

WHITE HOUSE TAPES
3RD CHRONOLOGICAL RELEASE

JANUARY 1972 – JUNE 1972



Nixon Presidential Materials Staff

National Archives and Records Administration

Mark L. Fischer
David C. Lake
Sammy McClure
John Powers
Samuel W. Rushay
Ronald R. Sodano

February 2002

NIXON WHITE HOUSE TAPES

THIRD CHRONOLOGICAL SEGMENT JANUARY – JUNE 1972

This group of 170 Nixon White House tapes, released on February 28, 2002, consists of the conversations which took place in the Oval Office, in the President's Old Executive Office Building (EOB) office, and on certain telephones in the Oval Office, the President's EOB office, and in the Lincoln Sitting Room in the residence of the White House. This group of White House tapes also includes room conversations and telephone conversations recorded in the President's study in Aspen Lodge at the Camp David Presidential retreat. These recordings were recorded, for the most part, from January 1, 1972 to June 30, 1972. However, a few conversations included as part of the "January 1972" tapes were recorded in late December, 1971. Additionally, a few conversations included as part of the "June 1972" tapes were recorded in July 1972. For archival purposes, they are included in this installment.

These recorded White House tapes are part of the Presidential historical materials of the Nixon Administration. The third chronological segment represents the fifth group of publicly released Nixon White House tapes under the terms of the 1996 Tapes Settlement Agreement between the National Archives, President Nixon's Estate and Public Citizen. The first installment, the Abuse of Governmental Power (AOGP) tapes, totaling 201 hours, were released in 1996. The next year, the National Archives released 154 hours of Cabinet Room tapes recorded between February 1971 and July 1973. In October 1999, the National Archives released the first chronological segment of the tapes. These tapes were recorded between February 1971 and July 1971 and totaled 445 hours. The second chronological segment, recorded between August 1971 and December 1971, was released in October 2000 and totaled 420 hours. According to the terms of the 1996 Tapes Settlement Agreement, the National Archives will release a fourth chronological segment (July 1972 to October 1972) and a fifth and final chronological segment (November 1972 to July 1973) in the upcoming years. All of these materials are in the custody of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) under the provisions of the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974 (PRMPA) (44 USC 2111 note). Access to the Nixon Presidential materials is governed by the PRMPA and its implementing public access regulations.

A Brief History of the White House Taping System

In February 1971, the United States Secret Service (USSS), at the request of the President, installed listening devices in the White House. They placed seven microphones in the Oval Office: five in the President's desk, and one on each side of the fireplace. They placed two microphones in the Cabinet Room under the table near the President's chair. The Secret Service technicians wired all devices to central mixers which were then connected to recorders in an old locker room in the White House basement.

In April 1971, the Secret Service technicians installed four microphones in the President's office in the EOB. These microphones were located in the President's desk and wires led to a mixer and recorders in an adjoining room. The Secret Service also tapped the telephones in the Oval

Office, in the President's EOB office, and in the Lincoln Sitting Room. These telephone conversations were recorded by tapping the telephone lines from the White House switchboard and relaying the conversations to recorders in a closet in the basement of the residence.

Finally, in May 1972, the Secret Service set up a taping system in the President's study in Aspen Lodge at Camp David. There were three separate recording systems put in place. A single microphone recorded conversations taking place in the study. The President's telephone on the President's desk was tapped as was the telephone on the study table.

This was a secret taping system maintained by the Secret Service. Only President Nixon, H.R. Haldeman, and a few of the President's close personal assistants knew the system existed. One of its key features was that the recording equipment in the Oval Office, the EOB office, at Camp David, and on the telephones was sound activated, operating without a conscious decision by the President to record a specific conversations. Most participants were unaware that their conversations were being recorded. The system was tied to the Presidential Locator System and would only activate if the president were present in the room. It was designed to continue recording for fifteen to thirty seconds after the President left the room.

The Cabinet Room recording system operated somewhat differently. It was a manual rather than a sound activated system. It was activated by Alexander Butterfield, a Special Assistant to the President who managed the President's activities in the West Wing of the White House. Butterfield activated the system from a switch on his desk (although the Secret Service also placed on/off switches on either side of the President's chair at the Cabinet Room table). When Butterfield inadvertently left the system "on," the tape recorders captured non-historical conversations as well as hours of room noise.

Tapes Processing

The Nixon Presidential Materials Staff (NLNS) has archivally processed the sound recordings for public access under the PRMPA, its implementing regulations, and the 1996 Tapes Settlement Agreement. Archival processing included duplicating the recordings to preserve the original tapes, enhancing the sound quality of the tape copies, describing the contents of the tapes by creating tape subject logs and other finding aids, and reviewing the tapes for restrictions. The PRMPA regulations define eight restriction categories. In accordance with PRMPA and the 1996 Tapes Settlement Agreement, NARA restricts the content if release of the information would:

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

In some cases, NLNS withheld certain portions which were so unintelligible that the staff could not adequately review them for release at this time. These portions are noted on the tape subject log as “[Unintelligible].” For all of the withdrawals (except those removed because they were unintelligible), the tape subject log will note the relevant restriction category and the duration of the withdrawal. For national security withdrawals, the tape subject log will also indicate the main topic or topics of the withdrawal. Portions of conversations determined to fall within the “G” restriction category were deleted from the tapes and returned to the Nixon Estate, in accordance with the PRMPA. All withdrawals, including unintelligible withdrawals, are identified on the tapes by a ten second tone.

Description of the January – June 1972 Conversations

There are 170 White House tapes in this installment. Four tapes were determined to be blank. There are 4127 conversations totaling approximately 426 hours of recordings which are being released at this time. The conversations involve a wide variety of participants including White House staff members H.R. Haldeman, Henry Kissinger, John Ehrlichman, Charles Colson, Alexander Haig, Ronald Ziegler, and Rose Mary Woods. They also include members of the Cabinet, other department and agency personnel, Members of Congress, foreign leaders, members of the press, and the general public. Conversations include a wide variety of issues and document the daily routine of the President and his staff, and include discussions on public relations, appointments, ceremonial events, polling information, presidential statements and speeches, and the President’s schedule.

Topics include domestic initiatives such as wage and price controls, drug policy, Revenue Sharing, welfare reform, the settlement of the West Coast dock strike, crime, development of the Space Shuttle, busing, legislation, reaction to AFL-CIO President George Meany’s decision to resign from the Pay Board, and the President’s New Economic Policy. There are also discussions of the Welander-Radford spy ring, Jack Anderson’s columns (regarding the President’s brother, F. Donald Nixon, and the International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) investigation), and the press, including Dan Rather’s interview with the President in January, and the President’s press conferences. There are several conversations in May and June about the President’s reaction to the attempted assassination of George Wallace in Maryland, his efforts to find out what happened, and his decision to provide all presidential candidates with security protection. This segment also contains the “Smoking Gun” conversation about the “Watergate” break-in and the “18 ½ minute gap” conversation.

There are many discussions about various presidential appointments, including: Peter G. Peterson as Secretary of Commerce, Richard Kleindienst as Attorney General, George Shultz as Secretary of Treasury, Caspar Weinberger as Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Peter M. Flanigan and Director of the Council on International Economic Policy (CIEP), D. Kenneth Rush as Deputy Secretary of Defense, Marina Whitman as a member of the Council of Economic Advisors, L. Patrick Gray as Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation following the death of J. Edgar Hoover, and John Connally’s resignation as Secretary of the Treasury.

The conversations also document foreign policies and world events, including the Vietnam War, the President's trip to the People's Republic of China in February, the President's "Summit" trip to the Soviet Union (and Austria, Iran and Poland) in May, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the war between India and Pakistan, the Egypt-Israel conflict, and Strategic Arms and Limitation Talks with the Soviet Union, and Mrs. Nixon's trip to Africa.

Many conversations from January through March, detail aspects of the President's historic trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Before the trip, there are many discussions about preparations, schedules, and the drafting of the final communique. There is also an interesting conversation between the President and Andre Malraux. After the President's return, there are many conversations detailing US and world reaction to the visit. There are also discussions about placing the two Panda bears in the National Zoo.

Likewise, there are many conversations from March through June detailing the President's trip to the Soviet Union and signing the ABM Treaty. Before the trip, there are many discussions detailing the treaty negotiations, communique statements, and trip planning. There are several discussions about the possibility that the Soviet Union might cancel the Summit following the US decision to mine Haiphong harbor in Vietnam. After the president's return, there are many discussions about Senate ratification, and US and world reaction to the Treaty.

There are many conversations about the President's policies for Vietnam. They include his announcement in January of his decision to withdraw 70,000 US troops, his reaction to the North Vietnamese Army's offensive in March and April, his anger at US military commanders, his decision to send Gen. John Vogt to Vietnam as a commander, and his May 8 Speech to the nation regarding the mining of Haiphong harbor. There are also many conversations about the Paris Peace talks, the status of the negotiations, and his peace proposals. In addition, there are a few interesting conversations in June about the death of John Paul Vann.

The President met with a number of foreign leaders and dignitaries, including Prime Minister Eisaku Sato of Japan, Prime Minister Nihat Erim of Turkey, King Hussein of Jordan, President Luis Echeverria Alvarez of Mexico, Kurt Waldheim (Secretary General of the United Nations, and French Chinese expert and poet, Andre Malraux.

As the year begins, there are increasingly more conversations about the upcoming presidential election, beginning with the President's decision to seek re-election and enter the New Hampshire primary. There are many conversations about the various democratic candidates (Edmund Muskie, George McGovern, and George Wallace), their statements about the President's policies, especially his Vietnam policies, and the primaries. There are many conversations about the attempted assassination of George Wallace and its effect on the election. In June, there are conversations about the "Watergate" break-in, the President's reaction, and John Mitchell's decision to resign as head of the Campaign to Re-Elect the President.

There are also some conversations that detail Abuses of Governmental Power, as defined by the PRMPA and its implementing regulations. Most of these conversations were previously released in November 1996 and February 1999. These conversations, now in context, include discussions about ITT, the milk fund, domestic wiretapping and surveillance, campaign activities, misuse of

federal agencies, and illegal political campaign contributions. Importantly, this installment also includes the “Smoking Gun” conversation as well as the “18 ½ minute gap” conversation.

Tape Logs and Transcripts

In the course of processing the tapes, NLNS staff prepared tape subject logs as researcher aids to follow conversations. Each log contains the tape number, the conversation, the tape location, the date and time of the conversation, and the names of the participants involved. The logs include activity statements which document when someone entered or left a room. In instances when there is a telephone conversation in one of the offices, the logs also contain cross references to the corresponding telephone recording, noting the tape and conversation number. Some of the conversations contain partial transcripts which were prepared by the Watergate Special Prosecution Force for use during their investigation and various Watergate trials. In addition, there are a few conversations with other partial transcripts. These were created by NLNS staff in response to court orders for special access to information contained on the tapes. In cases where partial transcripts exist, the tape subject log will contain a notation where a transcript has been created for that particular portion of conversation.

Variations in sound quality can produce wide variations in what is heard. Even though transcripts may be prepared with great care and substantial effort, many points of ambiguity are inevitable, and erroneous or different interpretations from transcripts are always possible. As a general policy, the National Archives does not create transcripts of conversations, and considers these existing transcripts to be an interpretation of the record rather than the record itself. NARA considers the actual tapes to be the record, and strongly urges users to listen to the tapes in forming their own interpretation.

Conversation Numbers

During the processing of the White House tapes, NLNS identified and assigned a unique number to each recorded conversation. The conversation number consists of an initial number which identifies the reel of original White House tape. Each conversation on each reel is further identified by a unique number, with the first conversation on a particular reel labeled “1,” the second conversation labeled “2,” the third conversation labeled “3,” and so on sequentially until the tape goes blank.

When listening to an Oval Office, an EOB office, or a Camp David Hard Wire tape recording, there may be instances where the President or someone else in the room places or receives a telephone call while a meeting is in progress. The tape subject log identifies each instance by an activity statement, alerting the listener as to what is occurring, and lists a cross reference, if there is one, indicating the tape and conversation number for that telephone conversation on the White House telephone tapes. Likewise, the tape subject logs for the White House tapes indicate the cross reference, if there is one, with the corresponding conversation from an Oval Office, an EOB office, or Camp David Hard Wire conversation.

Audio Quality

The audio quality of the recordings varies greatly. In general, conversations recorded in the Oval Office are of good audio quality; those recorded in the President's EOB office are of poorer sound quality. Conversations recorded on the telephone are generally very audible; however, in some instances, the recording equipment malfunctioned, and those conversations are barely audible. In some instances, background noises, such as footsteps or the clinking of coffee cups and glasses, make parts of the tape segments more difficult to understand.

The National Archives duplicated the original tapes using both analog and digital technology for preservation purposes and to produce copies with improved sound quality and audibility for the review of the conversations. Digital Audio Cassettes (DATs) were used for review purposes. Analog cassette copies were then produced from DATs for researcher use.

Executive Order 12958 and Declassification

In processing these recordings for public access, the National Archives implemented Executive Order 12958, which mandates declassification of materials more than twenty-five years old. Using agency guidelines, on-site visits from agency declassification specialists, detailed reference information, and textual records from the Nixon Presidential materials, the NLNS staff was able to review substantial amounts of material. The National Archives determined that only four hours and seven minutes required restriction out of 426 hours in this segment. These 125 withdrawals are indicated on the various tape subject logs. In addition, for national security withdrawals, the tape subject log indicates the main subject or subjects that have been withdrawn.

Other Finding Aids

In addition to the tapes subject logs, NLNS has created the following lists to assist researchers in their work:

Conversation List: a complete list of each conversation found on the tapes, including: date and time of the conversation, the names of participants (by individual or described by group), the length of the released portion of the conversation, and the reference cassette where the conversation can be located, by cassette number and segment number.

Name List: a list of names found on the tape subject logs and the tape number(s) where the person is mentioned or is a participant.

Geographic Names List: a list of place names found on the tapes subject logs and the tape number where the place is mentioned.

Acronyms List: a list of commonly used acronyms found on the tape subject logs and the tape number where the acronym is mentioned