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Nixon's Tapes & the 'Greek Connection'

The latest tranche of Nixon White House tapes shows how right Bill Clinton was, in his sickly and lachrymose funeral speech for Tricky Dicky, to insist that we learn to look at the whole man and the whole life. Nixon was scum, from top to bottom and from beginning to end, and through and through. Even by our degraded standard for the professional pol, he managed to be both howlingly empty and screamingly foul. His choice of associates tells you everything you need to know, about both them and him. Henry Kissinger, who squatted with a crap-eating smirk on his face through dirty Nixonian diatribes against the Jews (there are several more of these charming intimacies in the newly released tapes), touches new bottoms of toadyism when he says, on April 17, 1973, "You have saved this country, Mr. President. The history books will show that, when no one will know what Watergate means."

His second career, as a deep-thinking establishment pundit, probably began at that very moment.

Professor Stanley Kutler, whose book *The Wars of Watergate* is still the best general history of the subject, has performed two kinds of service here. First, he continued to sue the Nixonians and the National Archives for the right of public access to the tapes. Second, he has edited and arranged the resulting transcripts (*Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, Free Press) in a manner both concise and scholarly.

As a consequence, the mainstream press has for the first time paid some attention to a figure who has been tracked in these pages since May 31, 1986 [see Hitchens, "Watergate—The Greek Connection"]. Tom Pappas, a Greek-American tycoon who acted as a front man for the military junta then ruling that unhappy country, is the only one whose name turns up at each stage of the Watergate conspiracy. He plays a part in an original crime of the Nixon gang. His actions draw the attention of the Democratic National Committee. He is aware of the burglary. He is the provider of the crucial cash to buy the silence of the burglars. The new tapes show his footprints throughout.

To recapitulate: In 1968 Pappas delivered \$549,000 in cash to the Nixon campaign. The money came from the K.Y.P., acronym of the Greek C.I.A. Since the K.Y.P. was at the time a subsidized dependency of Langley, Virginia, U.S. law was being broken in two outrageous ways—the supply of campaign money by a foreign dictatorship and the recycling of U.S. intelligence money into the electoral process. My friend and colleague Elias Demetracopoulos, an anti-fascist Greek journalist, had laid the essential facts before Larry O'Brien, chairman of the D.N.C. O'Brien had publicly demanded an explanation of the Pappas connection to the Nixon-Agnew campaign. Thus we have a motive and an objective for the Watergate burglars, whose boss had been bugging the Demetracopoulos telephone as well.

In the newly released tapes, on June 20, 1972—the same day as the legendary eighteen-and-a-half-minute erasure and three days after the break-in itself—Nixon can be heard saying to

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Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman: "My God, the committee isn't worth bugging in my opinion. That's a public line." Haldeman replies: "Except for the financial thing. They thought they had something going on that." Nixon says: "Yes, I suppose." On January 3, 1973, the pair are conversing again as Nixon asks, of Charles Colson: "What the Chr was he looking for?" Haldeman says: "They were looking for stuff on two things. One, on finances. On March 2, Haldeman tells Nixon that White House counsel John Dean and Attorney General

John Mitchell are getting money for the burglars from Pappas; that Pappas has the great advantage of dealing in cash and that as part of his price he wants the retention of U.S. Ambassador Henry Tasca in Athens. The new tapes have Nixon ordering Tasca kept at his post and on March 7, 1973, receiving Pappas at the Oval Office. Sounding like the cheap capo that he was, Nixon says: "I want you to know what I was mentioning last night I am aware of what you're doing to help out on some of the things that Maury's [Maurice Stans, head of fundraising for the Committee to Re-Elect the President, or CREEP] people and others are involved in. I won't say anything further, but it's very seldom you find a friend like that, believe me."

Having thanked Pappas in this rather indiscreet way, Nixon later took fright. On May 23, 1973, he told his confidante and secretary, Rose Mary Woods:

Good old Tom Pappas, as you probably know or heard, if you haven't already heard, it is true, helped at Mitchell's request fundraising for some of the defendants.... He came up to see me on March the 7th, Pappas did. Pappas came to see me about the Ambassador to Greece, that he wanted to—he wanted to keep [Henry] Tasca there. We did not discuss Watergate at that point. It's very important that he remember that.

Nixon's worry on this point goes on for paragraphs. He thought everyone was as ratlike as he. On June 6, not having had a real surance from Pappas, he's nagging poor old Rose Mary again:

But I just want to be damned sure that Pappas, Jesus, doesn't get implicated in this damn thing, see. And of course I don't want to have anything indicating that I was thanking him for raising money for the Watergate defendants.

We still do not know what the Watergate burglars were to look for, except that it was "financial stuff." And we still do not know what was on the deliberately erased section of the tape of June 20, 1972. Pappas was later revealed as a longtime C.I.A. "asset," and Ambassador Tasca testified to Congress in a closed session that he had known about the junta's under-the-table donations. These recent disclosures strengthen the attractions of the "Greek connection" as a hypothesis: It touches the Watergate story consistently, at every relevant point, and its mere mention was enough to make Richard Nixon babble with nerves.