

WHAT IMPEACHMENT COULD MEAN FOR AMERICA

What happens if the President is impeached, but not convicted? Would the Nixon administration, like that of Andrew Johnson, be crippled, reduced virtually to caretaker status? What would that do to America, here and in the world? Unattractive as the prospect is, at least we have a precedent to go on. And the knowledge that America survived.

What if the President is impeached and convicted? It has never happened in our history, so we fear it. We can say with certainty only that Vice President Ford would ascend to the Presidency. As an ancient map warned in an inscription somewhere west of Africa, "Beyond this place there be dragons."

Dragons, demons, malevolent spirits of unspeakable horror may await us out there in the black unknown, in that region of our laws and politics and national heritage we have never fully explored. Is removing a President from

office the equivalent of regicide? Parricide? Patricide? Excommunication of the Pope? Will it mean the end of American democracy? Will we all be expelled from Eden, doomed eternally to burn in the sulphury fumes?

Or will it be a kind of exorcism, a necessary casting out of devils from the American spirit, a profoundly disturbing ritual which must be performed before we can repossess our soul?

Edward Engberg, in the essay which follows, sees impeachment/conviction as our chance to know ourselves better, to find out "what is important to us . . . the kind of government we want, the kind of men we want to have run it." The lurking fear, as he sees it, is that we may "all sit only as spectators . . ."

"The Post-Impeachment Period", as the years ahead may someday be known to historians, is what we make it.