

Transcript of a Dictabelt Recording
of a Conversation Between Howard
Hunt and Charles Colson, November
1972

COLSON: Hello.

HUNT: Hi.

COLSON: How we doin'?

HUNT: Well, uh, about as can be expected. How are you?

COLSON: Uh, just about the same Christ tryin' to hold the pieces together.

HUNT: Yeah. Congratulations on your victory.

COLSON: Thank you. Uh, you, uh, I'm sorry that uh, we haven't been celebrating it together with some, uh, good champagne and, uh, good scotch, but uh, (unintelligible)...

HUNT: (Laughs) (Unintelligible) may yet come a time. Who knows

COLSON: It'll come, I assure ya. Let me, uh, let me before you say anything, let me say a couple of things. One, uh, I don't know what's going on here other than, I am told that, uh, uh, everybody's gonna come out all right. That's all I know

HUNT: Uh huh

COLSON: And, uh, I've deliberately not asked any specific questions.

HUNT: Right.

COLSON: For this reason: that, uh, I have my own ideas about how things'll turn out...

HUNT: uh huh.

COLSON: but-and I'm not worried about 'em and you shouldn't be-but, I've always thought that if it came to a, uh, open trial that I would wanna be free to, uh, come into

COLSON: it and, uh, uh, character and, uh testimony and, uh, etc, etc,

HUNT: Yes. Un hmm.

COLSON: Uh, therefore the less details I know of what's going on, in some ways the better.

HUNT: Yes, I appreciate that.

COLSON: This is all. So, I have tried to stay out, uh, of asking specific questions, and it's very hard for me to do that for the reason that you're an old and dear friend and, uh, uh, I'm sure you, you regret the day I ever recommended you to the White House.

HUNT: Not in the least, Chuck, I'm just sorry that it turned out the way it did.

COLSON: Well, I am too, obviously, and I, I hope the hell you had nothing to do with it and I've clung to that belief and have told people that, and uh, and if you did have anything to do with it, I'm god-damn sure it's because you were doing what you were told to do...

HUNT: That's exactly right...

COLSON: ...'cause you're a loyal soldier, obviously, and always have been...

HUNT: Would you be willing to...

COLSON: ...for your country.

HUNT: (Laughs) Would you be, ah, ah, willing to receive a memorandum from me?

COLSON: Well, the only-yeah. Uh

HUNT: For your general information...

COLSON: Yeah, except...

HUNT: ...'cause I think it might help you. I...

COLSON: ...except, there are things you may not want to tell me

HUNT: No, there's really nothing I don't want to tell you, I would think that you could receive this memorandum, read it, and destroy it.

COLSON: No, I couldn't.

HUNT: You couldn't do that

COLSON: Nope. The reason I can't is the same reason- your letter to me -when I got that and then I was asked by federal authorities did I ever-had I had any communication, I said, "Yeah, I've received this letter and here's here it is." You know, I, I can't--- you can't get in the position where you're, uh, perjuring.

HUNT: No, of course not.

COLSON: So, I....

HUNT: Which I'm afraid John Mitchell has already done

COLSON: Well

COLSON: ...I can't-the problem is, you see, I don't want to get in the position of, uh, uh, I don't want to get in the position of knowing something that I don't now know for the reason that, I wanna be perfectly free to help ya, and the only way I can help Ya and the only way I can help ya is, uh to remain as completely uh, you know, unknowing as I am.

HUNT: I see

COLSON: See, my problem-let me tell ya the problem-is that, uh, well, I can do you a lot more good by, by not know-by honestly being able to testify that I don't know, just don't know the answer, uh, and I don't

HUNT: Uh huh.

COLSON: And right now I don't know anything about the Goddamn Watergate. Now...

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...supposing Teddy Kennedy holds his hearings, and I get called up there. Well uh, I can't refuse to answer and I wouldn't. I'd answer that, uh, I just don't know. I had no idea what happened.

HUNT: Yeah, uh hmm

COLSON: And I don't

HUNT: Of course, I'm never going to be put on the stand, as it stands now.

COLSON: That's right.

HUNT: And, uh, so I won't have the opportunity to say one, one thing or another.

COLSON: Well, you don't want to.

HUNT: You wouldn't be willing to talk to my attorney--wouldn't that be a different affair?

COLSON: Uh, (pause) I don't know, Howard, I don't know whether it is or it isn't. He would...

HUNT: That would...

COLSON: ...He would know best, as it were.

HUNT: ...that was a suggestion of his.

COLSON: Well, hell, I'll talk to him, that's not a problem. I mean I'll be glad to talk to him, I'm sure that you're being watched.

HUNT: Oh, I am too.

COLSON: And uh, not by federal authorities...

HUNT: No, no.

COLSON: I'm sure the Washington Post is watching you.

HUNT: No. Ah--well, the reason I called you was to make, uh--get back to the beginning, here--is because of commitments, uh, that were made to all of us at onset, have not been kept. And there's a great deal of unease and concern on the part of seven defendants and possibly, well I'm quite sure, me least of all. But, uh, there's a great deal of uh, of uh, financial expense here that is not been covered and what we've been getting has been coming in, uh, very minor dribs and drabs. And, uh, Parkinson, who's been the go-between with my attorney doesn't seem to be very effective and we're now reaching a point at which, uh...

COLSON: Okay. You've told me all, all, that, that--don't tell me any more

HUNT: Okay

COLSON: ...'cause I, I understand that--lemme, lemm just, uh...

HUNT: Because these people have really got to dig--this is a long haul thing but stakes are very, very high...

COLSON: (unintelligible)...

HUNT: ...and I thought that you would want to know that this thing must not break apart, uh, for foolish reasons.

COLSON: I agree. Yeah. Oh no Christ no. Everybody gets...

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...gets, uh...

HUNT: Well, and while we get, uh you know third, fourth hand reassurances, still, the, "the ready" is not available.

COLSON: Um hmm.

HUNT: (laughs)

COLSON: I follow,

HUNT: That's the basic problem

COLSON: I follow ya. I follow ya. Okay. Well, that's that--you, you've told me all I need to know

HUNT: All right.

COLSON: And, uh, and I can--I mean I--the, the less I know really of--

HUNT: Okay

COLSON: ...Uh, what, what happened, the more help I can be to you.

HUNT: All right, now, we've set a deadline now for close of business on the 25th of November for the resolutions, the liquidation of everything that's outstanding.

COLSON: Um hmm.

HUNT: And this is--I'm now talking about promises from July and August.

COLSON: Um hmm.

HUNT: There just, uh, been a apparent, uh, unconcern, uh,-- of course, we can understand some hesitancy prior to the election, but there doesn't seem to be any of that now. Of course we're well aware of the upcoming problems of the Senate, and, uh...

COLSON: Well, that's where it gets hairy as hell

HUNT: (Unintelligible) other things.

COLSON: --for your information, H-,Howard, uh, this thing--of course this thing has hurt hurt us all because, uh, uh everybody--it, w-, it, it, it's just unfortunate as hell. But,...

HUNT: Uh hmm.

COLSON: ...but the Democrats made such an issue out of the whole goddamn...

HUNT: Well, on the other hand, it...

COLSON: Well, I always thought when I write my memoirs of this book---of this campaign--that I'm gonna say that the Watergate was brilliantly conceived as an escapade that would, uh, divert the Democrats' attention from the real issues, and therefore permit us to win a landslide that we probably wouldn't have won otherwise.

HUNT

AND

COLSON: (Laughter)

COLSON: Seriously!

HUNT: Whether you believed it or not.

COLSON: No, I--listen, I think there's a little--there's a good bit of validity to that thesis.

HUNT: I do too. Um Hmm.

COLSON: I really do. Dumb bastards were, uh, were on an issue that the public couldn't care less about--really.

HUNT: You see, I, I haven't known at any time what sort of an input you were getting from Dean and other people...

COLSON: Minimum.

HUNT: ...about who was responsible for all of this.

COLSON: Minimum for, for very good reasons, because if somebody told me...

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: See h-, let me tell you the position I'm in. I, I, whether I stay in the White House for a while or whether I leave---doesn't matter—I wanna to be in a position to help you.

HUNT: Right.

COLSON: Okay, that means I have to be able to openly talk to people...

HUNT: Um hmm

COLSON: ...and, uh, and no matter who it is, d'uh, from a character standpoint or anything else, be able to say things about you that I wanna say. Now, I can'' do that the moment I know something that makes it impossible for me to talk to people.

HUNT: Right.

COLSON: And the moment I know something that makes it impossible for me to talk to people...

HUNT: Um-hmm.

COLSON: ...then I gotta be, then I gotta be uh, uh, kept, uh, in the background and can't talk.

HUNT: Yes.

COLSON: And I wanna talk. So (laughs)...

COLSON: As long as I can help ya, and I'm gonna, I'm gonna see that, I'm gonna see that you don't get a bad break out of this an' tell you sometime about that.

HUNT: I would hope that, uh, somewhere along the line, uh, the uh, uh, people who were paralyzed initially by this within the White House would now start to give, uh, some creative, uh, thinking to the affair. And uh...

COLSON: Oh, that's fine, that's true.

HUNT: ...and, and some, uh, affirmative action for Christ's sake.

COLSON: That's true. That's true.

HUNT: I mean, I think now is the time for it. And we expect it now and, and we want it.

COLSON: Yep.

HUNT: And, uh, the election's out of the way, uh, initial terror of a number of people has subsided, some people have already left the administration, and that's all to the good.

COLSON: Um hmm.

HUNT: So now it's pared down to the point where, uh, a few people ought to be able to really concentrate on this, get the goddamn thing out of the way once and for all.

COLSON: Um hum.

HUNT: Because, uh, I don't want to, uh (laughs) bore you with what it's been like, but it hasn't been pleasant for any of us.

COLSON: Oh, Jesus Christ I know it. I hope you're doing some writing to keep yourself busy, and, uh,...

HUNT: Oh, I am. Yeah, I am. I don't know if anything'll ever come of it, but it's a good-uh, well, it keeps my mind from from my plight. (Laughs)

COLSON: Um hum.

HUNT: Put it that way. (Laughs). So that, uh, uh I, I was never clear in my own mind and I'm still not and I'm not going to ask you, that, uh, one of the initial outputs, uh, that I had read about was, well, uh this is done by a bunch of wild-assed guys, and so forth. Well that's fine,

HUNT: after all we're protecting the guys who, who were really responsible. But now that's uh,-and then of course that's a continuing, uh, requirement, but at the same time, this is a two-way street.

COLSON: Um hum. Um hum.

HUNT: And uh, as I said before, we think that now is the time when, uh some moves should be made and, uh, surely your cheapest commodity available is money. These lawyers have not been paid.

COLSON: Hmm.

HUNT: There are large sums of money outstanding. That's the principal thing. Our living allowances which are due again on the 31st of this month, uh, that, we want that stuff well in hand and for some months in advance.

COLSON: Um Hum.

HUNT: I, I think these are all reasonable requests. They were all promised in advance and uh, ah, reaffirmed from time to time to my attorney, and so forth. So in turn, I've been giving commitments to the people who look to me.

COLSON: Um Hum.

HUNT: And, uh...

COLSON: I follow, I'm reading it.

HUNT: SO, I know you are.

COLSON: You don't, you don't need to be, don't need to be more explicit.

HUNT: ...I don't, I don't want to belabor it.

COLSON: No, it isn't a question of that. It's just that, uh, less, the less specific I know the better off I am.

HUNT: Okay.

COLSON: The better off we are-you are.

HUNT: All right.

COLSON: (Laughs) You know.

HUNT: So, Parkinson, uh Parkinson is out of town 'til next Monday, at which time a memorandum is gonna be laid on him and he's going to be made aware of the...

COLSON: I'll tell you one thing I've said to people. And uh, I just want you to know this because I think it's important. I have told people the truth, that I have known you for a long time. That, uh I've, considered you a personal friend. Uh, you're a personal in whom I've had high regard and high confidence a patriot, real patriot-and that had you ever been the one masterminding this, it never would have fallen apart. That the reason that I am convinced-and I told this to the federal authorities and the Grand Jury-uh, the reason that I am convinced that you, Howard Hunt, never had a goddamn thing to do with this, or if you did have anything to do with it, it was on the peripheries, is that if you ever did it, you'd do it a lot smarter than this. And uh, you know, that I've known how you've operated over the years.

HUNT: Chuck, if, uh, if I'd had my say, it never would have been done at all.

COLSON: Well, o.k.

HUNT: Let me put it that way.

COLSON: Say no more.

HUNT: The position of another fellow too.

COLSON: Say no more.

HUNT: All right. 'Cause there's, there was, uh...

COLSON: Say no more.

HUNT: ...high risk, low gain. O.k.

COLSON: Well, I never knew about-you know, course, obviously I never...

HUNT: That's right.

COLSON: ...knew of the goddamn thing.

HUNT: There was no -and I've always maintained to, to my attorney, uh, who, of course has my complete confidence in this matter, that uh...

COLSON: Um hum.

HUNT: ...that you absolutely had nothing to do with it.

COLSON: No shit! Well, I'll tell ya, if I'd never known it was comin', I would have said to you as a friend...

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...if some asshole wants to do this, fine, but don't you get in-, involved.

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: I mean, if, if, y-, you and I, if we'd ever had ever had a conversation like that, I would have said, my god...

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...don't, don't-you know. But, b-b-but the point, the point, I, I've made is that you're a smart-amo-among many other qualities,

COLSON: you are a brilliant operator, and brilliant operators just don't get into this kind of a thing. So I've I've held-an, and I was asked but, -and this is why I don't want to know anything different. This was why I was asked by the Bureau, "Well, what about, uh, uh, what about Hunt?" And I'd say, "Well," I could honestly say, "Look, I've known this guy a long time, he's a very smart fellow, and I can't for the life of me conceive that he would ever get himself into this kind of a situation." So I want to be able to stay in that position. That's why I don't, I don't want you to tell me anything (laughs)...

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...beyond that. Give my love to Dorothy, will you.

HUNT: All right, I will. And, uh...

COLSON: I know it's hard on you and the kids, and, and, uh...

HUNT: It's awful tough, my daughter up at Smith is really getting a rough time.

COLSON: Is she really?

HUNT: (Clears throat) Very, very hard time, yeah.

COLSON: Well, you know I tell ya, uh, I find that, that, uh, it's only the rough experiences in life- and you've had your share of them, God knows-uh, that really harden ya and something outta ya, and, uh, you learn by 'em and become a better man for it and uh, uh-we'll talk about that there. Y-you'll come out of this fine. I'm positive of that.

HUNT: Well, I want all of us to come out of it fine.

COLSON: Yeah, it's just a goddamn shame.

HUNT: Including you.

COLSON: Well, I'm, you know, I'm, m-my position. eh, eh, I suppose has been hurt in one sense that I've been, had been publically tarred by- obviously people around here know I didn't have anything to do with it. But, so be it. We'll all come out of it. Don't worry about that. That's the last thing to worry about. And uh, I understand this message and let me uh...

HUNT: Okay. If you can (unintelligible)...

COLSON: ...lemme get it (unintelligible)

HUNT: ...to me about it, I, I would think the sooner they can get moving on it, the better.

COLSON: Okay.

HUNT: All right.

COLSON: Great, Howard.

HUNT: Good to talk to you...

COLSON: Take care.

HUNT: And I'll discuss with Bittman whether he still feels that he needs to talk to you.

COLSON: All right, and, uh, as soon as, I feel that the situation-the future of the thing is clearing enough...

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...that you and I can get together, we're damn well going to do it. But, I don't want to do it...

HUNT: No, no, no...

COLSON: ...prematurely, because what it'll do is cause-well, it'll limit my ability to help ya.

HUNT: I, uh-Chuck, I understand that completely...

COLSON: I'm sure you do, you know...

HUNT: ...believe me...

COLSON: ...it's, it's-I'm in a better position...

HUNT: ...which is why I never tried to get in touch with you.

COLSON: ...I'm in a better position to help ya, uh, if I can honestly swear under oath, which I can do, I don't know a goddamn thing about it. And I don't. And, uh, as long as I'm in that position, then I can say what kind of a guy I think Howard Hunt is and why I think this is a bum rap. Okay?

HUNT: Okay

COLSON: Take care Howard. We'll be in touch.

HUNT: All right. Is your family all right?

COLSON: Oh, they're doing fine.

HUNT: You're boy's doing well in school, I'm sure...

COLSON: Yeah, he's doing great. And uh,...

HUNT: (Laughs)

COLSON: He's at Princeton, and he's takin' you know, he's takin' a lotta heat, just like you're talkin' about. Uh...

HUNT: Oh, he must have. Yeah.

COLSON: Oh, sure, I mean when, when, uh...

HUNT: Well, ab-, about the only counsel I can give my daughter, is that people who would do that sort of thing are the kind who would pull the wings off flies.

COLSON: Um hmm.

HUNT: And they're no really the sort of people she would really want to have as friends or even as associates, in any case.

COLSON: Well, I said the same thing to my son, you know, when the indictments were announced.

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: He said everybody at Princeton said, uh, "Well, your old man beat the rap."

HUNT: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's sort of...

COLSON: Isn't that, isn't that great?

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: You know, doesn't that make you feel wonderful? Jesus, and I said the same thing to him, and he's gotten so he doesn't (unintelligible). That's the price, that's the price you pay for serving your country and, you know, you're gonna take the good with the bad. That's all. So, if, you believe in what you're doin', you believe in what you're doin', that's what you have to--that has to be the ultimate consolation for all of us.

HUNT: Well, it does indeed. Are you going to be able to take some time off? (Unintelligible).

COLSON: God, I hope so, Howard. I'm plannin' to in December sometime.

HUNT: Yeah.

COLSON: If I can possibly wheel outta here. But uh--well, you take care of yourself. Don't let it get you. Don't let it, don't let it, uh, don't let it wear down the great spirit...

HUNT: O.k.

COLSON: And uh, uh, we got the President in for four years, and thank God for the country we do, so...

HUNT: Exactly, yes.

COLSON: That's, uh--you know when you go to sleep at night you can put up with a lot of personal grief if you think that, uh

COLSON: there are alw-, there are always things bigger than yourself. You know that, really that's true. The moment in life when things are not bigger than yourself, then you're all washed up.

HUNT: Oh yes. Yeah.

COLSON: You and I know that, we've spent our lives that way...

HUNT: Well, I've had a lifetime of serving my country, and in a sense I'm still doing it.

COLSON: That's right. Damn right. Okay, pal.

HUNT: O.k. Good talking to you.

COLSON: We'll be talking.

HUNT: (Unintelligible).

COLSON: Thank you. Bye-Bye.