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Profanity? Nixon's a Piker

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As good old earthy Angle Saxon profanity, Chaucer was infinitely more expressive.

When the official expurgated White House transcripts were first released some two months ago, with all those expletives and personal characterizations carefully deleted, there was a titillating quality about the language employed. Now, with the verified congressional version of those conversations in hand, we learn the pallid truth.

As exponents in the old-fashioned art of swearing, the President and his men are pikers. Anyone attending—or listening in over the the public airwaves—any number of protest demonstrations in the last decade would have heard far richer, more descriptive expletives and characterization uttered openly and loudly.

The President himself frequently uses hells and damns, often takes the Lord's name in vain, and is prone to speak in anatomical terms. As, indeed, are many of us.

To him and his aides, people are described as "bastards" and "sons of bitches" and "assholes." Sometimes they are "pissed off," and at others they feel as though they are being "pissed on."

At one point, the President says: "Well, it's such a shit-ass way to think." (He also uses the expression, "bullshit.") Again, in describing Charles (Chuck) Colson, he says: "Colson, who's got the brass, the balls of a brass monkey." (Later, he again uses that analogy, by remarking that "Colson's got brass balls.")

But by and large, the President's profanity is not up to the level—or depths—of even some of the more current G-rated, to say nothing of X, films shown across the land. It even, at times, comes over as faintly plaintive and old-fashioned. "Oh, God damn," he says in one conversation with John Dean.

What has been at issue over the use

of such language in the White House is not the sudden revelation that our Presidents occasionally utter profanities. Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln and Lyndon Johnson, to name only a few, could be as earthy and bawdy as any man.

But Mr. Nixon on at least two occasions publicly professed to be offended by the use of profanities and coarse language. In 1960, during his first pres-

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idential campaign, he cited Harry Truman's language as an example of a kind to be avoided in the White House—and promised to do so if elected. In January, 1971, Mr. Nixon spoke to reporters about seeing the movie "Love Story." He was offended, he said, by the amount of profanity.

When it comes to the more serious ethnic and racial slurs that are supposed to have been captured by the secret White House tape recorders, the latest batch of transcripts offers little illumination. Chariman Peter W. Rodin of the House Judiciary Committee says the current edition of the transcripts has been edited "to delete irrelevant material which was considered to be defamatory, degrading or embarrassing."

What remains is only a trace of a racial or ethnic remark. For instance: on Feb. 28, 1973, in another conversation between the President and Dean, the two men are talking about the sentencing of criminals in connection with Watergate. The prospect of stiff sentences from Judge John J. Sirica for the original Watergate seven defendants comes up.

"He's trying to work on them to break them, is he?" the President asks.

Then, moments later, the President remarks:

"The point is—the, uh—that, that sort of thing is just ridiculous. One of these, one of these blacks, you know, goes in here and holds up a store with a God damned gun, and, uh, they

give him two years and then probation after . . . six months."

Thus, the actual expletives turn out to be less robust than expected by the more prurient-minded. And the peculiar White House terminology—the "hang-out routes" and "roads," the "bullet-biting," the "stroking" of recalcitrant witnesses and the varied complicated "scenarios"—sprinkled through the private conversations remains entirely familiar.

But what emerges from reading this latest impeachment installment is a different portrait of Richard Nixon. In the earlier White House edited version, the President often seemed indecisive, confused and unsure. He was, it appeared then, not always in charge of those critical conversations. The deleting of key phrases or sentences also at times altered the meaning of, and knowledge about, significant passages.

Now he comes over as far more in command. He is more assertive, his sentences even parse better. He seems sharper and much more aware.

One example of the difference a single word can make:

In the celebrated March 21 meeting with Dean, the President and his counsel discussed the blackmail demands from E. Howard Hunt. Dean remarked that Hunt had contacted a lawyer about getting the money.

"He isn't Hunt's lawyer, is he?" the President asks.

"No," Dean answers, ". . . he is our lawyer at the re-election committee."

In the White House version, Mr. Nixon merely responds by saying, "I see."

In the Judiciary Committee transcript, the President says:

"I see. Good."

Throughout the White House version it is the omission of words, phrases, sentences even whole passages that at times alters the sense of vital conversations. The effect created is one of disjointed remarks and often ambivalent discussions.

Now, with many words restored, the conversations become more coherent and illuminating.