

What Might Have Been If Nixon Had Burned Tapes

Washington

Richard Nixon might still be president if he had destroyed the White House tapes when they first became publicly known, said former special Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

Jaworski made his comments in an interview taped for presentation tonight on Public Broadcasting Service's "Martin Agronsky: Evening Edition."

Asked if Mr. Nixon had destroyed the tapes whether he might still be President, Jaworski responded:

"If he had destroyed the tapes at the time or near the time when it was first known that there was a recording system in the White House, I would answer your question in the affirmative; I'd say yes."

But Jaworski added, if Mr. Nixon had waited and "undertaken to destroy them after the Supreme Court had acted, I don't think the wamerican people would have permitted it. I think he would have been impeached."

Responding to a question of why Mr. Nixon didn't destroy the

tapes, Jaworski said his speculation is that "in the first place, I think that the President never did believe he would have to surrender those tape recordings . . . But I think he also had another motivating factor, and that is that he looked upon these tape recordings as having a tremendous value. I'm talking about real intrinsic value, you know, and some day a real market value."

Jaworski was also asked if the 18-minute gap in one tape will ever be explained.

"I understand an investigation is still in progress so I really don't know what the outcome of that will be," he responded.

Jaworski said he has "a fairly strong suspicion" of who was responsible for the 18-minute gap in one tape of Mr. Nixon's conversations with White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman the first full work day after the 1972 Watergate break-in.

He said, however, the suspicion was not supported by enough evidence to warrant an indictment.

Asked if he felt the Justice Department should be separated



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Judge Walsh (left) and Leon Jaworski on 'Issues and Answers'

from the control of the president, Jaworski said it should remain in the cabinet.

Judge Lawrence Walsh, president-elect of the American Bar Association, appearing on the program with Jaworski, suggested another possibility might be to require that an attorney general refrain from political activity for a period after leaving office.