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NATION

New Nixon Tapes Tell Shady Tale

2

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Washington — Watergate isn't all that Richard Nixon tried to hide. For 22 years, he and his heirs fought to keep secret what White House tapes show: that he thanked a Greek businessman for providing hush money, set a \$250,000 price on ambassadorships and had Sen. Edward M. Kennedy tailed in search of scandal.

Newly published transcripts of Nixon's tapes show an administration willing under the Watergate scandal, which began with the White House-directed 1972 break-in at Democratic headquarters. They show that as Watergate began to unfold, Nixon insisted he could hold on to office.

"If I walk out of this office, you know, on this lex-pelive deleted) stuff, why it would leave a mark on the American political system," he told chief of staff H.R. Haldeman in May, 1973. "But the other thing is . . . if they ever want to get up to the impeachment thing, fine, fine . . . My view is then, fight like hell."

The transcripts shed new light on the lingering question: Given that so much damning evidence was on the tapes, why didn't Nixon destroy them? Ultimately they provided evidence of his involvement in the Watergate

Hush money, spying among office dealings

cover-up and prompted him on Aug. 9, 1974, to become the only president in history to resign.

The explanation: Nixon thought he could use the tapes selectively to prove his innocence if he were put on trial. Moreover, says historian Stanley Kutler, Nixon thought he could make money from them. Kutler filed the lawsuit that forced Nixon's heirs to release 201 hours of tapes. The result is published in "Abuse of Power," a book to be in the bookstores next month. A copy was made available Friday to The Associated Press. The tapes, says Kutler, "reveal a president deeply and intimately involved in sometimes criminal abuses of power, both before and after the Watergate break-in."

Examples:
● Nixon invited wealthy Greek-American businessman Thomas Pappas to the Oval Office in 1973 to thank him for providing the money that bought the

Watergate burglars' silence. Pappas was a major contributor with ties to the colonels who then ran Greece. Said Nixon: "I want you to know that . . . I'm aware of what you're doing to help out in some of these things that Maury's people [Maurice Stans, a Nixon fund raiser] and others are involved in."

Earlier, when Haldeman told Nixon what Pappas wanted in exchange for his hush money — the retention of Henry Tasca as U.S. ambassador in Athens — Nixon replied: "No problem. Pappas has raised the money we need for this other activity."

● Nixon insisted that people who were offered ambassadorships be required to pay. "My point is," he told Haldeman on June 23, 1971, "that anybody that wants to be an ambassador wants to pay at least \$250,000."

In a conversation with Nixon, chief domestic adviser John D. Ehrlichman expressed a need to conceal "the shadowing of Teddy Kennedy for eight or nine months" — shadowing that he called "extracurricular activities" that were "not too savory."

Said Nixon: "Oh, yeah. We don't want to get into that." Ehrlichman looked on the bright side: "It's to our credit . . . that we didn't have the FBI do it."