

Terrence O'Flaherty Views TV

The Second Shafting

PUBLIC DISGRACE has become a sure way to the best seller list and an "open sesame" to every television talk show in the land. You will recall that yesterday in this space we were considering the *The Strange Case of The Second Shafting of The Citizenry* by Spiro T. Agnew.



Merv Griffin

What irony! The first U.S. vice president in history who was forced to resign his office is the first to write a novel about what's wrong with the vice presidency! Not only were we forced to suffer through his disastrous term in office but now this exasperating newt is on the tube

all week slyly thumbing his nose at all of us.

Surely television is bad enough as it is, without this.

Yesterday's appearance on the Merv Griffin Show was laced with criticism of the office he disgraced and then evacuated in haste; talk about how to fight the Vietnamese; the threat of Communism; a rather unsportsmanlike put-down of his former boss (under the heading of Dishonor Among Thieves) and some hilarious double-talk, most of which would not be worthy of repeating here except for this unsettling thought: *It may help to soften the blow of facing Richard Nixon on TV again when HE takes to the talk show circuit next season under the tutelage of David Frost, the British import.*

It is unfortunate enough to have been cheated by these men without having to hear or read about how they did it.

BUT there are things to be learned from even the most disastrous events and one of them in this case is that an interviewer who grovels in front of his guest — as Griffin did — sometimes comes away with a better interview than someone who goes for the throat as Barbara Walters did on the "Today" show. Politicians have a talent for artfully dodging. That's the reason they're in politics. But if you turn on the flattery, they'll open up to it like a beautiful flower.

This doesn't mean that Griffin understands this. He fawns over everyone. But it appears to work effectively with the great and near-great, the famous and the infamous.

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AMONG the Agnew observations that stick in the mind as well as in the craw:

"I think it's fair to say that I was positioned in a way that I had a good probability of becoming president of the United States. Or at least a presidential candidate."

"This is the honest truth: I didn't know that Polack was a nasty word until the press taught me, because all of my Polish friends in Baltimore call themselves Polack, so I didn't know."

"I think my book (*The Canfield Decision*) is fiction, but I think that Woodward and Bernstein's *The Final Days* is more fiction than mine. I also believe it's a return to yellow journalism. I think it is a travesty of justice — the huckstering of this book (theirs, not his). That we dignify and celebrate these men who are going to make millions of dollars out of destroying what's left of a family is the worst thing that ever happened."

Instead of challenging that last statement by comparing it to Nixon's destructive tendencies, Griffin nodded gravely in agreement and the studio audience applauded.

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FOR a final stinger, Agnew said: "I can't anticipate that I would ever be in public life again, but to say that I am out of public life for good, well, strange things happen in the world and I'm not ready to make the complete disclaimer."

He was right about one thing. Strange things do happen in the world and Spiro T. Agnew is one of them.