

NIXON TAPES, TUESDAY, 15 JUNE 1971
TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH CHARLES COLSON, 6:21 P.M.
SOURCE: NIXON PRESIDENTIAL MATERIALS PROJECT, WHT-5-81
TRANSCRIBED BY EDDIE MEADOWS, NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

OPERATOR: Mr. President, I have Mr. Colson for you

NIXON: Yeah

COLSON: Yes - yes sir, Mr. President

NIXON: I was thinking on our - uh, this - uh - uh, New York Times thing
Uh [stammering] maybe you could generate some support from some of our - our constituent groups
on this - you know - uh, like for example - uh, I think veterans and - uh - uh

COLSON: Yes sir

NIXON: And - uh, fellow like Meany ought to pop-up on this one, you know

COLSON: Uh-huh

NIXON: I mean this - and also I think that on the congressional side that what is really needed - here's a
great opportunity for s - a young congressman, or - uh, a vigorous congressman and
senator or so, to really - uh, go - go - go all out on a thing like this
You know now they're - they have the privilege of the - you know - they - they're - what they
have is - uh, of course - uh, they can say anything they please - uh, on the floor - uh,
and even though the case is gonna be in the courts

COLSON: Right

NIXON: We're gonna be stuck with it; but on the other hand - uh - uh, we can't say much; but - uh, but
I - I think that it's very important to - to - to build a backfire on these people
Understand, I - I personally think that if we cast this in the right direction, Chuck, this could
backfire on the Times - I [unclear]

COLSON: Oh I think absolutely [unclear]

NIXON: They're playing by their own constituency
Now, we've got to get across several points: one, it's the Kennedy-Johnson papers

COLSON: Uh-huh

NIXON: [Unclear, stammering] basically - that's what we're talking about - the Kennedy-Johnson papers,
and that gets it out of our way
Second, it's a family quarrel; we're not gonna comment on [unclear]

COLSON: Yes sir

NIXON: But what we have is the larger responsibility, to maintain the integrity of government

COLSON: Wholly unrelated to these papers

NIXON: [Unclear] and - uh, wholly unrelated [unclear] integrity of government, like as Rogers said in his
press conferences, he had inquiries from foreign governments today, as to whether
their papers were s - uh, classified - er, you know

COLSON: Right

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NIXON: And that - uh, this also involves - uh - it really - it really does involve this, I mean it really involves the ability to conduct government - how the hell can a president, or a secretary of defense, or anybody do anything

COLSON: That's right

NIXON: And - uh, how can [unclear 'he'? 'they'?] make a contingency plan if it's gonna be taken out in a trunk and given to a god-damn newspaper

COLSON: Well, I don't think there's any question Mr. President that it'll ba- my own feeling is that it will backfire against the New York Times, and we can help generate this
I - [unclear] matter of fact we have a meeting going on at the moment, that I - [unclear] that I came out of to talk to you, but [unclear]

NIXON: Alright, fine.
Well then go ahead and meet

COLSON: No, No - the - the purpose of it is to - uh, generate some editorials in the other newspapers, that are highly critical - like the Chicago Tribune ought to give us a good play; the New York Daily news should

NIXON: Sure, well - uh, Hearst papers refused to print it

COLSON: That's right

NIXON: And they subscribe - they ought to take it on, but the papers - the newspaper establishment ought to come - they've got to say whether they're going to approve this kind of thing
Also, I think a network ought to step up for this one

COLSON: Strangely enough, one of the uh, most outspoken fellows in the meeting that we've just been holding on this very subject is Ray Price, who thinks that - uh,

NIXON: Does he

COLSON: The newspapers are [unclear] - thinks the New York Times is totally irresponsible

NIXON: Well he's a decent man - that's the reason - he's a man of integrity

COLSON: That's right [unclear]
We can certainly get the veterans groups - uh, [unclear]

NIXON: Yeah - uh- you know, I think some of them should - they ought to put - cast this - [stammering] listen - uh, the main thing is to cast it in terms of doing something disloyal to the country

COLSON: That's right

NIXON: This risks our men you know - just - uh, all that sort of thing - secret - uh, things that - uh, aid and comfort to the enemy - I mean, after all - [unclear] Jesus, its - uh,

COLSON: I think the Times position is indefensible; I think that - uh, it's - it's distinguishable from any other case, in that here we went to them and said you can't publish that; it's a violation of security, and they said to hell with you we're going ahead and publish anyway
So we - we - we would have been very, very remiss in our duties had we not taken whatever legal means were available to prevent it - and - uh, I think we [unclear] - I think you'll find a great deal of popular support for - uh,

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NIXON: If we can generate
Now, they're - they're running the line, Chuck, a right to know - b - raise that with Price; ask
him how do you answer 'right to know'?
That's of course a Goddamn code-word: right to know - the public has no right to know secret
documents

COLSON: Well we've been

NIXON: I don't want to know

COLSON: No, of course not
And [unclear, stammering] you can make the point that - that 'right to know' does not include
things which will compromise the - either the security [unclear, both talking]

NIXON: [Unclear] which will injure the country, and - and right - and - and freedom of the press does not
- is not the freedom to - uh, destroy the integrity of the government - to print - uh,
well

COLSON: [Unclear] there's never a - [unclear] in these kinds of issues, Mr. President - uh, you never get
into the argument of - of -uh, degree - it's a - you're - you're either a little bit
pregnant or you're not

NIXON: That's right

COLSON: And if you - if it were the battle plan for the withdrawal of troops next week, that could subject
boys to attack, why there'd be no argument about it
Now the integrity of the system as a whole is at stake

NIXON: That's right

COLSON: You simply cannot allow a newspaper to publish classified documents

NIXON: If they justify this, then in any future ca - case, then the publisher of a paper will put himself -
that was really what Alger Hiss did you see

COLSON: That's right

NIXON: He put himself on a higher pedestal, and said well, the Russians are entitled to know this; and he
passed the information, and th - then

NIXON: And the New York Times was among the papers that supported him in that

COLSON: That's right

NIXON: Now the point is that here, what the Times has done, is placed itself above the law
They say the law provides this; but we consider this an immoral war; it's our responsibility to print
it
Now Goddammit you can't have that thing in a free country

COLSON: [Unclear], that's irrelevant, and the right to know issue doesn't really come in there [unclear, both
talking]

NIXON: Well, pour it on them

COLSON: We'll - we'll pour it on - we're coming up with

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NIXON: *Get some congressmen stirred up*

COLSON: *We'll get the congress, and some editorials, and [unclear] our groups*

NIXON: *Good*

COLSON: *Yes sir*

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