

## Questionable Questions

Televised Presidential news conferences offer the rare — in Mr. Nixon's case, all too rare — opportunity to put direct questions to the Chief Executive and to elicit personal replies in full view of the American people. The adversary nature of these confrontations thus is inevitable and indeed desirable. As the only substitute for question period in the Parliamentary form of government, a no-holds-barred approach by the press is clearly in the interest of the people's right to know.

The mission to extract as much information as possible, however, cannot serve as an excuse for boorish behavior. On Monday evening the bounds of propriety were once again intolerably overstepped by Sarah McClendon, the Texas correspondent who has established a deplorable record as chronic baiter of Presidents. Apart from Miss McClendon's questionable habit of injecting into these news conferences personal charges about alleged inefficiency on the part of relatively obscure Government officials, her excess of volume and verbosity and her tendency toward rude interruptions of Presidential replies would be offensive even in a less exalted setting.

Miss McClendon is by no means the only reporter guilty of such breaches of decorum, and Mr. Nixon is not alone in being exposed to such discourtesies. Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy were subjected to similar treatment. Indeed, President Kennedy was particularly and rightfully angered when Miss McClendon introduced into a news conference the names of two recently appointed officials with the assertion that they were "well-known security risks." Mr. Nixon responded to the latest episode with a display of tolerance and wit that did him credit.

Disagreement with the President's policies ought not to be confused with license to be discourteous to the Presidency. Reporters who believe they have a special privilege for uncivil behavior only degrade their profession and diminish public respect for the press.