

Broadcasters ask court to oversee copying and distributing of tapes

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Washington (P)—Major broadcast organizations asked a federal judge yesterday to approve procedures for copying and distributing the White House tapes played at the Watergate coverup trial.

The organizations also asked United States District Court Judge Gerhard A. Gesell to prevent Richard M. Nixon from trying to block distribution of the tapes until after the judge has ruled on the proposed procedures.

Judge Gesell ruled December 5 that the tapes are public property and could be copied and distributed after the trial's completion. Mr. Nixon said he would appeal that order.

In asking that any such appeal be delayed, the broadcast group—including the three major commercial networks, Radio-Television News Directors Association, Public Broadcasting Service and Warner Communications, Inc.—said:

"The applicants share Mr. Nixon's expressed desire for an early final termination of this matter. We also believe that the earliest possible distribution of the tapes to the public will be in the public interest."

The organizations said that only after the copying and distribution procedures are approved would the Court of Appeals have "complete picture of the process it will be asked to review."

The organizations proposed that a master set of reels be made either from the tapes in the possession of the court or the copies being held by the Watergate special prosecutor's office.

Only the portions played to the jury would be copied. The petition estimated the total playing time would be 18 to 22 hours, based on the estimates of newsmen, court officials and the prosecutors, according to a group spokesman.

The organizations asked permission to copy the conversations in their chronological order rather than in the order in which they were played to the jury and also asked the judge to allow someone to identify on the master reel each conversation as it is played.

After the tapes are copied the organizations recommended that distribution procedures be set up to enable the initial applicants, expected to include the major networks and recording firms, to obtain their copies at the same time to avoid claims that any organization received an unfair advantage.

The organizations also recommended that government agencies having the technical capability, such as the U.S. Information Agency or the Marine Corps, handle reproduction of the tapes for initial distribution.