to the troubles of young couples in 1952. Nixon also stresses that his current life is still not a free ride. He “ just has \$4, 000 in life insurance,” and no insurance on his wife or children, which makes his audience feel that his family is not so high and mighty. Later he even said that he had a \$500 loan on his live insurance. It gave him substantial credibility with his audience to have a loan on his life. Lastly, a large portion of his short autobiography was devoted to the description of his time spent in the service. This appealed to the patriotic, anti-communist American, and since these times were not far from the end of World War II and during the Korean War, it really hit home with the entire population. Communism was a major issue at that time.

The people of America were threatened by possibilities of communist takeover. Nixon and Eisenhower were also running against democratic candidates Stevenson for President and Sparkman for Vice president. Nixon refers to the Alger Hiss case to show the American people that he was anti-communist. He assisted in the case and accused Stevenson of being passive in dealing with communism, because communists made progress with

government by Stevenson's party, and corruption arose in government of that party. Nixon was basically stating that he was a proven enemy of communists and that the democrats assisted them. Finally, Nixon supports Eisenhower by showing that he is qualified to clean up corruption and deal with communists. If one looks closely at Nixon's speech it has a very easy, logical pattern to follow, and allowed him to achieve every goal that he set for himself. One of his main intentions of his speech was to attack the democrats, but at the same time make republicans, including himself, look good.

After Nixon built up his own credibility, he began to bash the democrats. He implied that Stevenson and Sparkman had something to hide, unless they do as "I" did and make their finances public. Nixon encourages his audience to believe a lot of things that may or may not have been true. One, that he has done nothing morally wrong with using the \$18,000 fund because he made his finances public. Two, he is an honest man, and he deserves to be retained as Vice Presidential candidate. Three, rich men such as "Governor Stevenson who inherited a fortune from his father" should not deserve to be president. But, a "modest man" such as himself or Eisenhower, a common man that "God must have loved," should have that chance at office. In general Nixon said that Eisenhower and he, the republican candidates, are qualified to lead the country and democrats are not. Therefore, he only left the American public with the option of electing the republican candidates. Nixon's credibility was vital to his success in the speech.

If he couldn't convince his audience that he was a good and honest individual, the speech would have failed. He strategically built up his credibility throughout. He began by introducing himself as a "candidate for the Vice President whose honesty and integrity have been questioned." His acknowledgment of criticism heightened his credibility. It made him seem vulnerable, like "the people" would be. He portrays a patriotic image during several areas in his speech. When he was describing his time in the service, he was very modest, but made sure to put forth some statements of credibility. For Example, he told the people that he had "a couple of battle stars" and "a couple letters of commendation." Nixon made it sound like those honors were no big deal; after all he was only there when "the bombs were falling." Even though the above statements added substantially to Nixon's credibility, some emotional appeals helped him even more. He made himself more vulnerable, less of a politician, and more like common man.

His strongest device in the speech was probably the story about "Checkers." He dispensed this almost irrelevant story right before he began to bash his opponents. It gave him the additional credibility and sympathy to appeal to his audience. The puppy is what the speech was named after and also what people in 1952 related to. It did an excellent job of getting the American people on his side. I contained all the crucial points that Nixon was trying to stress. First, Nixon was a family man; he cares about his family and is willing to protect them. When Nixon said "regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it," he was almost referring to what people were saying about him. The dog was never threatened to be taken away, Nixon only used

this to work his audience in his favor. Earlier in the speech Nixon describes his childhood and how he spent most of his time in a family owned grocery store.

The following quote relates his life to hard times and uniting emotionally: “The only reason we were able to make it go was because my mother and dad had five boys and we all worked in the store.” This quote hits the families of America who were having financial troubles and makes them feel closer to Nixon’s level. Near the end of his speech, to recover from the fierce criticism of the democrats, he reads a letter that was sent to him a 19 year-old female. Her husband was in Korea at the time, and Nixon uses her offer of a ten-dollar contribution as great emotional appeal, because she was supporting him and Eisenhower. The letter was filled with emotion and was similar to what so many young American families were experiencing at those times.

As a result of this speech, Nixon’s popularity went through the roof. He remained on the ticket and introduced himself to a new audience of some 58-million people. From the several hundred thousand letters and telegrams received by the Republican National Committee, Nixon’s approval was 350 to 1. Some criticism can be made about Nixon’s speech but he achieved his goals and then some. He knew what he was doing and I feel that he did an excellent job building his credibility, and using emotion to grip his audience. He did get elected as VP that year and his popularity soared.