

RICHARD  NIXON
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PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Title: White House Tapes: Sound Recordings of Meetings and Telephone Conversations of the Nixon Administration, 2/16/1971 - 7/18/1973

Creator: Richard Milhous Nixon

Reference Code: RN-WHT; NARA ID: # 597542

Series:

Blank Sound Recordings; 7 Reels; NARA ID: #12006352

Cabinet Room Sound Recordings (CAB); 83 Tapes; NARA ID: #12006803

Camp David Hard Wire Sound Recordings (CDHW); 57 Tapes; NARA ID: #17408783

Camp David Study Desk Telephone Recordings (CDS D); 14 Tapes; NARA ID: #17408953

Camp David Study Table Telephone Recordings (CAB); 83 Tapes; NARA ID: #12006803

Executive Office Building Sound Recordings (EOB); 204 Tapes; NARA ID #17409890

Oval Office Sound Recordings (OVAL); 499 Tapes; NARA ID: #17409633

White House Telephone Recordings (WHT); 46 Tapes; NARA ID: #17412458

Collection Title (Filing): Nixon Tapes; White House Tapes

Collection Date: February 1971 – July 1973

Extent:

The White House Tapes are comprised of 4,042 reels of ¼” reel-to-reel tape consisting of 2,719 hours of conversation, which are broken up into approximately 22,724 conversations.

Abstract:

This collection consists of 4,042 reels of tape comprising 2,719 hours of conversation recorded as sound recordings from February 1971 – July 1973. The conversations reflect the day-to-day business of the Nixon White House. The recording locations include Camp David, the Executive Office Building, the Cabinet Room, and the Oval Office. Telephone conversations were recorded in the Oval Office, Lincoln Sitting Room, and Camp David.

Name & Location Repository:

Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Administrative Information

Provenance, Custodial, and Legal History:

White House Tapes: History and Installation

On February 16, 1971 the United States Secret Service (USSS), at the request of President Nixon, installed recording devices in the White House. The first devices were installed in the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room. Over the course of the next 16 months new locations were added including: the president's office in the Executive Office Building (EOB), telephones in the Oval Office, EOB office, and the Lincoln Sitting Room. Finally, recording devices were setup at Camp David including the president's study in Aspen Lodge, and telephones on the president's desk and study table.

President Nixon was not the first president to record private conversations in the White House. President Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower experimented with recording select meetings and press briefings. However, Kennedy was the first president to extensively record meetings and Johnson continued that practice expanding the scope of recordings. During the 1969 transition Nixon learned that Johnson had recording equipment installed in the White House to record meetings and telephone conversations. According to the president's Chief of Staff, H. R. Haldeman, Nixon "abhorred" the idea of recording conversations and he had the equipment immediately removed after the inauguration. However, over the next few years Nixon changed his mind about a recording system in response to a number of challenges in fully documenting his presidency with the accuracy he desired.

Nixon was concerned that his meetings were not always reported accurately by participants and he wanted to ensure his private discussions were not misconstrued publicly to the benefit of others during his administration. Haldeman theorized, this may have been due to an individual's lack of familiarity with the topics discussed but he also believed it was a way for those participants to bolster their own image. Another challenge was documenting presidential meetings with foreign leaders. Nixon preferred meeting with foreign dignitaries using only their interpreter. Nixon thought this lent an air of intimacy to the proceedings, which he believed furthered diplomatic discussions, it also presented a problem of ensuring the translations were accurate. At times, Nixon used a National Security Council (NSC) staff member, who understood the language, but did not attend as a translator. This practice, however, was not consistently followed and it still left gaps in the record. A complete record of his presidency, in order to aid in writing his memoir, was the objective and these methods all fell short.

The Nixon administration tried a number of solutions to keep an accurate record of conversations and meetings. In 1969 and 1970 such efforts included note-takers in meetings or the president taking notes himself, debriefing the president after meetings, and having a note-taker outside the

Oval Office catching participants leaving to record their thoughts. Nixon rejected these solutions which he felt were intrusive and did not capture the nuances and details of the conversations. As a last resort, the administration sought to enlist Lt. General Vernon Walters, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), known for his phenomenal memory, to work for the White House as President Nixon's personal note-taker. However, General Walters bristled at the idea of being anyone's note-taker.

Two years into his presidency, Nixon, had still not discovered a solution for documenting meetings. It is unclear who reinitiated discussions about a recording system, however, according to Haldeman, Johnson had a conversation with a friend of Nixon's regarding the benefits of a taping system while ostensibly discussing the process of setting up a presidential library. Johnson mentioned how helpful the recordings were in preparing his memoirs and how the Nixon Administration was mistaken in dismantling the system. Haldeman discussed the idea of recording his meetings with Nixon who subsequently agreed to set up a recording system in the White House. The challenge was to create a system that was low-maintenance and did not require much of the president—who was not comfortable with technology. Nixon settled on a voice-activated system unlike those of his predecessors. Haldeman believed the president would forget to activate the system when he wanted to record, therefore, the voice activation would ensure that the totality of conversations would be captured. The Secret Service maintained the system and would be responsible for replacing tapes and turning the systems on and off based on the location of the president. Haldeman's assistants Lawrence M. Higby and Alexander P. Butterfield worked with the Secret Service to install the system.

The recording system went live on February 16, 1971 in the Cabinet Room and the Oval Office. The first set of microphones were placed in the Oval Office—five in the president's desk and one on each side of the fireplace; and two in the Cabinet Room under the table near the president's chair. On April 6, the president's EOB office—four microphones in his desk—and telephones in the Oval Office and the Lincoln Sitting Room were added to the system. Finally, the president's office and two telephones in Aspen Lodge at Camp David began recording on May 18, 1972. Although Nixon was initially reluctant to record his conversations, once the system was in place he wanted a complete record of conversations which far exceeded anything his predecessors had done. What followed was an almost complete record of the president's daily conversations until the system was shut down in July 1973.

The Technology of the White House Tapes.

Of utmost importance for the recording system was something that was hands-off for the president who was not tech-savvy. It also needed to be low maintenance for the Secret Service. Alexander Butterfield tasked Alfred Wong, head of Technical Services Division of the Secret Service, to install a system that met these requirements. The taping system was tied into the Secret Service's presidential locator system. When the president entered a recording area the presidential locator was updated and an agent would set the recorder switch to the record/pause

mode. Whenever the voice operated relay microphones detected sound the machines began recording. The machines would continue to record as long as sound was detected and when it became quiet the machines would return to record/pause after 20-30 seconds.

Notably, the Cabinet Room is the only room that was not automatically turned-on with voice activation. While there were on/off switches installed near the president's place on the Cabinet Room table he in all likelihood never used them. There was another switch installed near Butterfield's desk and the responsibility for turning this system on and off fell to Butterfield. Often they were left on long after meetings concluded, capturing various sounds including tours, cleaning, and the daily bustle of the White House.

Similarly, when the president entered the Oval Office, the EOB, or his Aspen Lodge study he triggered the activation of the recording machines. Often, when the president was in those rooms, even if he was not speaking, the machines continued, because of ambient noises, television, music, and other noises. These segments are known as room noise and while they are not released to the public archivists review the content to ensure there is no conversation or withdrawn material on them. See processing notes for more information on room noise.

All of the recording stations were equipped with two Sony 800B recorders loaded with extremely thin .05mm tape. The recorders had a timer affixed to them that switched which recorder was active every twenty-four hours. During the weekend one recorder remained active for forty-eight hours. In order to keep maintenance low, the recorders operated at the slowest speed, 15/16, which allowed for up to six and a half hours of record time per reel. The quality of tape stock varied and the Sony machines and microphones were not made for recording conversations. All of these conditions have led to the original tapes—and all subsequent copies—to be of generally poor quality which makes listening a challenge.

The Watergate Investigation.

Before Nixon all presidential records were the personal property of the president. After an administration was over the president was allowed to retain legal custody of their records. Presidents would often use their papers to write their memoirs and when finished, traditionally gave their papers back to the American people in the form of a deed of gift. Nixon, therefore, was confident in the precedent that his recordings and papers would remain in his custody like the presidents who preceded him.

That all changed on Friday July 13, 1973 when in a private interrogation with committee investigators Alexander P. Butterfield revealed the existence of a taping system in the White House. He believed he was just corroborating information that the committee already knew. During his public testimony, three days later on July 16, before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities—also known as the Ervin Committee after the committee's chairman Samuel Ervin—Butterfield revealed to the nation the existence of the White House Tapes. This was the final day the tapes were operational. The Camp David recordings had been

completely shut down by late June but after Butterfield's testimony the remaining recorders were also shut down.

This revelation opened a new avenue in both the Senate investigation and the Special Prosecutor's investigation. The recordings could help prove the validity of John W. Dean, III's explosive allegations, before the committee on June 25, 1973, regarding the Nixon Administration or they could bolster the administration's side of the story. New avenues of investigation also meant new avenues of litigation and obstruction as the Nixon Administration attempted to prevent the release of any tapes. Immediately after Butterfield's testimony, Nixon directed Secret Service agents not to give testimony regarding their duties. On July 23 the committee voted unanimously to subpoena the tapes which required the president to deliver them to the committee. The Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox requested tapes and after being rebuffed by the administration secured a subpoena.

On July 25 Nixon informed District Court Judge John Sirica he would not comply with Cox's subpoena citing precedents which showed that presidents could not be "subjected to compulsory process from the courts." The next day President Nixon wrote to Senator Ervin denying the committee access to the tapes citing executive privilege and separation of powers. Vice Chairman Howard Baker, a Tennessee Republican, suggested suing the President. On August 9 the committee sued the president in federal court. The case was dismissed due to a lack of jurisdiction and that decision was upheld upon appeal. The country now faced a full-blown constitutional crisis.

The Special Prosecutor and the president's lawyer, Charles Alan Wright, met in court on August 22. Judge Sirica eventually sided with the Special Prosecutor and the administration appealed the decision stating they would only comply with a decision from the highest court in the land. On October 12, the Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Special Prosecutor concluding that the president should turn the tapes over to Judge Sirica. They stated that the president was not above the law but also pleaded with both sides to make an out-of-court settlement. Nixon's conundrum was to find a way to comply with the order without incriminating himself.

Nixon proposed a compromise to create transcripts of the relevant tapes, give them to the Judge Sirica, and then subsequently fire Cox. Attorney General Elliot Richardson informed the president he would resign if that happened. The president's new Chief of Staff, Alexander M. Haig, proposed the idea of using John C. Stennis to verify the president's transcripts. Stennis, although well-respected, was 72 and had long been battling a serious illness. Only recently had he come back to the Senate. It was also well-known that Stennis was hard of hearing. The administration portrayed this as an acceptable method to allow access to the tapes while redacting personal details or national security information before it was submitted to the court. They believed that the only relevant sections of the tapes were those dealing directly with the investigation and wanted to use a broad national security brush to redact segments that were unfavorable to them.

On October 16, the Nixon Administration proposed using a third-party to verify the president's transcripts. Two days later, Cox rejected the compromise citing he could not rely on a unilateral determination of the evidence. Furthermore, the Nixon Administration only wanted to allow the Special Prosecutor to receive tapes regarding the break-in and cover-up, and Cox wanted tapes that were relevant to other areas of interest in the investigation. On October 20 Nixon ordered Richardson to fire the Special Prosecutor. Richardson resigned, and then the Assistant Attorney General William Ruckelshaus also resigned rather than carry out the order. The third-in-command Solicitor General Robert Bork agreed to carry out the order. This series of events, known as the Saturday Night Massacre, may have delayed the release of the tapes for a time, but the event ensured they would eventually be released.

The firing of Cox on October 20 led to a firestorm of disapproval in Congress and around the country. In November Leon Jaworski accepted the position of Special Prosecutor and with the backing of a more confrontational Senate, he had more independence and protection than his predecessor. Soon afterwards the Special Prosecutor was informed that two tapes requested were missing and that the tape for June 20, 1972 had an 18 ½ minute gap. The Nixon Administration stated the erasure was accidental, and the president's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, claimed she had inadvertently erased that portion of tape. On November 26 lawyers for the president released seven tapes to Judge Sirica and after listening to the tapes Sirica released a portion of them to Jaworski on December 21. Those tape segments proved helpful in corroborating the case against the administration. The grand jury indicted a number of the president's aides, and in May, Haig was informed by Jaworski, that the president had been named as an unindicted co-conspirator.

On April 16, 1974 Jaworski issued a subpoena asking for sixty-four additional tapes. The president once again opposed the subpoena in court, citing executive privilege and separation of powers. Judge Sirica ruled against the president on May 20 which gave the administration until the May 31 to comply or appeal. The president appealed and Jaworski asked the Supreme Court to take immediate jurisdiction. On July 8 the Special Prosecutor and the president's lawyer, James St. Clair, presented their arguments before the Supreme Court. *United States v. Nixon* was an unanimous 8-0 decision; Associate Justice William Rehnquist recused himself, against the president. Handed down on July 24 the decision effectively ended the presidency of Richard Nixon and allowed the Special Prosecutor access to all the tapes that were subpoenaed—including the June 23, 1972 tape which contained the "smoking gun" conversation.

Post-Presidential Legal and Custodial History

Richard Nixon resigned on August 9 and within one month the former president signed an agreement with the Administrator for the General Services, Arthur F. Sampson. This contract, the Nixon-Sampson Agreement, covered all the tapes and documents of the Nixon presidency. It stipulated that the government would keep all materials in a federal facility behind a two-key system. Access would require the approval of both Nixon and the administrator (or their

proxies). Nixon could access the materials for judicial cases and the tapes would become government property on September 1, 1979. However, Nixon reserved the right to order their destruction at any time. Furthermore, the agreement required the tapes to be destroyed on September 1, 1984 or upon Nixon's death, whichever happened first. Lawsuits sprang up immediately seeking to void this agreement. Congress stepped in and passed the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act (PRMPA). On December 19, 1974, President Gerald R. Ford signed PRMPA.

PRMPA stated that the Archivist of the United States shall retain complete possession and control of original recordings, as well as all papers, documents, other materials created during the Nixon administration that had historical or commemorative value. The act allowed for access to the materials by former President Nixon and the Watergate Special Prosecution Force, as well as for the purpose of legal discovery and ongoing governmental business. Section 104 of PRMPA mandated that the General Services Administration (GSA), of which NARA was originally part of as the National Archives Records Service (NARS), submit to each house of Congress a set of proposed regulations describing procedures for processing and providing public access to the Nixon Presidential materials in its possession. Section 105 of PRMPA provided the Federal Court for the District of Columbia (DDC) with exclusive jurisdiction to hear cases challenging the legal or constitutional validity of the act or implementing regulations. DDC also retained jurisdiction to settle disputes involving custody and control over the materials or compensation resulting from the seizure of the materials.

The US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of PRMPA in *Nixon v. Administrator of General Services*. The Supreme Court's decision on June 28, 1977, allowed the National Archives to take possession of the Nixon Presidential materials. In a memorandum signed on July 29, 1977, by Counsel to the President Robert J. Lipshutz and GSA Administrator Jay Solomon, the White House Office of Counsel formally transferred custody and control over the Nixon Presidential materials to the National Archives. On August 9, 1977, sensitive Presidential materials, including Haldeman's Diary, were transferred from the EOB to a vault within the National Archives.

Soon after the Supreme Court handed down its decision, GSA submitted a set of implementing regulations to Congress which was approved on December 26, 1977, and became effective on January 16, 1978. The fourth set of implementing regulations refined the meaning of presidential historical materials to include materials made or received by the president and his staff in fulfilling their constitutional and statutory duties of the Office of the President. The regulations further distinguished presidential materials from private or personal materials which relate only to an individual's family or non-public affairs. The implementing regulations also stipulated that the National Archives must prioritize the identification and segregation of personal materials interfiled with presidential materials, and return any personal materials to their owner in a timely manner. With formalized definitions of presidential and personal materials in place, a distinction

could now be made under PRMPA between materials for retention by archivists and others that must be returned to individuals.

Processing History:

The First Review – 1978-1993:

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) took physical possession of the White House Tapes in August of 1977. From March through April of 1978, NARA's primary focus was on creating a preservation copy of the original tapes. The original tapes were .5 mil and 6 ½ hours long and they were recorded at the very slow speed 15/16 inches per second (ips). NARA staff rewound the original tapes onto larger seven inch reel with a four inch hub which provided a tighter, more even wind. The preservation duplicate was on 1.0 mil tape and it was recorded at 3 ¾ ips. This copy is known as the "S-Copy". However, because of ongoing legal disputes, at this time, NARA was not permitted to listen to the tapes and instead had to complete the duplication process by monitoring signal levels on the machines.

By September 1978, NARA had finished the duplication and started to process the tapes in order to gain intellectual control over the collection. The original tape boxes had very little information about the content of the tapes and usually only included an approximate date of creation. Archivists listened to the tapes to start piecing together participants, subjects, date, location etcetera. This process also included a review of the content to identify restricted sections of each conversation in accordance with PRMPA, and its implementing public access regulations—which is more fully described below. During this period the existence of seven blank reels of tape was discovered: 171, 173, 175, 187, 600, 680, and 950. These reels may have been placed on the recorders but were never used. Nonetheless they were given number designations. They are currently arranged as the Blank Sound Recording Series.

Despite gaining more intellectual control over the collection archivists needed a solution for quickly and consistently navigating the tapes to find specific conversations and restrictions in order to comply with PRMPA and the various legal decisions. To solve this problem, NARA created another duplication of the tapes for reference use. This copy, known as the "Enhanced Masters," had additional technical processing which included spectrum analysis, signal boosting, noise removal, and each tape was stamped with Society of Motion Picture & Television Engineers (SMPTE) timecode. The Enhanced Masters were made on 3 ¾ ips and 1.5 millimeter tape. Each reel was approximately one-hour long with multiple reels making up a full tape. The timecode enabled archivists to fully comply with PRMPA restrictions.

Now that archivists could accurately pinpoint segments of the tapes they began a comprehensive review of the tapes. Under PRMPA, and a subsequent agreement in 1979, NARA was required to return personal and private conversations to the former president. Any conversation where Nixon

was not using the constitutional or statutory powers of the office of the Presidency was considered personal. Therefore, conversations with his family and conversations where he was acting as the head of the Republican Party—and speaking purely in his private political role—were to be returned.

All presidential conversations had to be reviewed by NARA under PRMPA guidelines and segments found to have restricted content were separated into their proper PRMPA categories. The PRMPA guidelines define eight restriction categories:

- A: Violate a Federal statute or agency policy;
- B: Reveal national security information;
- C: Violate an individual's rights (pending);
- D: Constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy;
- E: Disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information;
- F: Disclose investigatory/law enforcement information;
- G: Disclose purely private and personal information, as defined by the PRMPA;
- H: Disclose non-historical material.

During this review, NARA was also required by court subpoenas to provide transcriptions for sections of conversations needed in court. (Previously, some transcripts were created by the FBI and the Special Prosecutor during the Watergate investigations.) This process was incredibly time consuming and it was impossible to guarantee 100 percent accuracy, therefore, NARA created detailed subject logs of all conversations except when mandated by the courts to create a transcript. The subject logs described the main conversation topics, sub-topics, participants, entrances and exits by staff, and telephone calls. Paired with the Presidential Daily Diary, archivists were able to add exact time of day or approximate time of day to each room and telephone conversation.

The review process was detailed and comprehensive. Each tape had a processing folder which held all documentation regarding that tape. The tape was then reviewed by two archivists, both of which listened to it in its entirety. During the first review, an archivist created a detailed subject log of the topics and people in the conversation, marked the movement of staff in and out of the office space, and flagged PRMPA restriction categories. To aide in review archivists used a plethora of historical sources—including the Presidential Daily Diary, Public Papers, staff memorandum, and any other pertinent primary and secondary sources—in order to ensure historical context for the conversations. Withdrawal sheets were also created in order to document decisions regarding the PRMPA restrictions. These sheets listed the beginning and ending timecode, the beginning and ending keywords, and the restriction category of the

withdrawal. After the completion of this review a second, more senior, archivist re-reviewed the tape to verify the first reviewer's decisions. After a thorough review the tape was passed on to Archives Specialists for editing.

Upon receiving the reviewed tape, Archives Specialists used the reviewer's decisions to physically delete the restricted content from the tape and splice in 10 seconds of blank leader tape. These blank leaders were marked with the tape, conversation, and withdrawal number. Similarly, blank leader tape was spliced onto the restricted tape sections with the identifying information and all of these were spliced together into a large reel based on PRMPA restriction category. This method allowed for any withdrawal to be easily found and reinserted back into a conversation when appropriate. All of these changes were made to the "Enhanced Masters" and the "S-Copy" remained untouched.

In the late 1980's a dispute arose between the Nixon and NARA. After releasing twelve-hours of conversations and transcripts created by the Watergate Special Prosecution Force (WSPF), which were played in court during the Watergate trials, NARA prepared to release the rest of the subpoenaed tapes, however, the former president sought to block their release. The release of these tapes was delayed until 1991. This delay was also coupled with a decision by the NARA to re-review all the tapes. This controversial decision led to a large turnover in staff who disagreed with NARA's decision to re-review the tapes.

On May 17, 1993 three-hours of Abuse of Governmental Power (AOGP) conversations were released by the NARA. One of the primary directives of PRMPA was "to provide the public with the full truth, at the earliest reasonable date, of the abuses of governmental powers popularly identified under the generic term "Watergate"." While many of these conversations were identified by the WSPF, many were not, and archivists identified conversations that met this standard based on the criteria which were investigated by the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities 1972. The ten categories were:

1. Misuse of Government Agencies
2. Watergate break-in
3. Watergate cover-up
4. Campaign practices
5. Obstruction of Justice
6. Campaign financing
7. Milk Fund Investigation
8. Hughes-Rebozo Investigation
9. Emoluments and Tax Evasion
10. International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) Investigation

The AOGP was the final release of this era of tapes review; and with the Nixon's death in 1994 only sixty-three hours of conversation had been released to the public. Despite PRMPA

mandating the speedy review and release of the tapes to the public, Richard Nixon had been able to significantly delay the release of the majority of the tapes for over a decade.

Chronological Release Era – 1993-2013:

The delay in the release of the tapes led directly to a scheduled release of tape conversations known as the chronological releases. The chronological releases was a result of the long delay and constant legal wrangling between NARA and Nixon spurred a lawsuit from historian Stanley Kutler and the advocacy group Public Citizen. Nixon's lawyers joined the suit and in 1996 a compromise was reached. The Tapes Settlement Agreement stipulated that 201 hours of AOGP conversations would be quickly released, Cabinet Room conversations would be released next, and then the remaining tapes would be released in five chronological segments, with the fifth segment, being the largest, split into five smaller segments.

The Abuse of Governmental Power conversations were released in three parts on May 17, 1993, November 18, 1996, and February 1999 with 2,224 conversation segments totaling 258 hours from February 1971 through July 1973.

The Cabinet Room Conversations were released to the public in two parts on October 16, 1996 and February 28, 2002 and consisted of 83 tapes with 436 conversations totaling 154 hours from February 1971 through July 1973.

The chronological releases included all tapes from a date range in every location except the Cabinet Room, which were released separately. Furthermore, a process was created for the Nixon estate and other individuals who were recorded to object their release. The only outstanding issue not agreed upon was the Nixon estate's dispute with NARA's decision to retain a complete copy of the tapes including the "G" personal returnable segments. The Nixon estate believed those segments should be returned while NARA wanted to retain them until work was completed.

Archivists began reviewing the tapes in accordance with PRMPA regulations and the Tape Settlement Agreement. In addition to the PRMPA categories, archivists also withheld certain portions of conversations that they could not adequately review for release at the time because they were unintelligible. These portions are noted on the tape subject log as "Unintelligible." For all of the PRMPA withdrawals (except those removed because they were unintelligible), the tape subject log noted the relevant restriction category and the duration of the withdrawal. For national security withdrawals, the tape subject log also indicated the main topic of the withdrawal.

NARA also began another tapes duplication effort in 1993. The "S Copy" had been erased during 1985-86 and the "Enhanced Copy" was beginning to exhibit sticky-shed syndrome.

Sticky-shed is when the binder which holds magnetic tape together starts to degrade causing the tape to stick. Baking can counteract sticky-shed for a period of time but archivists decided it was best to create new preservation copies. Four new copies were created including a new preservation analog, the “P-Analog”, on 1.5 mm on ¼ inch open reels at 3.75 ips.

The second and third copies served as the preservation digital copy which was made on Digital Audio Tape (DAT) AMPEX #467 cassette. These are known as the “P-DATs” and from this copy a fourth copy was created, the “Edited DATS or E-DATs” which had the “G” segments erased with a 1 kHz tone. Archivists used the E-DAT to complete the first four chronological releases. All copies of the digital and analog masters were stamped with SMPTE timecode to facilitate archival work. All of the masters had the audio equalized and processed to reduce some of the noise and imperfections in the recordings. Due to the ongoing legal disputes at the time archivists were unable to listen to the “G” segments for more than a few moments to set or check the levels.

The 1st Chronological Release was made public on October 5, 1999 and consisted of 134 tapes with 3,646 conversations totaling 443 hours from February through July 1971.

The 2nd Chronological Release was made public on October 26, 2000 and consisted of 143 tapes with 4,140 conversations totaling 420 hours from August through December 1971.

The 3rd Chronological Release was made public on February 28, 2002 and consisted of 170 tapes with 4,127 conversations totaling 426 hours from January through June 1972.

The 4th Chronological Release was made public on December 10, 2003 and consisted of 154 tapes with 3,073 conversations totaling 238 hours from July through October 1972.

The next chronological releases would not come for another four years. During that time the Nixon Presidential Library, which was not part of the National Archives, became an official Presidential Library on July 11, 2007. As part of this agreement the Nixon Foundation deeded the political portions of the tapes to the federal government. Previously, all political conversations had been classified as “G” personal returnable. Those conversations could now be reviewed and released to the public. The new criteria for personal returnable was the former president’s health, his personal finances, and the private, non-public activities of the First Family (Thelma “Pat” Nixon, Tricia Nixon Cox, Edward Cox, Julie Nixon Eisenhower, and David Eisenhower). Access to the tapes was now governed by the regulations under PRMPA, the 1996 Tapes Settlement Agreement, and the 2007 deed of gift.

Under the 2007 deed of gift agreement, the Nixon Foundation also allowed NARA to retain and release room noise captured on the tapes that had been designated as “G” material under PRMPA. If President Nixon was alone in a room during a room noise recording, the room noise was withdrawn as “G” personal returnable. If President Nixon was not in the room, the room noise was withdrawn as either “G” or as “H” non-historical. Archivists reviewed these room

noise segments the same as conversations, however, room noise segments were not released directly to the public, but they are available upon request.

The 5th Chronological release was the first release to include the 2007 deed of gift provisions including the release of the political “G” which had until that point been restricted. Archivists retired the E-DATs and began to use one of the P-DAT copies for review work. At the same time the Nixon Library acquired two SADiE4 Digital Audio Workstations [DAWs]. The DATs were imported into the SADiE system which staff could use to edit and output conversations to CD. Starting in 2007 conversations were simultaneously released online via the Nixon Library website. Now a more thorough record of the presidency could be obtained from the tapes, and the tapes were beginning their shift from analog to digital.

5th Chronological Release Part I was made public July 11, 2007 and consisted of 3 tapes with 165 conversations totaling 11.5 hours from November 1972.

5th Chronological Release Part II was made public on December 2, 2008 and consisted of 55 tapes with 1,398 conversations totaling 198 hours from November 1972 through December 1972.

5th Chronological Release Part III was made public on June 23, 2009 and consisted of 36 tapes with 994 conversations totaling 154 hours from January through February 1973.

5th Chronological Release Part IV was made public on December 9, 2010 and consisted of 75 tapes with 1,801 conversations totaling 265 hours from February through April 1973.

5th Chronological Release Part V was made public on August 21, 2013 and consisted of 94 tapes with 2,905 conversation totaling 340 hours from April through July 12, 1973.

The release on August 21 was the last portion of the tapes that had not been made public. After 35 years of review and multiple legal challenges archivists had finally released all of the Nixon White House Tapes to the public.

Digital Remastering – 2013-Present:

Even before the August 21, 2013 release, Nixon Library archivists had begun preparation for the next iteration of the tapes. In 2010 the Nixon Library submitted a proposal for funding to NARA’s Preservation Programs to create a new preservation analog copy of the tapes. Due to the 2007 deed of gift there was a significant portion of “G” conversations that needed to be reviewed and released. In 2011, NARA approved the funding with the caveat that the new preservation copy would be digital, since analog tape have gotten increasingly rare and expensive.

From June 2011 through September 2012, the Nixon Library procured the digital equipment and storage necessary for a project of this magnitude. Two SADiE6 DAWs for preservation

mastering; 4 Dell DAWs with WaveLab for digital review, editing, and quality control; and 2 Synology Network Attached Storage (NAS) units were acquired. The goal of the project was to be a complete digital preservation transfer, conforming to NARA preservation standards and practices, of the “P-Analog” copy of the tapes for digital review, editing, and release.

Before archivists began digitally transferring the project, Nixon Library staff undertook a massive data digitization and modernization project in 2013 which included creating a tape dataset in an Excel comma-separated values (CSV) format that contained the following data from every single conversation: identification name, dates, times, participants, recording location, latitude and longitude, description, and other pertinent information. Archivists also took data that was locked in Microsoft Access databases—participant names, conversation subjects, and main topics—reorganized and modernized the data to comply with current archival standards. This data was placed in Excel spreadsheets and was made compatible with Extensible Markup Language (XML) to be used as metadata for digitized tapes. Staff digitized the information from the boxes tapes were housed in which would also be used for metadata and quality control. Furthermore, staff digitized every national security withdrawal into Excel spreadsheets and segregated them by recording location to aid in Mandatory Declassification Review (MDR).

The next stage of the project was the digital transfer of the “P-Analog” tapes. Following the recommendations of NARA’s Preservation Lab, the Nixon Library elected to do a flat transfer of the tapes. As discussed above, during the Chronological Review era all of the tape reels were processed and had signal boosting in order to improve audibility. A flat transfer streamlined the process and was more in keeping with current archival principles. The digital format was an uncompressed stereo Broadcast WAV—as defined by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU)—with a frequency of 96 kHz and 24 bits. The file size was going to be about 2 GB/hour and a full transfer was going to require approximately 14 TB for two preservation copies.

The digital transfer was completed by connecting a Studer to the SADiE6 system, playing the tape, and recording it in real-time into the SADiE6. Each reel was approximately one-hour long and there were anywhere from one to seven reels per tape. Once an entire tape was completed the XML data created earlier was inserted into the tape reels with BWF MetaEdit and then the entire tape was rendered out from the SADiE6 to the Nixon Library servers. From that point on archivists would work in a digital environment and would open the reels in WaveLab to conduct quality control. During the quality control process archivists checked the audio levels, SMPTE timecode levels, metadata, and overall soundness of the digital file. If the file passed quality control MD5 checksums were embedded and two clones of the files were created and placed on different servers. If the file did not pass quality control, it was sent back to be re-digitized to fix the error. The complete digitization of the tapes is scheduled to be completed by Fall 2018.

With the preservation process underway archivists began working to develop the next steps for processing national security information. By 2012 all national security withdrawals had been

officially requested through MDR procedures. Archivists used the MDR requests to create a queue for which tapes were to be processed and reviewed first. Archivists needed to simultaneously develop processes for MDR in addition to the tapes review process already in place. Therefore, the Nixon library developed a two-pronged strategy to accommodate both MDR and tape review. In order to process tapes, archivists began another digitization project. This project involved taking analog determination sheets—which document the SMPTE timecode beginning and end of each conversation, room noise, and withdrawals—and digitizing them. These would be used in conjunction with WaveLab to create montages. Montages are like onion skins that archivists can use to modify and markup the tapes without changing the files. To complete a montage an archivist has to digitally splice together each reel to recreate a complete tape—which were broken up into separate one-hour reels during preservation—and then add in markers for conversations, withdrawals, and room noise. After a montage is completed, the tape is then ready to be processed for MDR review.

Next archivists developed a new method for MDR review. The necessary data was digitized, but archivists now needed a way to automatically populate the data in analog sheets. These sheets would be given to the various equity holders to facilitate their review of restricted segments. Furthermore, archivists needed a way for the MDR reviewers to listen to the various segments. To solve the first problem archivists created new MDR review documents, based on the textual model, but with important changes that reflected the audio nature of the collection. Archivists then used mail merge in Microsoft Word to pull from various Excel spreadsheets to automatically populate MDR documents. It was important for archivists to move away from the CD model of the Chronological Review era so that they could harness all the advantages of the digital format. CDs are also expensive, inefficient, and need to be disposed of properly. The Nixon Library decided to invest in five Sony Walkman NW-E390 MP3 players. With these archivists could load playlists for reviewers and they could harness the metadata they had to embed in MP3's identifying information which would aid MDR reviewers.

With these issues settled archivists began the process of getting every national security withdrawal reviewed. They also had to re-review all the "G" withdrawals from the 1st through the 4th Chronological review. Using the methods developed by their predecessors, archivists began to review the tapes for content. Much of tape review remains the same. A tape is reviewed by two archivists to ensure compliance with PRMPA, the Tapes Settlement Agreement, and the 2007 deed of gift. There are some areas where current tape processing is different however. Previous eras, inserted a 10 sec 1 kHz tone into every withdrawal. Mainly, this was done because of the limited space available on CDs and audiocassettes. With the tapes completely digital archivists edit out the restricted segment and insert in a 1 kHz tone of the same length as the withdrawal. When a tape is finished, each conversation is rendered out separately as a high-quality mono uncompressed Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) Broadcast WAV EBU at 44.1 kHz and 24 bits. Those Broadcast WAVs are then embedded with metadata at the conversation level.

The WAVs are then converted into MP3s at 320 kbps, metadata added as needed, and then are posted to the website as the public access copy of the tapes.

Some of the overriding goals of this review of the tapes was to bring all tapes into conformity with the 2007 deed of gift. There are large segments of political conversations that are now going to be available to the public for the first time. Simultaneously, archivists are updating and standardizing the tapes finding aid. The finding aid—which has been created at different times, with different technology, and different standards—needed to be brought up to modern archival standards. This standardization includes language and appearance. One major change is how “unintelligible” withdrawals will now be treated like every other withdrawal on the tape subject logs with identification information and duration. Previously, the logs marked these withdrawals only with [unintelligible] but no other identifiable information or duration. This change will improve transparency between archivists and the public.

Building upon the work of previous archivists to improve both the clarity and consistency of tapes and finding aids was paramount. Previous eras had to contend with reviewing tapes and at the same time potential legal threats. With those threats now removed, archivists had the time to standardize the language and update decision-making processes to more closely align the entire collection with current archival standards. To accomplish this an internal manual was created with detailed work-flows and best practices. Training to review tapes is intensive and archivists seek to form a collaborative atmosphere in order to best interpret the various laws and regulations ensuring compliance with the law and maximum public transparency. With all archivists on the same page there will be a uniformity of purpose and practice that will create a better product for the public.

In the Spring of 2018 the Nixon Library released the first batch of new tapes with the intent to release new tapes in full after review and MDR work is completed. As of September 2018 all 4,042 reels of the Nixon White House Tapes have been digitized.

Conditions Governing Access:

The original, unedited tapes are retained in College Park, Maryland and are not available to researchers.

Public access copies of the tapes are available in College Park, Maryland; Yorba Linda, California; and on www.nixonlibrary.gov/white-house-tapes.

Language of Materials: English

Scope and Content:

The White House Tapes consist of taped conversations from the Nixon Administration from the period of February 1971 – July 1973. These conversations occur in a variety of places including: the Oval Office, the Executive Office Building, Camp David, the Cabinet Room, and the White House Telephone.

There are a wide range of topics discussed throughout the tapes. Among the Foreign Policy topics are: the Vietnam War, Prisoners of War, the Paris Peace Talks, treaties, diplomatic appointments, Israel, and India-Pakistan. Domestic Affairs matters examined include: Supreme Court candidates, Wounded Knee, Cabinet appointments, campaign financing, federal spending, and wage and price controls.

The President and his aides also discuss national politics involving both local and national politicians and candidates, polling results, news, election results, strategies for the 1972 re-election campaign, and the inner workings of the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP). Watergate related topics discussed include: the Pentagon Papers, Daniel Ellsberg, grand jury proceedings, the break-in of the Watergate complex and Dr. Lewis Fielding offices, misuse of federal agencies, witness testimonies, and executive privilege.

Participants on the tapes include: administration officials, members of the House and Senate, business leaders, athletes, celebrities, diplomats, and foreign heads of state. Noteworthy participants include: Henry A. Kissinger, H. R. Haldeman, John W. Dean, III, Gerald R. Ford, Leonid I. Brezhnev, Indira Gandhi, Lee Kuan Yew, Malik Faisal ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Saud, Leslie T. (“Bob”) Hope, and Stephen Blass.

The free-flow nature of the conversations and the fact that most participants did not know they were being recorded created an atmosphere wherein participants spoke colloquially and offered their unembellished opinion on current events and people.

Preferred Citation:

Location of conversation, Six-digit conversation number; Date; White House Tapes; Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

Example:

OVAL, 800-001; October 16, 1972; White House Tapes; Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

Publication Rights: The contents of the White House Tapes are in the public domain.

Related Collections: President's Personal Files (White House Special Files: Staff Member and Office Files); President's Office Files (White House Special Files: Staff Member and Office Files); Presidential Daily Diary; Dictabelts; Harry R. Haldeman (White House Special Files: Staff Member and Office Files); and the H.R. Haldeman Diaries.

Biographical Note:

Born on January 9, 1913 in Yorba Linda, California, Richard Milhous Nixon was the second of five brothers; Harold, Donald, Arthur, and Edward. His parents Francis Anthony Nixon and Hannah (Milhous) Nixon were Quakers and instilled those values in their children. His childhood was marked by poverty and tragedy including the deaths of his brothers Arthur in 1925 and Harold in 1933.

Nixon was a good student and throughout his education. In high school he became involved in debate and school politics—where he suffered his first political defeat—eventually graduating from Whittier High School in 1929. After graduation he stayed close to home attending Whittier College where he participated in a plethora of extracurricular activities in addition to working in the family grocery store. After graduation in 1934, he received a scholarship to attend the newly formed Duke University School of Law. His excellence earned him scholarships for his second and third years. In 1937 he was elected president of the Duke Bar Association, and graduated later that year.

After graduation Nixon returned to California and began working at the law firm Wingert and Bewley, becoming a full partner in 1938. That year he also met Thelma (“Pat”) Ryan. They would eventually marry in 1940 and had two children Patricia, born in 1946, and Julie born in 1948. Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941, he and Pat moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked at the Office of Price Administration (OPA). In April Nixon joined the Navy even though he could have deferred the draft as a civil servant or as a birthright Quaker he could have avoided service completely as a conscientious objector. During his World War II service he was sent to a number of duty stations: Ottumwa, Iowa, Noumea, New Caledonia, the Solomon Islands—Guadalcanal, Vella Lavella, Bourgainville—Alameda Naval Air Station et al. While overseas he was assigned to the Southern Pacific Combat Air Transport Command (SCAT) first as an assistant operations officer and later as the commanding officer.

After being discharged from active duty in 1946, Nixon was recruited by California Republicans to run for Congress against Horace Jeremiah (“Jerry”) Voorhis in California’s 12th District.

During his campaign he claimed Voorhis was an ineffectual congressman and insinuated he was too extreme. Nixon was elected by a comfortable margin 57 percent to 43 percent. As a congressman he was on the Education and Labor Committee and the Herter Committee which advocated for the passage of the Marshall Plan. He also joined the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1947. Here Nixon built his bona fides as an anti-communist as he was instrumental in exposing Alger Hiss—which also helped to make him a national figure. He was reelected in 1948 and in 1949 decided to run for Senate.

Nixon's opponent in the Senate campaign was Helen Gahagan Douglas. Nixon's strategy included portraying Douglas as too liberal and soft on communism. During his campaign, Nixon distributed the "pink sheet" which linked Douglas with Congressman Vito Marcantonio of New York—who was considered to be one of the most left leaning members of congress if not an outright communist. Nixon also attacked Douglas by saying she was "pink right down to her underwear." Moreover, it was during this campaign that Douglas bequeathed Nixon with the nickname "Tricky Dick" which followed him throughout his career. Even though it was a hard-fought, bellicose campaign Nixon won easily 59 percent to 40 percent.

Nixon's time in the Senate, however, was short-lived. As a Senator, he spent his time at the forefront of the Republican attack on the Truman Administration regularly giving speeches around the country. Nixon's combative style was appreciated by Republicans as he frequently attacked Truman for his weak foreign policy, being soft on communism, the firing of General Douglas MacArthur, the management of the Korean War et al. Nixon was a star on the rise and one of the most exciting of the new class of young Republicans. As such, he was chosen by Dwight D. Eisenhower as his running mate in July 1952 at the Republican National Convention.

In September 1952, murmurs about a political fund which had been set up for Nixon became a crisis when *The New York Post* published a lurid exposé. Soon calls for his resignation from the ticket began to come from newspapers and politicians of both parties. Nixon fought back on television disclosing an independent audit of the fund by Price Waterhouse. He then gave a detailed analysis of the Nixon family finances listing everything he owned and earned. At the end of the speech, Nixon confessed that they had received one gift from a donor—a black and white cocker spaniel—which his kids loved and named Checkers. Nixon continued saying despite what "they" said his family was going to keep the dog. The Checkers speech, as it came to be known, was a resounding success and saved Nixon's political career. In November Eisenhower and Nixon easily defeated Adlai E. Stevenson and John J. Sparkman 55 percent to 44 percent.

During his tenure, the office of the Vice President was transformed from a relatively ceremonial position into a vitally important office. Nixon can be seen as the first modern Vice President. Much of this is due to Eisenhower who thought it was important for his successor to be a fundamental part of the administration. Nixon sat in on all Cabinet and National Security Council meetings and chaired them when Eisenhower was absent. He travelled over 114,250

miles visiting numerous countries including: Korea, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Morocco, and Italy. Notably on a trip to Caracas, Venezuela, his calm demeanor when confronted with rock throwing anti-American protestors further burnished his image back home.

In 1959 Nixon was sent to the Soviet Union as the American representative of the American National Exhibition in Moscow. While walking the exhibition floor with Nikita Khrushchev, Nixon engaged in a conversation regarding American home innovation—which led to a debate regarding each country's military strengths and ideologies. While Khrushchev became loud and aggressive Nixon remained calm further reinforcing his image. The "Kitchen Debate" was seen by many ordinary Americans as a triumph for Nixon and America.

In July 1960 Nixon was nominated as the Presidential candidate for the Republican Party and he chose Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. as his running mate. His opponents were John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Throughout the campaign the polls were close but Kennedy prevailed by 112,881 votes or .17 percent. Although there were accusations of voter fraud in Texas and Illinois Nixon refused to pursue them thinking it would be detrimental to America's image. As this was the first election where television played a central role, one of the reasons for Nixon's loss has been blamed on his appearance during the television debates. While he performed well, when compared to Kennedy, he looked sweaty, sallow, and unkempt.

Over the next few years Nixon embarked on what is known as his Wilderness Years. He went back into private practice in California and he wrote *Six Crises*. In 1962 he ran for Governor of California against the incumbent Democrat Edmund G. ("Pat") Brown. Nixon lost resoundingly 52 percent to 47 percent, and he considered the loss the end of his political career. During his concession speech Nixon told the assembled press that, "[y]ou won't have Nixon to kick around anymore because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference." Afterwards, Nixon moved to New York to practice law on Wall St.

Nixon's comeback started in 1964 after Barry M. Goldwater won the presidential nomination for the Republican Party. Unlike some of his rivals, Nixon campaigned tirelessly for Goldwater. Although the election was a disaster for the Republicans there was no blame for Nixon who had loyally supported and campaigned for the party. In 1966 he reprised his role as a vigorous campaigner for the party. He ended up visiting thirty-five states in an effort to help congressional candidates. The 1966 election was a resounding success for the Republicans due in large part to the efforts of Nixon.

1968 was a year of strife and upheaval in America. There was the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., escalation of The Vietnam War, and large sometimes violent protests throughout the country. Nixon strode into this atmosphere presenting himself as the remedy for all the chaos. At the convention, Nixon easily won the nomination and he chose Maryland Governor Spiro Agnew as his running mate. During the course of the general election Nixon maintained his calm, steady demeanor. He was able to thread the needle on issues making

himself the moderate choice for both northern and southern voters. The strategy worked and he defeated Democrat Hubert H. Humphrey and American Independent Party candidate George C. Wallace, Jr. 43 percent to 42 percent and 13 percent respectively.

His first term in office was marked by a number of achievements and controversies. Two of his biggest achievements ran counter to his image as a staunch anti-communist. The opening of People's Republic of China in February 1972. These were the first diplomatic discussions between the two countries in over twenty years. In May 1972 during a visit to the Soviet Union, Nixon and General Secretary Leonid I. Brezhnev signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and the interim Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) which limited a number of nuclear weapons each country to could produce—the first such treaty between the two countries.

On the other side, his escalation of the war in Vietnam was divisive, which included an increase in bombings epitomized by the Christmas Bombings in December 1972. Furthermore, the secret bombings of Cambodia and Laos, without Congressional authorization, led to the War Powers Resolution in 1973 which was an attempt to curb presidential power to send troops to war without congressional authorization.

In 1972 Nixon ran for reelection against South Dakota Senator George S. McGovern. With his foreign policy successes the 1972 election was never really in doubt. Nixon cruised to a landslide victory 60 percent to 37 percent. McGovern only won 17 electoral votes to Nixon's 520 making it one of the largest victories in American history. Nixon followed this victory with the end of the Vietnam War shortly after his inauguration. On January 27, 1973 the Paris Peace Accords were signed officially ending the war.

However, a slow simmering controversy was approaching. In July 1972 there was a break-in at the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate office complex in Washington D.C. As the new term commenced investigations began into the break-in. Over the next two years the Nixon administration was tied to the break-in and a myriad of other campaign "dirty tricks." Additionally, it was revealed in July 1973 that Nixon had bugged his offices and phones in the White House. After these tapes were secured by the Special Council via subpoenas they provided the "smoking gun" that Nixon knew of and directed the cover-up of the Watergate break-in and had subsequently attempted to use the FBI and CIA to stop the investigations. Nixon held on until the threat of impeachment was imminent and the support from his party had completely eroded. He resigned from office on August 9, 1974. Gerald R. Ford, Jr. replaced Agnew, who had resigned in October 1973 after he was investigated on separate corruption charges, was sworn into office. On September 8, 1974 President Ford gave Nixon an unconditional pardon.

During his post-presidential years Nixon embarked on another comeback. He wrote a number of books including his memoir *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. Throughout the years he made a number of trips around the world meeting with foreign leaders like Margret Thatcher, Chairman Mao Zedong, and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Despite his resignation and the

stain of Watergate, by the end of his life Nixon had successfully engineered another comeback and was considered by many to be an elder statesman. He died on August 22, 1994 from complications of a stroke. His funeral was attended by all living presidents.

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