

Module 10: How Will Historians Treat Richard Nixon?

Evidence 27: Address to the Nation About the Release of Tapes, April 29, 1974



Question to Consider

- How does the evidence below refute or support the views of the three historians outlined in the Conclusion of this module?

Document

Ever since the existence of the White House taping system was first made known last summer, I have tried vigorously to guard the privacy of the tapes. I have been well aware that my effort to protect the confidentiality of Presidential conversations has heightened the sense of mystery about Watergate and, in fact, has caused increased suspicions of the President. Many people assume that the tapes must incriminate the President, or that otherwise, he would not insist on their privacy. But the problem I confronted was this: Unless a President can protect the privacy of the advice he gets, he cannot get the advice he needs. This principle is recognized in the constitutional doctrine of executive privilege, which has been defended and maintained by every President since Washington and which has been recognized by the courts, whenever tested, as inherent in the Presidency. I consider it to be my constitutional responsibility to defend this principle.

Three factors have now combined to persuade me that a major unprecedented exception to that principle is now necessary: First, in the present circumstances, the House of Representatives must be able to reach an informed judgment about the President's role in Watergate. Second, I am making a major exception to the principle of confidentiality because I believe such action is now necessary in order to restore the principle itself, by clearing the air of the central question that has brought such pressures upon it--and also to provide the evidence which will allow this matter to be brought to a prompt conclusion. Third, in the context of the current impeachment climate, I believe all the American people, as well as their representatives in Congress, are entitled to have not only the facts but also

the evidence that demonstrates those facts. I want there to be no question remaining about the fact that the President has nothing to hide in this matter.

I am confident that for the overwhelming majority of those who study the evidence that I shall release tomorrow--those who are willing to look at it fully, fairly, and objectively--the evidence will be persuasive and, I hope, conclusive. We live in a time of very great challenge and great opportunity for America. We live at a time when peace may become possible in the Middle East for the first time in a generation. We are at last in the process of fulfilling the hope of mankind for a limitation on nuclear arms--a process that will continue when I meet with the Soviet leaders in Moscow in a few weeks.

We are well on the way toward building a peace that can last, not just for this but for other generations as well. And here at home, there is vital work to be done in moving to control inflation, to develop our energy resources, to strengthen our economy so that Americans can enjoy what they have not had since 1956: full prosperity without war and without inflation. Every day absorbed by Watergate is a day lost from the work that must be done by your President and by your Congress work that must be done in dealing with the great problems that affect your prosperity, affect your security, that could affect your lives. The materials I make public tomorrow will provide all the additional evidence needed to get Watergate behind us and to get it behind us now.

Never before in the history of the Presidency have records that are so private been made so public. In giving you these records--blemishes and all--I am placing my trust in the basic fairness of the American people. I know in my own heart that through the long, painful, and difficult process revealed in these transcripts, I was trying in that period to discover what was right and to do what was right. I hope and I trust that when you have seen the evidence in its entirety, you will see the truth of that statement.

Source:

Obtained courtesy of John Woolley and Gerhard Peters at The American Presidency Project, University of California at Santa Barbara,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.