

Nixon: while newsmen deadpan him, comedians pan him

By THOMAS COLLINS
(C) 1973, Newsday

President Nixon may think he is taking a beating at the hands of network news commentators, but lately other segments of television have been taking up where the straight news programs leave off. A sportscaster recently referred to him in prime time as "Tricky Dickie," and Johnny Carson has been zinging him steadily in his opening monologue on the "Tonight Show."

Public figures, even Presidents, have always been fair game for comedians and their joke writers, but it would be hard to recall a comparable time when Carson, who reaches 14 million viewers nightly, zeroed in so frequently on one target. In a way, he is probably acting as an escape valve for the country: Watergate hurts so much it is probably better to laugh at it.

While Walter Cronkite can scarcely risk arching an eyebrow, Carson can wisecrack: "They're having their annual White House masquerade ball in Washington...this year Nixon is going as President Harding."

While the newscasters can only report deadpan the story of the White House tapes, Carson can mirror what is on many people's minds, saying the unsayable and getting a laugh at the same time: "I wouldn't say the President is a sore loser...he's sending the tapes to Sirica...nobody said they had to be on spools."

Another time: "Nixon got a little confused...instead of a tape recorder, he tried to play the tapes on a power saw."

When Nixon fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, Carson's gagmen came up with: "Personally, I don't think the President is acting like a king...after all, he only fired Archibald Cox...originally, he planned to have him beheaded." And the turnover in personnel at the Justice Department rated the comment: "I feel sorry for the secretary in the Justice Department...she just learned how to spell 'Bork.'"



Composite by David Novick

Carson plants his barbs and skips away with the comment, "I'm not taking a stand. I'm just reporting the news." And his staff insists he is not trying to be political. "Johnny knows when to do jokes about people," a member of his staff said. "The value of comedians is they go after laughs, not to make points."

As irreverent as Carson is, he still has not gone as far as sportscaster Don Meredith during an ABC telecast of a Monday night football game. After watching Nixon's favorite football team, the Washington Redskins, lose to Pittsburgh, Meredith observed that if they kept losing, "Tricky Dickie" might drop in on a practice session.

The remark lit up ABC swit-

chboards and caused Presidential speechwriter Patrick Buchanan to be awakened from sleep by an angry "former high administration official" (the following week Meredith apologized to the President on TV).

"He was really angry," Buchanan said. "He wanted to know if I had heard it." Buchanan who has advocated dismantling the networks, said there was nothing the administration could do about Meredith. It was not known whether Nixon was watching the game that night but a report on the incident showed up the next morning in the daily news summary his aides prepare for him.

CBS drops ban on 'instant analysis'

By JOHN CARMODY
(C) 1973, The Washington Post

WASHINGTON—CBS announced last week it will drop its five-month ban on "instant analysis" of Presidential television and radio broadcasts by its correspondents.

The announcement came from William Paley, CBS board chairman, an indication of how serious a policy decision it was considered by the giant broadcasting company.

William Small, CBS' Washington bureau chief, called the action a "very pleasant surprise" and admitted that the original June 6 network decision had "not been popular with most of the guys" in the key bureau here.

Paley's unexpected statement said that "Since June 6, the nation and the world have witnessed a rapid series of exceptionally newsworthy events. This has made it clear that postponing news analysis under all circumstances may impair a journalistic service of far greater value to the public than we had realized."

Paley added that "CBS news will provide analyses immediately following appearances of the President and others of public importance when, in its news judgment, such service seems desirable and adequate preparation is feasible."

CBS dropped so-called instant analyses in June. NBC and ABC continued the practice. At the time, a majority of the CBS correspondents were reportedly dissatisfied with the unilateral action and blamed CBS corporate officers in New York, rather than news officials, for the decision.

A "friendly" dinner meeting here last month between the bureau staff and CBS president Arthur Taylor, included some outspoken criticism of the June action. At that time Taylor reportedly commented that the decision "was not frozen in concrete."

As early as 1969, commentator Eric Sevareid had suggested in a letter to network officials that instant analysis be dropped. By coincidence, two weeks after Sevareid made the 1969 recommendations, then Vice President Spiro Agnew attacked

the media practices, including instant analysis, in a speech in Des Moines.

It is widely believed in the industry that CBS subsequently refused to take action on the proposal lest it seem that the network was knuckling under to Agnew. The issue lay dormant until this summer when the edict was suddenly announced.



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