

The Price Is Right

The vulgarity of the thing is beyond belief.

Richard Nixon, who refused to discuss his administration's scandals with the people who elected him, the Congress or the courts, has now contracted to talk for pay with a British entertainer.

No offense to David Frost intended. He is a good performer whose business is televised titillation. That's what he will get from four, lengthy Nixon interviews to be broadcast after the 1976 elections.

The first vulgarity lies in the way that the Recluse of San Clemente has decided to make his re-entry into our national life. Neither the dignity of the great office he once occupied, nor honor, nor duty could prompt him to talk about Watergate. He will, however, take money to discuss the scandal which will forever burden his name in our history.

The second vulgarity derives from the forum Richard Nixon has chosen for his revelations.

Television can do many things: It can seriously inform. It can lacquer people and events in that superficiality which amuses. The camera's eye is neutral. What is seen through it depends on who's in front of it.

David Frost is a talk show host. Doubtless he will be backed by research as he sits down to interview Nixon. Doubtless he will do his best to hack his way through the complexities of the Watergate scandals toward

the facts and enlightenment that can only come from the ex-President.

But Frost is not part of that small band of people—lawyers, members of Congress, investigative journalists — whose expertise on Watergate derives from the years they lived with it, probed it and agonized over it as an aberration of our system. As a celebrity-patter, the British entertainer seems poorly equipped to keep the most devious public personality of modern times on the truth track.

In his August 10th announcement of the Nixon deal, Frost said that the disgraced ex-President will have no control over editorial content.

Nixon won't need to control content. He'll make it. Oral history as talk show should be a piece of cake for him. "Law and order" was the slogan that carried him to the presidency he corrupted, "strict constructionist" was the label he stitched on himself as he tried to muscle an ideologue onto the Supreme Court, pietisms were the stuff of his public posture as he conducted coverups in secret.

The Nixon-Frost deal is, potentially, in horrid keeping with that part of television's genius which creates a universe out of superficial banalities. It is revelation for pay. That's its vulgarity.

It could even take its name from one of those daytime programs in which screeching ladies win prizes by playing games and answering questions.

The Price Is Right.