

The Nixon Tapes

A NEW LAW PUTS former President Nixon's White House tapes under the custody of the General Services Administration and makes most of those not dealing with national security available for public inspection.

This disposition of the Oval Office tapes is a denial of the conventional view that Presidential papers belong to the President after he leaves office. No doubt Mr. Nixon will go to court to resist the reach of this law.

But presumably there is a different issue to be considered with respect to the particular tapes that were played to the jury in Judge Sirica's court last month. These electronic records, says Judge Gesell, are publishable like any court document. Their publication and sale on records is about to get under way. That will be embarrassing to the former President but it is hard to see how it can be prevented. What the prospect reveals is Mr. Nixon's error and folly of having conducted and recorded conversations in the first place that would come back to haunt the participants.