

Notables Sue For Access to Nixon Tapes

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A prominent group of writers, lawyers, film-makers and historians went to court yesterday to seek access to at least 147 tape recordings from the Nixon White House years.

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court here by a New York organization called the Committee for Public Justice, which includes such names as playwright and author Lillian Hellman, author John Hersey and historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

The suit was filed under the Freedom of Information Act, and specifies those tapes subpoenaed by the House Judiciary Committee during its impeachment hearings last summer.

As it turned out, all 147 tapes were not turned over, but then-President Nixon did release transcripts of some of the tapes.

Before filing suit, the plaintiffs had asked the General Services Administration for disclosure of the material.

The GSA denied that request earlier this month, for the following reasons:

- It doesn't have custody of the tapes. A court order has barred it from implementing an agreement that would have placed the tapes in its custody with release only by Mr. Nixon.

- The Presidential Libraries Act of 1955 exempts presidential materials from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

The writers, historians and lawyers, and film-makers said that the denial of access to the material "inhibits their research, writing and publication con-

cerning a historical subject of great public significance, and restricts their rights as citizens to discover if and how the highest office of the land was misused by President Nixon."

The suit was assigned to U.S. District Judge Charles R. Richey and becomes the fourth legal challenge in his court concerning the tapes agreement between Mr. Nixon and GSA.

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Mr. Nixon has filed a suit seeking enforcement of the agreement. Another group of writer, historians and political scientists has asked that the pact be ruled illegal. Convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr. also is seeking to rule the pact illegal, as well as asking that he be granted access to certain tapes for use in a civil trial growing out of the Watergate bugging.