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Views TV

The Man Who Impeached Himself

AS OF this afternoon, the television networks won't have Richard Nixon to kick them around any longer.

When the Great National Sigh of Relief was heard yesterday at sunset no group sighed with greater ecstasy than the four television networks because plans for the fall season can now proceed according to schedule without taking time out for the Senate hearings on impeachment.



Richard Nixon

made the lasting impression on the public.

Without the television coverage of the recent House Judiciary Committee hearings, I wonder if they would have been as fair to either side of the controversy. The presence of the calm eye of the camera cautioned representatives on both sides of the issue to make a more determined gesture toward non-partisanship than might have been deemed necessary had the hearings been off limits to TV.

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BUT THE MOST damaging of all to the President were the television appearances of Richard Nixon on himself. Even in sunnier days he had never been at peace with the cameras — but when his jowl-shaking protests of innocence began to be so obviously at odds with the facts, his TV appearances became grotesque.

There was, too, a pathos about those video appearances. Yet any tendency for the viewer to feel compassion for the man was quickly dispelled by his arrogance.

I firmly believe that he could have pulled it off in his favor a year or so ago if he had gone on television with a strong speech admitting his own mistakes, renouncing his former aides Ehrlichman and Haldeman, simply saying he was sorry and asking for the country to support him in the future. I think it might have worked. I'm not saying it would have been good for the country, but I believe he could have held his own — with the help of television.

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INSTEAD, he called TV newsmen liars and when he wasn't disparaging the medium he sent his Vice President out to do it for him. He lavished praise upon the two most obvious wrongdoers, lied about his own involvement with them — and, all the while, he looked very guilty there on the home screen. In the telecasts next day he was yachting with Bebe Rebozo.

As an exception, when he spoke to the nation's broadcasters in convention, he baited a CBS newsmen in a manner unbecoming to a President — and was rebuffed in a manner unbecoming to a newsmen. But Mr. Nixon started it — and he lost it. Gradually, the picture began to form in even the most loyal minds that Richard Nixon was not being honest. It was a picture that had moved from the television screen to the mind.

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HE LOST ME long, long ago on a day when millions of Americans marched for peace in cities and towns all over the nation. It was one of the biggest television stories of the year. And the White House announced that the President had been watching a football game.

We can no longer defend Richard Nixon for "sticking to what he thought was right" — because we know now that it wasn't right. And he knew it.

Maybe we should all be glad that he wasn't bright enough to deceive us more than he did. With television as his ally, instead of his foe, he could have walked away with us. Some day there may come such a man . . . Plan now to be wary.