

White House Smut



Arthur Hoppe

MR. NIXON'S lawyers pleaded with the Supreme Court this week not to let "every disc jockey and every entertainer" play the famed "Nixon tapes" as this would inflict intolerably cruel "embarrassment or mental anguish." I concur.

These are the tapes that were played aloud during the 1974 cover-up trial of Mr. Nixon's top aides. I attended one day and listened to an hour or so of the recordings. Never have I heard anything more embarrassing or painful.

As vulgarity followed vulgarity and grunt echoed grunt in that small courtroom, we spectators for the most part stared straight ahead with the artificially-composed expressions of respectable citizens forced by civic duty to examine some particularly sordid piece of evidence.

These tapes are, quite literally, obscene.

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"A TAPE is different than a (trial) transcript," argued one of Mr. Nixon's lawyers. And he's right. In print, the President and his closest advisers seemed merely dull, monosyllabic, ineffectual plotters, casually violating this law and that. It is an image to which the nation has somehow adjusted.

But on tape! On tape, the President, Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman sound like three paunchy, cigar-chewing smut lovers gathered in some back room to discuss half-drunkenly whom they can con out of a free dirty movie to show at their next stag smoker.

These conversations, believe me, are utterly without redeeming social

significance, appeal solely to the prurient interest, and violate the contemporary standards of any community in the country, with the possible exception of New York's Times Square, San Francisco's Broadway and Boston's Combat Zone.

The thought of a disc jockey broadcasting such excreta over the public airwaves is appalling. Imagine an impressionable child hearing the President of the United States play the leading role in such a lewd performance. Less harm would be done by having Santa Claus star in a remake of Deep Throat on the Howdy Doody Show.

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YET, as a dedicated upholder of the public's right to know, I would hope the Supreme Court releases the tapes. They are, after all, part and parcel of our embarrassing and painful history.

The solution, I think, is for the Court to declare the tapes what they are — pure pornography. They could then be played in our adult theaters ("Opens Monday — Behind the Green Door and Inside the White House!") and sold in our adult book stores ("Special! Two Presidential Speeches and a Vibrator for Only \$6.95!")

We liberated adults could then say about the tapes what we say about dirty movies: "Well, 20 minutes or so is rather interesting, but then it's all pretty much the same."

I part company with Mr. Nixon's attorneys only when they argue the tapes should not be released because they would embarrass their client. Why single him out from the rest of us?