

TV Views

Those White House Tapes

By Les Brown
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THE NEWS DIVISIONS of the television networks have begun to lay plans for specials to be televised the week the White House tape recordings on the Watergate cover-up become available for air play, which they have been advised will be no sooner than January 3 and, in any case, not until the cover-up trial ends.



The networks succeeded in their attempt to secure access to the recordings introduced in evidence in the trial when Judge Gerhard A. Gesell ruled last week, in United States District Court, that the tape exhibits were public documents and therefore public property. The tapes will be

made available to commercial recording companies as well as to broadcasters.

But Judge Gesell had indicated that the release of the recordings would be held up until a method of reproducing them could be established that would assure fair and equitable distribution to those who had applied for access.

Heads of the network news division said Wednesday that they would not race each other to be first on the air with specials based on the tapes, although they expected to play sample portions of the recordings on their evening newscasts the day they are released.

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ALTHOUGH cognizant of the problems in building a special for a visual medium upon aural materials, and although aware that many of the tapes may not be audible under broadcast conditions, the networks have each made assignments for the project.

Richard C. Wald, president of NBC News, said that Don Meaney, head of the Washington Bureau, would be in charge of working out the general scheme and determining which tapes might be used. Carl Stern, who has been covering the trial for NBC, would be the reporter on the special.

Wald said the broadcast would not necessarily occur in prime time but might be more suitably scheduled at 11:30 p.m. He said there were still serious questions as to whether most of the tapes "would hold up for broadcast" and held out the possibility that they might not be sufficient for a program.

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THE ABC SPECIAL would be produced by Bob Siegenthaler and that of CBS by Russ Bensley, with David Schoumacher and Fred Graham having drawn the respective reporting assignments.

William Sheehan, president of ABC News, said the ABC program was being planned initially from the written transcripts and that "ABC is inclined not to dramatize" the recordings on the screen. He indicated that the written text might be projected on the screen while the tapes were being played.

Wald said that NBC, for a visual accompaniment to the audio tapes, might use the sketches of the trial, with a running tape across the bottom of the screen carrying the transcript.

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ACCORDING to Sheehan, ABC envisions "an edited program designed to put the issues of the trial in perspective. NBC, on the other hand, desires to play the pertinent tapes in full, if possible, with no editing. "We have to present the tapes as they are, to give the sense of the whole matter," Wald said.

He said that NBC was planning to concentrate on the recordings relating to the question of hush money, to whether there were plans to put the blame on former Attorney General John Mitchell, to the methods of cover-up and to how the cover-up was working.

Wald said there would be no attempt by NBC to censor the language in the recordings, even where there were expletives or profanity. Sheehan indicated that the editing, or a late-night presentation, might solve the problem of rough language.

Terrence O'Flaherty is sick.