



WXPost

Airing the AUG 8 1975 Watergate Drama

By John Carmody

"The White House Transcripts," which airs tonight at 10 o'clock on Channel 26, is a compelling piece of television, flawed here and there by a lack of professionalism but finally fascinating.

It is a 90-minute dramatization from among the dozens of 1972-73 conversations that President Nixon taped and, wonder of wonders, kept until they drove him from office.

The producers have wisely selected a rather narrow range of those conversations. They trace, in the main, the change from overweening smugness among Nixon's closest aides to those points in time when the President began ordering first one and then the other of those aides to abandon the sinking ship and their reputations in his behalf.

The overall effect of this limited choice among hundreds of pages of dialogue is to accent Nixon's refusal to concede any personal culpability in the cover-up. It is the stuff of personal tragedy.

The rambling, sometimes overly cryptic conversations have obviously been edited into coherence and, in the editing, may well unfairly emphasize some of the nuances of those personal exchanges.

Moreover, there is no way to producers of this program could guarantee the emphasis and tone of those private talks despite an apparent willingness to be as fair as possible in the dramatization.

Perhaps the single major flaw is the voice chosen for Nixon. As played by actor Harry Spillman, the jowly-toned Nixon teeters very close to parody at times. Yet the portrayal grows on the viewer.

More of the other actors (particularly Glenn Zezer playing a glib, self-assured John Ehrlichman and Russell Horton, as an eager-to-please John Dean III) are remarkably on target during most of the production.

The program was produced in Boston last summer and was originally shown on Canadian television five

See TRANSCRIPTS, B8, Col. 5

"Perhaps the single major flaw in 'The White House Transcripts' is the voice chosen for Nixon. As played by actor Harry Spillman, the jowly-toned Nixon teeters very close to parody at times. Yet the portrayal grows on the viewer."

TRANSCRIPTS, From B1

days before Nixon resigned. An epilogue has been added to include that event in tonight's version.

It has received considerable critical acclaim after being shown in numerous major TV markets in this country in the past year.

The scenes are restricted to rather threadbare replicas of the Oval Office and what is apparently Mr. Nixon's hideaway in the Executive Office Building. Major roles also include Jon Terry as H.R. Haldeman; Scott Ricketson as Ronald Ziegler; Rudy Bond as John Mitchell; and Dolph Sweet as Henry Petersen.

In an opening statement the narrator says the program "may shock you,"

that it is being presented "in the interest of public information (sic)" and that the producers have tried to present the conversations "fairly and objectively." Nixon supporters will undoubtedly not agree with any of these assessments. Yet the producers have left out Mr. Nixon's more unkind characterizations of friends and ethnic groups, have confined his expletives to only two fairly raunchy exceptions and have refrained from the obvious temptation to display the American flag lapel pin and other such Nixonian devices.

With these limitations (more skillful producers could probably have included some of these devices to good, tasteful effect), this is still a powerful and disquieting remembrance of those surreal Watergate times.
