

# Cabbages And Kings and Humming Things

Washington

THE NATIONAL IMPULSE to extrude Richard Nixon from the presidency is beginning to spawn irrationalities the way a storm front spawns twisters. Why can't people just say, "Look, I voted for McGovern, I can't stand Nixon, and I want him out"? Or, alternatively, "I'm a lifelong Republican, but — let's face it — we've got to get rid of him"? But no; at heart we are a nation of Puritans, and Mr. Nixon's ouster must be seen as the wages of sin.



William Rusher

So the hunt for Nixonian sins must stagger on, and we are being asked to believe, like the Queen in "Alice," six impossible things before breakfast.

To begin with one immense but largely overlooked absurdity, we are asked to believe that Mr. Nixon, having secretly bugged his own office, then made a whole torrent of self-incriminating statements — about the milk increase, about ITT, about Watergate, and about its cover-up, to mention only four areas — in the presence of the very microphones he himself had planted.

All right, and then we must suppose that Mr. Nixon, having lost his cool and having said something highly injudicious in the presence of the secret recorder, thereafter neglected, out of further forgetfulness or sheer laziness, to erase or destroy the incriminating tape during the whole year before its existence was discovered by the rest of the world. Would you?

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LET IT PASS. There came a day when the existence of the tapes did become known to the world. Let us assume that Mr. Nixon, replaying this particular one after it was subpoenaed, was horrified to hear himself saying things that sounded terribly incriminating in the cold light of hindsight.

What did he do? Destroy the tape and announce that (as in the case of two others) it never existed? No; we are asked instead to believe he erased 18½ minutes of the conversation and then calmly turned the tape over to Judge Sirica. Why? In heaven's name, why?

Well, let us go the extra mile and assume that for some reason the option of simply destroying the tape wasn't available to him. Perhaps too many people on the White House staff knew of its physical existence for that to be safely deniable. Let us assume that, in whatever extremity of desperation, Mr. Nixon did in fact decide to erase the incriminating part of the conversation and then submit the tape, thus doctored, to the tender mercies of Judge Sirica and a battery of electronics experts. Just how would he go about the erasure?

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BENEATH THE FAMOUS hum, which we have discovered was indeed caused after all by an anomaly in Rose Mary Woods' transcriber, the electronics wizards found evidence that somebody, apparently intentionally, had erased, in five or more consecutive segments, a portion of the tape constituting, in the words of the New York Times, "precisely and exclusively the potentially incriminating part."

Now, isn't that just a little strange? I mean, if you had said something incriminating on a tape, and were determined to erase that part and then turn the tape over to a judge and a bunch of experts, would you erase "precisely and exclusively the potentially incriminating part?" Wouldn't you erase some of the non-incriminating part as well — to make the action look less deliberate, and to avoid focusing so narrowly on the tender section?

A friend of mine, who favors Nixon's resignation, conceded that Mr. Nixon was too smart to erase "precisely and exclusively the potentially incriminating part," but gamely speculated that perhaps Rose Mary Woods did the actual erasing and that maybe she is that dumb.

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COME ON, gang. Stop insulting your own intelligence and everybody else's. The tape erasure is indeed a mystery; but you haven't pinned it on Nixon, and it certainly isn't why you favor ousting him. If you really prize candor so highly, why not practice it yourselves?

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