

## James Reston Reports:

## Let's Have More in an

## Washington

FOR THE LAST couple of years, the Nixon Administration, with Vice President Agnew leading the charge, has been protesting against what it calls "instant analysis" of presidential speeches by television commentators, and now CBS has announced that it will abandon this practice.

The timing and reasoning of the CBS decision are a little puzzling. If anything, CBS has been even more insistent than NBC or ABC in demanding that all the rights and obligations of the press under the First Amendment should apply equally to broadcasting.

Fuller column, NYTimes 13 Jun 73,  
filed Watergate.

## Instant

ambiguous and even dangerous problems of the day subjected to the immediate impressions of the CBS stars obviously troubles the man in the White House. They would rather have Rather (Cronkite, Severeid, or Mudd) wait.

This all seems fair enough, until you think about just how fair it is. The problem of avoiding sudden or ill-considered reactions to presidential speeches is not created by the broadcasters, but by the President. Whenever the President decides to make a major speech, it is constructed with the greatest care, after days and even weeks of preparation and calculation and is ready, subject to last-minute accidents, long before it is delivered.

The reporters and commentators engage in "instant analysis" only because the White House holds back the text until the last minute, though the text is prepared, completed, and mimeographed many hours before. The White House wants it that way. It wants to create a carefully calculated public reaction from the American people, without any "yes buts" from the commentators.

In short, it blames the networks for reacting too quickly to presidential speeches and being "unfair," though it has unfairly denied them the texts in time to make the careful and thoughtful analysis it says it wants.

Yet, just when the broadcasting industry was beginning to get strong public support for this principle of equal protection under the First Amendment, and precisely when the public was learning from the Watergate scandals that maybe presidential statements needed the most searching analysis, "instant" and otherwise, CBS announced that it will adopt a policy of "delayed reaction."

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PRESUMABLY, this decision was made by William Paley of CBS in order to be fair to the President and he has a point. To have a carefully prepared presidential address on the complicated

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ACCORDINGLY it is odd that Bill Paley, of all people, should impose a hard rule of no instant analysis on his correspondents, especially since, with the best will in the world, it is unenforceable.

The President makes statements every day, and the CBS White House correspondent reports on them and comments on them. Is Mr. Paley going to tell his White House correspondent merely to report what the President says every day and not analyze what the President said until later? If so, John Chancellor and David Brinkely at NBC, and Howard K. Smith and Harry Reasoner at ABC are going to have a field day.

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THIS ISSUE of "fairness" and "instant analysis," of course, is only one illustration of the much larger problem of the role of television in American political life. "Equal time" under the so-called "Fairness Doctrine" that now exists under law is neither "equal" nor "fair."

If the White House announces in advance that the President will make a "major announcement" on Monday night at 9 o'clock — on prices, Vietnam, or Watergate — he is assured of a vast TV audience. But even if the commentators or Democrats are given equal time on Wednesday, the audience will not be the same or "equal" and the debate will certainly not be therefore "fair."

We need all the analysis we can get of presidential power and television power, for if the President can use all the power of his office and command instant access to the TV networks, without instant analysis of what he says, the American political system will be even more unbalanced than it was at the beginning of the Watergate scandals.

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