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History in Your Living Room

THE IMPEACHMENT HEARINGS came to an end Tuesday night in an atmosphere of some heat and asperity over the issue of presidential tax payments—which charge was in the end soundly rejected—but on the whole the committee's proceeding was sober and serious and conscientious.

It seems to us that the presence of television in the committee room had a great deal to do with this mood. Far from making a Roman holiday, the cameras seemed to draw the Representatives out and expose their inner minds and consciences, both to one another as they sat at their desks, and to the millions looking on.

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THERE IS, PERHAPS, nothing like the sense of being seen and heard across the whole country for "wonderfully clarifying the mind," as Dr. Johnson said in another connection. Most of the lawyer members of the Judiciary committee had never had that kind of audience before. And it must be said that most of them showed, in both their faces and their words, their grave acceptance of the responsibility to do right and be fair to the President and the American system.

It was an experience not many people would envy the 38 Representatives. Possibly the ordeal was actually heightened for them by the sense of every word's being heard and every expression's being seen. For its part, the public, seeing history happening in its living room, has learned a great deal from this closeup look at the constitutional process. As was frequently mentioned, this was only the second impeachment of a President of the United States in 198 years. We believe most who watched would say that the Constitution and the law on which their government and their liberties rest are better understood and have more meaning to them today than they did a week ago.

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IT IS COMMONPLACE to say that television is an incomparable contribution to self-government. What was exceptional about these televised hearings was their almost total absence of hypocrisy, posing, hamming, playing to the gallery. The prospect of introducing television cameras onto the floor of the House and, later if impeachment is voted there, onto the floor of the Senate is much less disquieting, in fact it is warmly to be welcomed, as a result of the past week's experience.