

## Prisoners Read the Transcripts

# Cons' Watergate Play

Norfolk, Mass.

The man with the familiar face sat the familiar desk in the familiar office. He steepled his fingers together and looked solemnly at his top aides.

"I don't give a (expletive deleted). Stonewall it. Let 'em plead the Fifth Amendment. Cover it up. Save the plan," he said. Those were the words of Watergate. President Richard Nixon was speaking from his Oval Office desk to John Ehrlichman and John Dean.

There was one difference: It all took place Saturday night in Norfolk prison. The former president and his sidekicks were portrayed by convicted prisoners participating in the play "The White House Transcripts."

"I'd love it if Nixon were here tonight," said Sheldon Terry Bernard, number 21766, to his prison colleagues. On stage he was the embattled president.

"Especially if he were wearing a blue shirt," said the actor-convict portraying Mr. Nixon. The convicts in the audience wore blue shirts.

The play in the prison received much attention from the media. But it seemed to mean more than just publicity to the convicts.

"There's a certain irony here tonight," said Bernard, a professional musician now serving a six-to-15-year sentence for armed robbery. "If you have enough money and enough social position, you don't do the time. It's as simple as that. Nothing new."

The production got its start through Boston public relations man Thomas McCann, who had taped a similar version for television. He helped get permission for the convicts to do it, then loaned them the duplicate Oval Office set and the

He tabbed a friend, Mark Frechette, who was a star in the movie "Zabriskie Point," to be the director. Frechette is now doing a stretch for armed robbery. Bernard was his accomplice on that job, too.

"We read all the books about Nixon," said Bill Wallace, who played H.R. Haldeman. "We looked for look-alikes to do the different people."

"Walking around the quad, we'd say, 'hey, how about him?'"

There was some reluctance. However, the ones who accepted threw themselves into the roles, and even went so far as to get special haircuts.

"I didn't want to be in it," said lifer Merrill Walch. "I didn't want to get mixed up with playing a criminal."

"Besides, if I were John Mitchell, I would've been in this place 25 years ago. I would have punched out Martha."

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Three prisoners assumed the roles of Richard Nixon, John Dean and H. R. Haldeman in Oval Office setting

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