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**Nixon Audience Put at 45 Million,
One of Highest for a News Show**

**Surveys Rank Program
With Leading Series**

By LES BROWN

Early ratings from four cities for David Frost's televised interview with former President Richard M. Nixon indicate that the Wednesday night telecast was the most watched news interview in the history of television and one of the highest-rated news broadcasts ever.

Television researchers, projecting from the sample market, estimate a national audience for the broadcast of more than 45 million viewers, which would put it among the highest rated programs of the week, perhaps on a par with "Happy Days," the top-rated series in the Nielsen listings.

An aide for the Frost program disclosed yesterday that Mr. Nixon's aides had halted the interview at one point to give the former President a chance to calm himself. [Page A18.]

Network officials are at a loss to recall a news interview program, or even a news program—except for events covered simultaneously by all three networks—that attracted so large an audience.

The 90-minute telecast, which was

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**Some Who Knew Him
Are Still Divided**

By LINDA CHARLTON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 5—Nearly three years after leaving the Presidency, Richard M. Nixon remains, in exile as in power, a divisive figure who stirs clashing emotions in many Americans, judging by the reaction to the 90-minute interview shown on television last night.

"I'm glad he stated that he had committed errors," said former Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., the North Carolina Democrat who was chairman of the Senate Watergate committee. Mr. Ervin, noted for his rotund courtliness, added, "I think his downfall primarily comes from a lust for money, which was evidenced in his tax returns, as well as a lust for power."

Raymond K. Price Jr., who was Mr. Nixon's chief White House speech writer, said he thought the interview would "have a healing and cleansing effect—I think it was a very generous concession by Nixon of his own errors."

But Donald H. Segretti, a leading practitioner of political "dirty tricks" in the 1972 Nixon Presidential campaign, said that David Frost, the interviewer, "never

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Associated Press
Former Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., who was chairman of the Senate Watergate committee, watching a videotaped playback of the Nixon interview in Charlotte, N.C. He had been traveling and missed the original telecast.

REACTION OF VIEWERS SHOWS OLD DIVISIONS

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asked the big question, why—why did you do it?"

"The show was interesting, but I don't think we learned anything new," he said.

To Bruce Hershenson, a one-time special assistant to Mr. Nixon, it was "the most magnanimous performance I've seen by a public official."

Republican Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona declared Mr. Nixon to be politically "as dead as he can be," adding, "I have no sympathy for him at all."

Rabbi Baruch N. Korff, who led a support-the-President movement during the final months of the Nixon Administration, said, "No President can be a saint and no saint can be a President." But Rabbi Korff went on to say: "I wish Mr. Nixon had come out earlier in the interview saying he was a participant in the cover-up. I think in the final analysis he does say that. My heart goes out to him."

Watching the interview was an "agonizing experience," said Senator Jacob K. Javits, the New York Republican. "It showed he should have resigned and I'm glad he did."

The fact that Mr. Nixon was undertaking this series of interviews for a large financial incentive disturbed Senator George McGovern, among others. "If I were charged with the offenses Richard Nixon is, and I believed myself to be innocent, and if I had the chance to talk about it on television, I would not charge \$1 million," said the South Dakota Democrat who was defeated by Mr. Nixon in 1972.

Senator Charles H. Percy, the Illinois Republican, said on a similar note that he did not like "the idea of a former President of the United States appearing in such a context, and for money."

No Comment From Many

Some of those once close to the former President had less clear-cut reactions. J. Fred Buzhardt, formerly Mr. Nixon's White House counsel, said last night that he could not really comment because "I don't know what I expected; it takes a while to digest it, you know."

H.R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, said he had no comment at this time, adding: "It's too complex to discuss in little bits and pieces. I may have something to say in the future, but I'm not going to make a lot of little comments at this time."

Mr. Nixon's domestic affairs counselor, John D. Ehrlichman, who was asked to resign by Mr. Nixon with Mr. Haldeman in April 1974, is serving a term at a Federal prison in Stafford, Ariz., for his role in the Watergate cover-up. He was one of a number of persons closely associated with the Watergate episode who did not watch the interview, or at least would not comment on it.

Among these was the former Watergate special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, who is committed to writing about the interview for a news magazine; and a former Justice Department prosecutor, Richard H. Ben-Veniste, who cited a similar newspaper commitment in refusing to comment.

John M. Doar, chief counsel to the House Judiciary Committee, was on an airplane; Samuel Dash, counsel to the Senate Watergate Committee, and Albert E. Jenner, minority counsel to the Judiciary Committee, were both out of the country.

Carter Doubts Enlightenment

LONDON, May 5 (UPI)—President Carter said that he thought Mr. Nixon had been candid in conceding that he had lied to the American people in the Watergate affair, but Mr. Carter doubted that the David Frost interview had "enlightened" the public.

Mr. Carter told reporters on the way to the London economic summit conference that he had watched the first 15 minutes and the last 15 minutes of the 90-minute interview.

"Well, I didn't change my mind," Mr. Carter said. "I think he was frank in saying that he lied to the American people on some of the statements that he made."

"I think Nixon has convinced himself that he did not violate the law. It was an interesting discussion but I doubt if the American people were enlightened by it."

A reporter pressed Mr. Carter on whether he thought Mr. Nixon had violated the law.

"Well, I don't know," Mr. Carter said.

The President said that he may ask Mr. Nixon for advice when Secretary of State, Cyrus R. Vance prepares his trip to China later this year.

"It might be advantageous to have conversations with President Nixon," Mr. Carter said. "I would probably not do it myself, talking with him about the special relationship with China. But if a question came up we couldn't answer without consulting President Nixon, I would not have any reticence whatever."

NIXON SHOW SCORES COUP IN TV RATINGS

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carried by WNEW-TV (Channel 5) in New York from 8:30 to 10 P.M. and on 154 other stations, drew 47 percent of the viewing audience in the metropolitan area, according to the Nielsen overnight ratings. Researchers project an average audience of 6.5 million people in the New York area alone.

Moreover, the ratings show that the viewing did not drop off as the program progressed. The audience reached its peak at 9 P.M., and most viewers remained with the program to the end.

Los Angeles 50%, Chicago 36

In Los Angeles, the interview attracted 50 percent of the audience and in Chicago 36 percent. (Arbitron, a rating service that competes with Nielsen, reported a 42 percent share of audience for the program in both New York and Los Angeles.)

In a special overnight rating ordered by WCKT in Miami, an NBC affiliate that carried the broadcast, the Nixon-Frost interview gained a 50 percent share.

The ratings, in every situation, far exceeded the most optimistic expectations of the promoters, and the program devastated all competing entertainment programming, including the John Wayne movie "Big Jake" and a Peter Fonda film, "Race With the Devil."

Top officials of all three network news divisions conceded that "The Nixon Interviews" was a blockbuster, and all praised the program almost without reservation.

"It told you everything about Nixon," said Richard S. Salant, president of CBS News, who called the effort "one of the most interesting interview broadcasts I've ever seen."

'Excellent,' NBC News Chief Says

Richard Wald, president of NBC News, rated the program "excellent" and praised Mr. Frost for doing "a very good job of interviewing."

"I would not claim that one of our people would have done it better—differently, I think, and maybe just about as well, but I wouldn't want to say better," Mr. Wald commented.

Another NBC executive observed that the program had probably benefited from the fact that Mr. Frost, a British television personality, "could bear down on Nixon harder than a traditional American reporter could have." A journalist has to maintain a greater sense of objectivity and impartiality, he said.

The news chiefs all said that they regretted not having the program on their own networks but added that the circumstances, chiefly Mr. Nixon's requirement of a large fee, had made it impossible.

'Principle at Issue'

"The tremendous interest in this event doesn't change the principle that is at issue," said William Sheehan, president of ABC News. "We would still have to consider it wrong to pay a public figure for granting a news interview. Our policy against practicing 'checkbook journalism' is firm and not governed by the ratings potential."

Alone among the networks, NBC News

had been willing to pay a fee to Mr. Nixon, reportedly \$400,000. "But it was never held open to bidding," Mr. Wald said. "One day we learned that Frost had won the rights, and we were never told why."

Mr. Frost is understood to have offered the former President \$600,000 and 10 percent of the profits for the four 90-minute interviews.

To preserve the rerun value of the broadcasts, for next year or the year after, Mr. Frost's organization, Paradine Productions, refused to allow any of the stations or networks to carry visual excerpts from Wednesday night's copyrighted interview.

CBS News abided by the prohibition, and ABC News got around it on "Good Morning America" yesterday by video taping a family while the Nixon interview was on their television set. But WNBC-TV and WNEW-TV both carried an excerpt in their newscasts after the interview, and so did NBC on its "Today" show yesterday morning.

"This was a true news event, and we felt it was fair to excerpt just a bit of

it, just as a newspaper may excerpt a portion of a book," Mr. Wald said. "We only used less than a minute of it." PU

WNEW-TV reported receiving more than 1,000 phone calls after the Nixon telecast, most objecting to giving Mr. Nixon a forum or to paying him for his appearance. Some protested his being questioned by a foreigner. The station also received a number of telegrams expressing similar complaints yesterday.

WNEW-TV enjoyed a financial bonanza from the telecast. The station received the program free on the special network in exchange for carrying five minutes of commercials sold by Mr. Frost's representatives. Under the arrangement, each station was permitted to sell seven minutes of commercials locally.

The New York station's asking price for 30-second spots in the Nixon interview was \$7,500, and it sold all of them. The station's rate for a comparable spot in "The Merv Griffin Show," which normally runs in the time period, is only \$1,500.

The British Broadcasting Corporation carried the Nixon-Frost interview last night, as did nine other foreign broadcast systems. The BBC followed the broadcast at midnight with a live telecast, by satellite, of the PBS news program "The MacNeil-Lehrer Report." Guests on that show were Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the Washington Post reporters who gained prominence with the Watergate story.

Separating the two American news programs on the BBC last night were reports on the local government elections.

An Audio Problem

In the United States, "The Nixon Interview" got off to a shaky start when a problem with the audio transmission rendered the program mute for the first minute. Stations that carried the program at the exact time of its transmission from Los Angeles thus were left with an opening sequence of Mr. Frost speaking without sound.

WNEW-TV, however, had taped the program for a one-hour delay, so that it might begin at 8:30 P.M. A staff announcer thus was able to fill the silence by reading from the transcript the prefatory remarks by Mr. Frost that had been lost on the soundtrack.