

Terrence O'Flaherty Views TV

Is It a Mouse or an Elephant?

A MIRACULOUS last-minute vote gave the television networks a chance to use their "tree house," a tiny catwalk built at the back of the hearing room of the House Judiciary Committee last week. And what a show they gave us!

Not only was the script compelling, but the cast of unknown performers was first rate. Well, not exactly "unknown" perhaps because of each of them is known to viewers in his own particular political neighborhood. Sort of like a "Miss America Pageant." Californians recognize "Miss California," but the others are strangers.



Dwight Eisenhower

It was one of the "strangers" on the House Judiciary Committee who said what most Americans have said to themselves ever since the Nixon scandals began:

"The thing that is so appalling to me is when this whole idea was suggested to him, the President didn't rise up in righteous indignation and say: 'Get out of here! You're in the office of the President of the United States! How can you talk about bribery and blackmail and keeping witnesses silent? This is the Presidency of the United States!' and throw them out of his office and pick up the phone and call the Department of Justice and tell them there's an obstruction of justice going on here. Someone is trying to buy the silence of a witness. . . . But my President didn't do that. He sat there and he worked to cover it up. . . ."

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ANOTHER observation which undoubtedly left its mark on millions of viewers was this one by California Democrat Jerome Waldie:

"The saddest part of all these transcripts was the President's own bewilderment in the March 22 tape when he failed to understand why the whole thing was falling apart so rapidly and wondered what he could do about it. He said about President Eisenhower (quote): 'That's Eisenhower. That's all he cared about. He only cared about — Christ! — to be sure he was clean. Both in the fund thing and the atom thing. But I don't look at it that way. We're going to protect our people if we can.' (unquote).

"That is the saddest standard of conduct set forth in that entire page after page of transcripts — that the President denigrates the standard that Eisenhower had set for his subordinates. 'We don't look at it that way.' And he DOESN'T look at it that way . . . You can't look at this case without feeling a deep sadness — but a deeper anger. . . ."

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DID I SAY last week that there was no Sam Ervin on this show? I was wrong. William Hungate, the Missouri Democrat, was so eager to illustrate his point with a story that he used up his time. The story was about the elephant that came into the meeting and someone said: "There's an elephant." And someone else said, "That's not an elephant. It could be a mouse with a glandular condition." I think he was trying to say that no two people see a thing the same way. . . . But in this case it's apparent that more people see it one way than the other.

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WAS THE MAN in far-off San Clemente watching and did he curse or cry?

Or did he react in the way Harry Reasoner's conservative friend did when Harry told him about the Supreme Court's 8 to 0 decision against Mr. Nixon in regard to the tapes. "Just think — 8 to 0 — unanimous" said Reasoner. The old man shook his head and said:

"So they got to them, too, did they?"