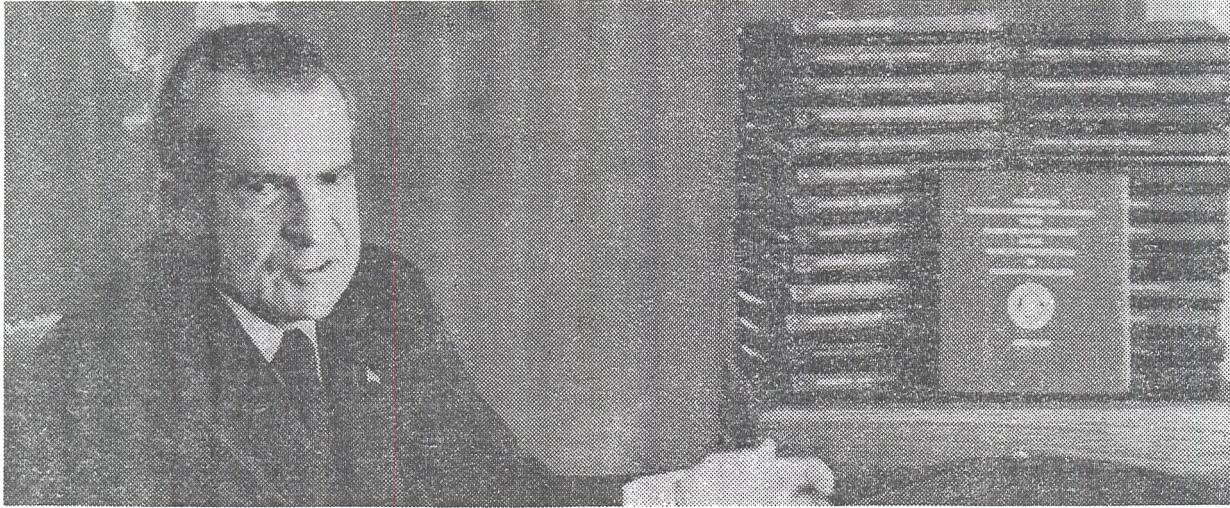


# Nixon: 'Would have destroyed'



Richard Nixon and transcripts of the fatal tapes during a televised talk in April 1974

## tapes

New York News

WASHINGTON — Former President Richard Nixon says that he would have destroyed the damning White House tapes had he known they would become public and that they contained evidence of criminal conduct.

In an emotional conclusion to the series of TV interviews with David Frost — actually a collection of taped material that was not used in four 90-minute programs aired earlier this year — Nixon also said that if it hadn't been for Martha Mitchell's "mental and emotional problem...there'd have been no Watergate."

Referring to his former attorney general and campaign director John Mitchell, Nixon said: "John wasn't minding the store. He was practically out of his mind about Martha in the spring of 1972. He was letting

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(Jeb) Magruder and all those boys, these kids, these nuts, run this thing."

Nixon denied that either he or his long-time personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, had caused the notorious 18½-minute gap in a key Watergate tape recording.

He said he "never had access...to the machine on which the experts said the accident or erasure occurred. I never touched it."

"Rose Woods did have the machine," Nixon said. "But I know she would tell the truth and has always told the truth, and that if she had done it (erased the tape)...that, ah, she's so smart she'd (laughter) a done'a...she'd destroyed a lot more."

Unlike the first four programs, which were carried by 165 stations last spring, the fifth show was to be broadcast by only about 60 stations at various times during the month

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## Nixon on press image: 'I'm not a very lovable man . . .'

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of September. In the Bay Area, the interview will be shown this Thursday on Channels 4 and 8.

The show was given a preview showing for members of the press here yesterday afternoon.

Frost said that much of the material on the White House tapes came from Nixon's answer to the very first question when they began taping the interviews early this year. The question, Frost said, was, "Why didn't you burn the tapes?"

Nixon replied that in April 1973 — three months before their existence was publicly disclosed — he had "suggested and I believe directed" then-White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman "to destroy those that had no historical value, those that involved the family...political or

other friends and so forth and so on."

But Nixon said Haldeman never carried out his directive and that he did not destroy the tapes himself before a court ordered him to release them to the Watergate special prosecutor because "I didn't believe that there was anything on them that would, ah, ah, be detrimental to me."

"I also must admit," he said, "(that) in all candor I (didn't) believe that they were going to come out. The second point was that I didn't destroy them because I felt that... had I done so, it would have been an open admission, or at least appeared to be an admission, 'Well, I'm trying to cover something up.'"

Asked by Frost if, in hindsight,

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he didn't wish he had gotten rid of the tapes, Nixon replied, "Well, as a matter of fact, if the tapes had been destroyed, I believe that it is likely that I would not have had to go through the agony of resignation and, ah, consequently, I wish that Mr. Haldeman perhaps had either taken my instruction, if it was an instruction, ah, or suggestion ... and destroyed those except those that had major significance from a policy standpoint."

Nixon, who frequently used gutter language in his recorded White House conversations, told Frost that if he had known the tapes would become public and "that there was conversation that was criminal, I sure as the dickens — I could use stronger expletives, but not before this home audience — I sure as the dickens would have destroyed them."

Nixon spent considerable time discussing his stormy relationship with news media.

"I suppose that one of the

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reasons that the press' attitude toward me through the years has been at times not too favorable (is) that I'm not a very lovable man," he said.

At another point in the program, Nixon volunteered a lengthy account of Mitchell's relationship with his wife.

"John's problem was not Watergate, it was Martha," Nixon said of his former law partner and attorney general, who is now serving a prison term for his role in

Watergate, and of Mrs. Mitchell, who died of cancer last year.

Nixon admitted that he joined with Haldeman and other White House aides in an effort, early in 1973, to get Mitchell to take the blame for Watergate. But he said he was recounting Mitchell's problems with his wife "to explain my feeling of compassion for my friend, John Mitchell."

"John Mitchell is a smart man," Nixon said. "He's too smart to ever get involved in a stupid jackass thing like Watergate."