

The Jury: Silent

Since October the stars of the Watergate trial have been the defendants, their lawyers and the judge. Now, in the proceeding's final days, attention inevitably shifts to the silent decision makers, the twelve citizens who will be asked to say "guilty" or "not guilty." A favorite courtroom game is trying to read their faces for comprehension, fleeting signs of response, ennui or interest. Another is to guess how their backgrounds might affect their judgment.

The jurors are an intriguing mix. There are eight blacks and four whites (the District of Columbia is predominantly black), and this is considered by some to be a disadvantage for the white upper-middle class defendants. That argument, however, is discredited by many expert observers. The jurors range in age from 27 to 68 (average: 52). Their occupations span a wide spectrum, including a loan specialist for the Department of Agriculture, a dime-store saleswoman, a logistics coordinator, a retired domestic and a hotel doorman. The jury is overwhelmingly female (nine to three). After they were selected, fully half the jurors told Judge John Sirica that they had reservations about convicting Richard Nixon's underlings in view of Nixon's pardon, but vowed that they would set aside such sentiments in judging the defendants.

Their countenances—and hence their reactions to the evidence placed before them—have for the most part remained stonily unreadable. John Hoffar,

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Decision Makers

57, a retired police superintendent and the jury's only white male, generally remains stolidly poker-faced but smiled broadly once, as Prosecutor James Neal vigorously questioned H.R. Haldeman.

Some jurors, by dint of personality, have made stronger impressions than others. Ruth C. Gould, 57, the chic Government-loan specialist, seems to have set the sartorial pattern for her colleagues. She displays a varied and stylish wardrobe, and her example has apparently encouraged the others to spruce up. Gould is a leader in other respects as well. She has riveted her attention on the complex testimony, and jury watchers predict her election as forewoman.

When it was proposed that Saturday sessions be held in an effort to finish before Christmas, Gould drafted a firm, graceful letter to Sirica on the group's behalf. "The Watergate jury panel," she wrote, "wishes to let you know that while they would of course enjoy spending Christmas at home, it is not an overriding concern among them . . . should the trial extend through the holidays and beyond, they are quite prepared to accept that fact." Said a beaming Sirica after reading the note aloud in court: "Didn't I tell you to never underestimate the intelligence of a jury?"

The letter had the effect of extending a form of incarceration that, for now, has been more confining for the jurors than the defendants. The jurors were busy Christmas shopping last week—ac-

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accompanied by U.S. deputy marshals, who went along to make certain that a store clerk did not offer a stray remark about the trial. The jurors have been staying in Washington's unpretentious Midtown Motor Inn since their swearing-in Oct. 11, leading peculiarly insulated lives as temporary wards of the Government.

For dinner in the Midtown's dining room, they may order, free of charge, whatever is on the menu. At their own expense, they are also permitted two cocktails at dinner. Their mail is censored, and they are not permitted to make or receive telephone calls except in family emergencies, when a marshal would listen in to cut off any conversation that might venture into trial-

related matters. The newspapers they receive are clipped beforehand of all Watergate-related stories, and televisions and radios are instantly snapped off by the ubiquitous chaperons when trial news is apt to be broadcast.

Their confinement will probably be prolonged for several days after they are charged by Sirica with the task of judging the defendants. For \$25 a day (except for Government employees, who draw their full salaries) and all they can eat, they will continue to serve the court—and history—as best they can. On Christmas day the jurors will have a holiday dinner with their families in the dining room of one of Washington's more luxurious hotels—with marshals seated at each table.

JOHN HART

