

Hunt rips media, Sirica and congress

By KATHY PARKER

The 1972 break-in at Democratic headquarters in the Watergate complex, which touched off a national scandal and toppled the Nixon administration, had "the color of a lawful undertaking" when it occurred, said E. Howard Hunt, former CIA officer and Watergate conspirator.

Hunt, released from prison last month after 32 months of detention for his part in the break-in, made his remarks Monday in an hour-long talk at Oakland University. Some 700 persons listened intently as Hunt traced the history of Watergate, described his imprisonment and blasted the media for "creating a public trauma."

"Our country and its people are the overwhelming victims of Watergate," Hunt said. "It shocked and embarrassed our allies and gave heart to our committed enemies."

Hunt said Watergate actually began with the Viet Nam war, "sprouted during the Johnson administration and came to fruition during the march on the Pentagon." He said it was a "gift to those who disliked policies of national strength."

HUNT said former Atty. General John Mitchell, aide Jeb McGrunder and former White House counsel John Dean were "the original Watergate conspirators," and traced the ill-fated Huston and Gerston plans of political sabotage through the establishment of the Plumbers unit.

He said the \$250,000 of presidential campaign funds used to finance Gerston "persuaded me that the operation had the president's knowledge, encouragement and blessing."

The conspirators were "subjected to physical humiliation," Hunt said, and placed in an "atmosphere of hostility" during legal proceedings.

"I have served more time and paid more money for my part in it than anyone else," he said. "I served in four federal prisons and nine different flea-ridden, roach-filled jails."

Hunt said he and others imprisoned during the Watergate affair were the "real victims" and that the media, Congress and Judge John Sirica were "morally wrong" in their handling of the affair.

Hunt, who received \$2,000 from Union Productions, OU's student concert-lecture board, for his appearance, said he has "no sense of reconciliation because I never received one crumb of mercy." Election year doomed his chances of commutation, he said.

HUNT REFERRED to his incarceration and trial as "a travesty. I was interrogated like a menacing Russian spy by my inquisitors. Too little food, terrible conditions, interrupted sleep—my sensory inputs were restricted, and I became disoriented."

When his wife was killed one month before his trial was to begin, Hunt changed his plea to guilty because he was "devastated," he said. "I hoped for the mercy of the court, but Judge (John) Sirica was not to be denied his headline inquisition."

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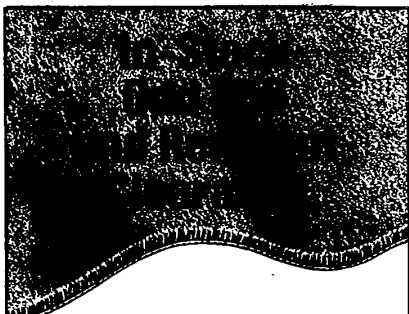
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