

# UC Berkeley

## Charlene Conrad Liebaw Library Prize for Undergraduate Research

### Title

Caged Revolutionaries: An Examination of Inmate Unity During the Attica Prison Riot of 1971

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9t19t9vx>

### Author

Shahan, Morgan

### Publication Date

2012-04-16

Undergraduate

## *Caged Revolutionaries*

*An Examination of Inmate Unity During the Attica Prison Riot of 1971*



Morgan Shahan  
Department of History  
Instructor: Dr. Dee Bielenberg  
Spring 2012

At 9:46 on the morning of September 13<sup>th</sup> 1971, Bobby Seale heard live gunshots on his car radio and knew that his role as a negotiator with the D-yard Attica brothers was over.<sup>1</sup> Just a few days earlier, talks between prison officials and revolutionary inmates had lapsed into silence as the two parties awaited the arrival of Seale, who flew to upstate New York to hear the rioters' demands.<sup>2</sup> Seale, a leader of the Black Panther Party was, as he put it, "attuned in my own mind to feel and think that whatever the problem, if I was called on I could go out and deal with it."<sup>3</sup> As state troopers stormed D-yard in a cloud of tear gas, however, Seale sat powerless in the passenger seat of a car listening to the cacophony of shotgun fire reverberating through the speakers. He had just witnessed the denouement of the deadliest prison riot in American history.

## **Historiography: The Not-So-Silent 1970s**

### **Disillusionment in America: the Vibrancy of Protest, the Power of Backlash**

This riot, at the Attica Correctional Facility in upstate New York, began on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1971, during a period of disillusionment among many Americans troubled by "the gap between [the country's] ideals and social realities."<sup>4</sup> This period of disillusionment occurred just after a decade that had ushered in an increase in American conservatism alongside the achievement of sweeping civil rights reforms. With the rapidly changing social policy under the Johnson administration and the development of organized conservative backlash during the 1960s, many young Americans added their voices to the call for social change while their elders retreated to the safety of the status quo. The 1960s are thus often remembered as the years of hippie

---

<sup>1</sup> Bobby Seale, *A Lonely Rage: The Autobiography of Bobby Seale* (New York: New York Times Books, 1978), 221.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen M. Gillon, *The American Paradox: A History of the United States Since 1945* (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2007), 218.

culture—a decade characterized by youth movements, peace, love, and rampant radicalism. Despite the reputation of the 1960s, “the 1970s was when many of the hallmark events and issues of “the sixties” actually transpired,” including the Attica rebellion.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of when these events actually occurred, “to write of the vibrancy and vitality of 1970s protest stands at odds with the popular understanding of the civil rights movement.”<sup>6</sup> The commonly accepted “narrative moves from the aggressive 1960s to the defensive 1970s... from a period when activists forced change to a period when change was forced upon them” and when the “key actors in the narrative” became members of the silent suburban white majority rather than African American activists.<sup>7</sup> Due to the increasing power of this white majority, the 1970s were marked by the manifestation of conservative backlash in policy decision. Governmental emphasis on law-and-order measures “yielded the steady rise of a highly racialized mass incarceration that especially affected urban black communities.”<sup>8</sup> The implementation of strict antidrug laws and the violent repression of social movements during the 1970s led to the classification of the decade as a period when “social movements were repressed and tore themselves asunder,” but the 70s were also a time “when movements experimented and expanded.... [and] the Left grew and changed.”<sup>9</sup> The Left may have grown, but so did the right and center: as Michael Harrington said in 1976, America was “moving vigorously left, right, and center, all at once.”<sup>10</sup> Though the American population “housed radicals of all stripes,”

---

<sup>5</sup> Dan Berger, “Introduction: Exploding Limits in the 1970s,” in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Tuck, “We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left Off: The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest During the 1970s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008): 638.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 640.

<sup>8</sup> Berger, “Exploding Limits,” 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

governmental policy largely catered to the conservative, conventional population that Richard Nixon dubbed “the silent majority.”<sup>11</sup> This group consisted of the millions of people who opposed drastic social change, feared societal disruption, and largely abhorred the emergence of radical youth activism among middle class students.<sup>12</sup> The manipulative use of this publicly mute population allowed the government to permit outspoken opposition to policy without giving into pressure to drastically alter its structure and outlook.<sup>13</sup>

Some of “the silent majority” opposed to social turbulence might have been lured even farther from Leftist movements to support the conservative policies advanced by the New Right during the 1960s through powerful and often sensationalized rhetoric. The New Right was created through a unification of the conservative factions of the 1950s, the “libertarians,” who were against restraints on individual liberty, and the “moralists,” who thought that the upkeep of moral standards should take precedence over the preservation of individual freedoms.<sup>14</sup> A shared aversion to invasive governmental policy and fear of the communist vision promoted by many radical movements allowed the conglomeration of these groups.<sup>15</sup> As conservative fervor rose, hatred of the communist leanings of radicals prompted Medal of Honor recipient and popular anti-communist speaker Eddie Rickenbacker to urge the people of America to “face the fact that the enemy of this nation is not only outside the gates, but also inside.”<sup>16</sup>

The enemy within was no shadowy foe to conservatives like Rickenbacker. The meteoric ascent of radical movements supported mostly by minorities and middle-class white college

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Gillon, *American Paradox*, 218.

<sup>13</sup> Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Gillon, *American Paradox*, 163.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

<sup>16</sup> “Thunder on the Right,” CBS Television Network (Chicago, IL: February 22, 1962).

students presented clear evidence of the lure of communistic rhetoric in America. Perhaps most frightening to white conservatives was the rapid growth of the Black Power movement, a phenomenon spurred by discontent with inequality between blacks and whites in American society and by black desire to achieve “social and economic rights” alongside the “legal and political rights” they had gained by the passage of civil rights legislation.<sup>17</sup> This longing for social and economic rights was exacerbated by the widening economic gap between blacks and whites as well as the division of black America “into a two-class society” during the 1970s as “some black families rose to middle-class income levels” and “about 30 percent slid deeper into poverty.”<sup>18</sup> Stanford historian Peter N. Carroll opines that President Nixon’s “public policy emphasized the importance of stabilizing the black community” and that his motive behind bolstering the emergent black middle class was to discourage black militancy—but “while government might flirt with minority entrepreneurs... the yawning poverty of urban America remained untouched.”<sup>19</sup> The government’s official condemnation of the actions of lower-class rebels, Carroll asserts, was “epitomized” by “the massacre at Attica.”<sup>20</sup> Black Panther Party founder Huey Newton articulated the extremity of the government’s condemnation of the impoverished and disadvantaged as it was revealed at Attica: “the criminal activities of the trigger-happy Nixon show[ed] clearly that he... [had] no respect for peaceful negotiation when the victim [was] divided and weak.”<sup>21</sup> At the end of the Panthers’ Attica statement, Newton asked for “unity of all the victims against the common enemy, the Nixon-Rockefeller regime.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Gillon, *American Paradox*, 177.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 252.

<sup>19</sup> Carroll, *Nothing Happened*, 47; *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1972), 205.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 206.

### Rocky of Kykuit: Governor Rockefeller and His Team

Out of all the participants in the Attica negotiations, New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller was certainly the most removed from the inmates in physical proximity as well as in his class background. Rockefeller was born on the island of Mount Desert in Maine, where his family would later vacation at their expansive summer home, The Eyrie.<sup>23</sup> He grew up in a West Fifty-fourth Street mansion overflowing with priceless treasures—“Persian rugs with silver and gold threads... Gobelin tapestries... Oriental objects of art”—its nine stories could not comfortably contain.<sup>24</sup> Young Nelson attended the experimental Lincoln School in New York City and went on to study at Dartmouth, though, as one college classmate put it, he was “more of a doer than a heavy thinker.”<sup>25</sup> Rockefeller may have felt academically discouraged throughout his scholastic career, but he learned to recognize the influence of his family and his own importance at a young age: the first person he wished to visit when he reached Hanover was Dartmouth’s president and a Rockefeller family friend, Dr. Ernest Hopkins.<sup>26</sup> As gubernatorial speechwriter Joseph Persico recalled, Rockefeller passed this sense of station to his seven children early in their lives:

“...Hurd, the state budget director... was explaining a passage when a towheaded child bounded into the room. Dr. Hurd stopped as Nelson swept three-year-old Mark, his youngest son, onto his knee. As Dr. Hurd started to speak again, Mark began talking. Nelson stopped to listen, not to Dr. Hurd but to Mark... Nelson Rockefeller was passing along an unspoken lesson absorbed from his own father—“These people work for us. Never mind their age, their position, they defer to you.” Thus are young princes bred.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Joe Alex Morriss, *Nelson Rockefeller: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph E. Persico, *The Imperial Rockefeller: A Biography of Nelson A. Rockefeller* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Rockefeller, seated in the main living room at his family home of Kykuit with Mark on his knee, was accustomed to being in charge. Radiating “an exuberant self-assurance so unshakable that it must have been instilled from birth,” Nelson Rockefeller was comfortable with delegation to the expert subordinates he surrounded himself with.<sup>28</sup> One such subordinate was New York State Correctional Commissioner Russell Oswald, the man in charge during the tense days of negotiations in D-yard—a place as different from the sweeping pastoral grounds of Kykuit as one could imagine.

**“A Regular Mess”: The Politicization of American Prisoners and the Explosion at Attica**

At 5:30 A.M. on September 9, 1971, Russell Oswald’s alarm clock began to ring.<sup>29</sup> As he left the comfort of his bed that morning and commenced his routine, he could not have known that he would not rest under the warmth of its covers that night. He walked his dog in the woods near his Schenectady home, broke his fast with a soft-boiled egg and coffee, and collected his papers before driving to the Department of Correctional Services in Albany, with a stop along the way for a hospital visit to his ailing wife.<sup>30</sup> From 7:45 A.M. to 9:21 A.M., Oswald enjoyed his office window’s view of the Hudson River Valley as he worked undisturbed.<sup>31</sup> At 9:21, he tore his eyes from the panorama as Deputy Correctional Commissioner Walter Dunbar entered with the first news of the rebellion: Superintendent Mancusi’s message that inmates at Attica had taken over all major cellblocks.<sup>32</sup> Dunbar commented colloquially, “Mancusi reports it’s a regular mess,” and an alarmed Oswald arranged for the flight from Albany to Batavia that would

---

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Russell Oswald, *Attica—My Story*, ed. Rodney Campbell (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 73.



take his team to Attica.<sup>33</sup> The twin-engined Beechcraft King-Air landed in Batavia at 1:40 P.M., plunging Oswald into five near-sleepless days of crisis, days he would later refer to as a “tragic” experience that “we who bear the scars will never forget.”<sup>34</sup>

Oswald began his memoir, entitled *Attica—My Story*, with his analysis of the revolutionary ideology of 1960s and 1970s prison activism outside correctional facility walls and the motivation for riot activities within. Like historian Eric Cummins, who wrote an account of the radical prison movement’s development twenty-two years after *Attica—My Story* was published, Oswald testified that the emergence of tensions within the pre-Attica American prison system could be recognized in the revolutionary activity at San Quentin in California.<sup>35</sup> Both Oswald and Cummins cite two major disturbances at this maximum-security institution as events that established racial unity among inmates against the establishment itself, a dynamic that would manifest itself on a larger scale at Attica.<sup>36</sup>

During the late 1960s, Bay Area radicals began to perceive prisons as hotbeds for political philosophy and insight. They protested outside San Quentin to show solidarity with the inmates, demonstrating to Associate Warden James Park that “outsiders could conspire with prisoners to cripple the normal operation of a prison,” as he wrote to Oswald in 1968.<sup>37</sup> With the materialization of radicalism behind bars, Oswald opined, “new tactics of the prison revolution” were developed.<sup>38</sup> According to Oswald, revolutionary leaders influenced the “rank and file” by convincing inmates “psychologically, that they were not really criminals, but victims of the

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 75; *Ibid*, 357.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 28. Also Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 94.

<sup>37</sup> Cummins, *Rise and Fall*, 157; Oswald, *My Story*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

oppression of society,” or that they were political prisoners.<sup>39</sup> Law professor David J. Langum cited similar concerns of another corrections expert in his biography of Attica observer William Kunstler: “Paul D. McGinnis, a retired state corrections commissioner, warned of ‘a new breed of inmates... [who felt that they were] political prisoners jailed by a repressive society.’”<sup>40</sup> Oswald believed that this new classification and politicization of inmates gave the orchestrators of rebellion “cannon fodder for the revolution.”<sup>41</sup>

To avoid the relatively narrow American definition of the classification “political prisoner” and preserve the broad scope of the inmates it may apply to, this paper will assume that political prisoners include persons incarcerated for committing “criminal offenses for political motives” as well as “radicalized ‘ordinary’ prisoners.”<sup>42</sup> The extraordinary collective awakening of American inmates from conditions of “civil death” throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s constructed activist leaders within the prison system who were able to create conditions of unprecedented racial unity behind bars. Prison administrators across America felt the tension within the system, and Oswald probably spoke to their fears with the statement: “...revolutionary leaders focused on the prisons as their point of leverage. Here was where the establishment could be made to buckle.”<sup>43</sup> To support this assertion, Oswald quoted George Jackson, a radicalized prisoner who self-identified as a political inmate.

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> David J. Langum, *William M. Kunstler: The Most Hated Lawyer in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 188.

<sup>41</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Aryeh Neier, “Confining Dissent: The Political Prison,” in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 352; Claire Dwyer, “Political Prisoners,” in *Dictionary of Prisons and Punishment*, ed. Yvonne Jewkes et al. (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2008), 204.

<sup>43</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 12.

### George Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, and the Rhetoric of Revolution

Jackson believed strongly in the power of prisoners as a societal group, writing that the “sheer number of the prisoner class and the terms of their existence make them a mighty reservoir of revolutionary potential.”<sup>44</sup> Though Jackson would not live to see it, the rebellion at Attica would later provide evidence to support his assertion. While he lived, however, Jackson could appreciate the popularity of the revolutionary ideology he helped articulate. Influenced by Marx, Lenin, Engels and Mao, among others, Jackson’s book of prison letters, *Soledad Brother*, became a bestseller while he was imprisoned in San Quentin.<sup>45</sup> Heavily edited by Gregory Armstrong to avoid overly polemical language, the personal narrative created out of the letters touched a generation of radicals. As Jo Durden-Smith, British documentary filmmaker and author of *Who Killed George Jackson?*, articulated:

“It is hard... to recreate the excitement with which [*Soledad Brother*] was greeted or to communicate how personally its personal statement was taken by those who read it... Out of the most unlikely of places, a place designed to numb and blunt all feeling, had come, from an uneducated convict, a message about feeling aimed at all those who were or had been radicals.”<sup>46</sup>

The book’s revolutionary rhetoric was also highly regarded within the prison population, where contraband copies circulated among inmates. Durden-Smith commented that “a ‘revolutionary front’ was opened for the first time in America’s prisons, and Jackson became a commander in the battle” against the American correction system.<sup>47</sup> Prisoners were inspired by Jackson’s struggle. His work helped create an “educational and political network” within prisons during a

---

<sup>44</sup> Cummins, *Rise and Fall*, 158.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

<sup>46</sup> Jo Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson?* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), xiv-xv.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

time of “unprecedented valorization of incarcerated people in American radical” culture.<sup>48</sup> Even at Attica, where *Soledad Brother* and other radical works were banned, handwritten and typed copies were smuggled in to become a vital element of inmate-constructed education curricula.<sup>49</sup> His death—reverberating from the West Coast to the East—provoked a collective action response at Attica Correctional Facility in upstate New York.

Several days after Jackson’s August 21<sup>st</sup> murder at San Quentin, Attica inmates wore black armbands and abstained from their food in a silent memorial for their fallen comrade.<sup>50</sup> This show of reverence for Jackson, indicating respect for his work on behalf of American prisoners, reflected the Attica inmates’ rejection of criminal classification in favor of self-identification as political activists or revolutionaries.<sup>51</sup> Jackson was the quintessential leader, the man inmates and their sympathizers on the outside believed would “tear down the walls” of the prison system.<sup>52</sup> As an inmate in San Quentin, George Jackson became “a teacher of radical political philosophy and a spokesperson for a crisis behind bars,” even to inmates in faraway New York. His self-education during his incarceration as well as his “uncompromising politics” would come to serve as an example for many Attica prisoners seeking to reform themselves while working against the system.<sup>53</sup> According to inmate Sam “The Mad Bomber” Melville, Attica’s reaction to Jackson’s death was an anomaly that contributed to mounting tension within the prison: “No one can remember anything like it here before.”<sup>54</sup> In the days that followed the

---

<sup>48</sup> Lee Bernstein, “The Age of Jackson: George Jackson and the Culture of American Prisons in the 1970s,” in *The Journal of American Culture* 30 (2007): 310.

<sup>49</sup> “War at Attica: Was There No Other Way?” *Time*, September 27 1971, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Richard X. Clark, *The Brothers of Attica* (New York: Links Books, 1973), 69.

<sup>51</sup> Sam Melville, *Letters from Attica* (New York: Morrow Publishing, 1972), 168-169.

<sup>52</sup> Durden-Smith, *Who Killed*, xv.

<sup>53</sup> Lee, *Age of Jackson*, 312.

<sup>54</sup> Carroll, *Nothing Happened*, 52.

inmate-orchestrated memorial, Melville reported to his lawyers that prison rules were “now *strictly* enforced” and that the prisoners were “treated as dogs.”<sup>55</sup>

### **From the Prison to the Correctional Institution: the Failure of Reform**

This poor treatment existed despite greater efforts to create a more rehabilitative prison system, an endeavor that began in the mid-1960s when Governor Rockefeller appointed a committee to investigate the treatment of inmates, with Russell Oswald as Co-Chairman.<sup>56</sup> The Committee attempted to actuate reform with the recommendation that the state abandon “the ancient concepts of prison and reformatory, and... start working with a new concept: the correctional institution.”<sup>57</sup> To meet these terms, the Department of Corrections promptly changed the names of the maximum-security prisons in New York State to maximum-security “correctional facilities,” while wardens became “institution superintendents” and guards were renamed “correctional officers” (C.O.s).<sup>58</sup> The 1960’s change in terminology was wholly euphemistic and did not reflect structural alterations within the prison system. Due to the largely empty promises made by Russell Oswald—who was appointed to the new post of Commissioner of Correctional Services in January of 1971—and others, the Attica rebellion was classified by the New York State Special Commission on Attica as a “product of frustrated hopes and unfulfilled expectations.”<sup>59</sup>

Oswald cited a “stringent” state budget, “tax-conscious” New Yorkers, and “more dangerous inmates” as several of the contributing factors to the difficulty of effecting real change

---

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Steven B. Rosenfeld, ed., *Attica: The Official Report of the New York State Special Commission on Attica* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 18. “Corrections officers” and “correctional officers” are terms that will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 19; *Ibid*, 105.

in the system and thus as possible indirect causes of the rebellion.<sup>60</sup> This hypothesis coincides at a basic level with Utrecht University professor Arjen Boin and Leiden professor William A.R. Rattray's theoretical framework of causal factors involved in prison rebellions, that "a prolonged state of administrative breakdown sets the stage for institutional breakdown."<sup>61</sup> Boin and Leiden define "a state of administrative breakdown," as the inability of prison officials to maintain a viable way of working while attempting to manage "external shifts," or changes to the status quo of institutional operation.<sup>62</sup> A prison administration suffering from administrative breakdown often experiences disunity between its top officials and its staff—such as when lower-level staff do not agree with official strategies to affect and manage policy change—as well as the development of "exuberant optimism at the strategic level" that leads staff members to believe that higher officials are unable to comprehend the problems within the institution. Institutional breakdown, as a direct result of administrative breakdown, "refers to the development of dysfunctional interaction patterns between prisoners and staff."<sup>63</sup> A stable penal institution is characterized by well-defined rules legitimized by the acceptance of correctional officers and inmates.<sup>64</sup>

### **"Those Damned Inmates": Attica and Riot Theory**

This theory applies beautifully to the development of conditions that led to the 1971 riot at Attica. According to the report of the New York State Special Commission on Attica (also known as the McKay Commission), efforts by the Rockefeller administration to reform the

---

<sup>60</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Arjen Boin and William A.R. Rattray, "Understanding Prison Riots: Towards a Threshold Theory," in *Punishment and Society* 6 (2004): 53.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

state's correctional facilities began in 1965.<sup>65</sup> It was not until 1971, however, that Chairman of the Board of Parole for New York State, Russell Oswald, was appointed to the aforementioned position of Commissioner of Correctional Services. In the execution of reforms, Oswald was limited by a small budget and by lack of cooperation from correctional officers and wardens. Oswald's policies and political views, however, still contributed to a perceived "decline of the power and status of the guards relative to the inmates" within New York State institutions.<sup>66</sup> The newly appointed Correctional Commissioner "indicated that he was... aware of the fact that there was some need to change the attitude of the guards" and acknowledged that inmate demands "might have some merit," a statement distasteful to many correctional officers.<sup>67</sup> In terms of substantive reform, Oswald clarified the criteria for censorship of the books, magazines, and newspapers the prisoners ordered by March of 1971 and in July he ordered that Muslim inmates were to be fed meals without pork.<sup>68</sup> A Federal judge decided in 1970 that prisoners charged with violating institutional rules should be allowed to defend themselves and an adjustment committee was formed to review charges brought by guards.<sup>69</sup> Though these reforms were minor, the administrative breakdown that followed the attempted implementation of change within the system emerges in State Trooper and former Attica guard Anthony Strollo's account of a conversation with Attica C.O.s during the riot:

"Things have gotten too relaxed," one C.O. complained angrily. "Yeah," another agreed. "It's getting so bad that most guards aren't happy writing up an inmate"... The C.O. shook his head as he looked around... "I wrote up an inmate... Then the next day I went before the committee where I explained my complaint of the *alleged* violation... Well,

---

<sup>65</sup> Rosenfeld ed., *Official Report*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Ezra Stotland, "Self Esteem and Violence by Guards and State Troopers at Attica," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 85 (1976), accessed February 11, 2012, doi: 10.1177/009385487600300107, 89.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

the administration... sided with the damned inmates... Now, as a result, morale among the guards sucks.” He motioned toward the Administration Building with his hand. “And *they* don’t know why? They kinda dismissed the charges... *That’s* the kind of support we get in this place.” Tony cleared his throat. He just couldn’t believe how bad things had gotten since he left. “I remember when I worked here. If an officer wrote up an inmate, the officer was right.”<sup>70</sup>

As the administration began to consider the needs of the inmates incarcerated at Attica, the correctional officers came to resent the new policies and view government officials like Oswald as allies of the inmates, who they regarded as their enemies. The earlier integration of the prison system meant that inmate demographics at Attica had changed rapidly—before desegregation, the incarcerated population was mostly white, but by 1971, 54% of Attica inmates were black and another 9% were Puerto Rican.<sup>71</sup> The Attica C.O.s were all white, save for one Puerto Rican.<sup>72</sup> Due to these demographics and the prevalence of racism among the prison staff, enmity between correctional officers and prisoners increased, causing the development of the “dysfunctional interaction patterns between prisoners and staff” described by Boin and Rattray.<sup>73</sup> While C.O.s did not consider racism to be a problem at Attica, McKay Commission findings suggest otherwise, pointing out three factors that counter C.O. opinions: first, “statistics and observations of which inmates have the “good” and the “bad” jobs,” second, “unconscious slips (anecdotal material, jokes, use of racist expressions) by officers in general discussions and when answering questions,” and finally, “accounts of biased treatment cited by black and Spanish-

---

<sup>70</sup> Strollo, Anthony R. and Dorothy Wills-Raftery, *Four Long Days: Return to Attica* (Hurley: American Life Associates, 1994), 57.

<sup>71</sup> Rosenfeld, *Official Report*, 28.

<sup>72</sup> Tom Wicker, *A Time To Die* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1975), 7. This Puerto Rican officer was never seen or interviewed by anyone on the McKay Commission because he could not be produced by the Attica administration.

<sup>73</sup> Boin et al., *Understanding Prison Riots*, 51.



speaking inmates... supported by white inmates.”<sup>74</sup> When asked about the frequency of inmate self-segregation in the mess hall, one officer replied, “How would you like to sit between two coloreds while you were eating?”<sup>75</sup>

Another indication of institutional breakdown at Attica surfaces in the McKay report’s explanation of the lack of consistency present in the implementation of institutional rules. Rules were poorly communicated and often completely pointless, since they were selectively enforced. Although a rulebook was compiled in 1961, it was never distributed among the inmates after November of 1970, and “ignorance of the rules [was] not accepted as an excuse for violation.”<sup>76</sup> Additionally, a daily rotation of guards’ positions in which they were assigned to different companies of prisoners meant that inmates had to learn the policies of 400 different officers. Since the C.O.s often made up their own rules, inmates and guards faced constant miscommunication and could not establish personal relationships of mutual respect.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, men who applied for C.O. positions tended towards social ineptitude. According to a University of Rhode Island study of 100 applicants, men who applied for prison jobs often showed “emotional shallowness, alienation from social customs, and relative inability to profit from social sanctions,” qualities which are strikingly similar to those possessed by inmates.<sup>78</sup> Fueled by relational ineptitude, serious miscommunication between the inmates and guards at Attica led to the September 8<sup>th</sup> incident many consider to be the catalyst for, if not the cause of, the rebellion.

---

<sup>74</sup> Rosenfeld, *Official Report*, 80.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Bert Useem and Peter Kimball, *States of Siege: U.S. Prison Riots, 1971-1986* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 25

<sup>78</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 87.

At about 3:45 P.M. in A-yard the day before the riot began, one of the defensive coaches for the prison football team was showing another inmate some linemen's techniques.<sup>79</sup> Most accounts, including that of inmate and Muslim minister Richard X. Clark, relate that the coach, an older white prisoner named Ray Lamorie, and his pupil, a black man named Leroy Dewer grappled together as they practiced moves.<sup>80</sup> Tom Wicker, a journalist for the *New York Times* and one of the observers at Attica reports differently, stating that Lamorie was not the inmate scuffling with Dewer, but only came to Dewer's defense after guards moved in to end the fight.<sup>81</sup> In any case, as Dewer and the other inmate wrestled, Lieutenant Richard Maroney stepped into the yard to break up what he believed to be an altercation. An inmate eyewitness reported to the *New York Times* that Maroney walked up behind Dewer and tapped his shoulder, whereupon in "a breach of prison order so stunning that activity in the yard froze almost instantly," Dewer instinctively whirled around and punched the lieutenant.<sup>82</sup> The stunned guard collected himself before ordering Dewer to the segregated unit. Though three other officers supported Maroney, Dewer was able to retreat into a large group of inmates who shielded him as Ray Lamorie loudly affirmed the younger inmate's innocence.<sup>83</sup> The guards were forced to retreat.

In their 1989 analysis of prison riots, sociologists Bert Useem and Peter Kimball speculate that the A-yard incident was the catalyst for the uprising that began on September 9. The inmates "had kept the administration from having things their way," which Useem and Kimball speculate gave the prisoners "a heightened sense of their own efficacy with the forces of

---

<sup>79</sup> "The Attica Revolt: Hour By Hour: A Misunderstanding Sparked Uprising Where 41 Died," *The New York Times*, October 4 1971, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Richard X. Clark, *The Brothers of Attica* (New York: Links Books, 1973), 5-7.

<sup>81</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> "Attica Revolt," 1.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

the state.”<sup>84</sup> The McKay Commission report echoes Useem and Kimball’s interpretation of the sequence of events at Attica, but the *New York Times* feature on Attica reported that the “chance misunderstanding” in A-yard “[led] directly to a mass insurrection by inmates at the maximum security prison.”<sup>85</sup> The *Times* story did not account for the deplorable conditions within the institution and the growing activism among inmates later exposed by the McKay Commission.

The prevalence of inmate activism and organizing in the years leading up to 1971 has led to disagreement over the origins of the uprising, especially regarding questions of the existence of premeditation among the prisoner participants. Speculation among C.O.s and officials that the riot had been planned out before September 9<sup>th</sup> circulated after the revolt ended. Two Attica guards, Officers Carlson and Swanson, reported to the *New York Times* that “there were notes between inmates intercepted at least three weeks before the thing happened, giving detailed lists of what was needed,” and that the leaders of radical groups within Attica planned everything in advance and “just needed an incident to set it off.”<sup>86</sup> Corrections Commissioner Oswald agreed with Carlson and Swanson, explaining that “the new tactics of the prison revolution typified specific planning toward specific objectives... the riot itself would be a carefully co-ordinated confrontation at a set time—prearranged so that external demonstrations could be synchronized and news media invited to the scene.”<sup>87</sup> Oswald also stated in a 1989 interview that if someone asked him “if that was a spontaneous revolution, taking over the institution, I would have to say, as I said many times before, it was planned.”<sup>88</sup> The McKay Commission countered Oswald,

---

<sup>84</sup> Useem and Kimball, *Siege*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> Rosenfeld ed., *Official Report*, 105. “Hour by Hour,” 1.

<sup>86</sup> Warren H. Hanson, “Attica: The Hostages’ Story,” *The New York Times*, October 31 1971, 72.

<sup>87</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 29.

<sup>88</sup> “Interview with Russell Oswald,” by Sheila Bernard, *Washington University Digital Gateway Texts*, February 24 1989, <http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eii/eiiweb/osw5427.0907.126russelloswald.html>.

articulating that “the uprising began as a spontaneous burst of violent anger and was not planned or organized in advance; the relative ease with which the inmates took control of large areas of the prison was due not to a preconceived plan, but to a combination of fortuitous circumstances,” that included the malfunctioning Times Square gate, the lack of a riot response plan, and the outdated institutional communications system.<sup>89</sup> Attica brother Richard X. Clark, one of the leaders of the makeshift D-yard society, also maintains that the uprising was unplanned, because “first, there were too many stool-pigeons around, too many guys who’d tip off the authorities” and second, the inmates would have had to meet continually to work out the details, which was “impossible because the suppression of the inmates was too great.”<sup>90</sup>

### **The Dominoes Fall: A Five Company Rebellion**

Despite disagreement over causes and the existence of plans for the uprising, most accounts of the riot itself exhibit fundamental agreement as to the details of how the conflict unfolded. During the summer of 1971, a riot at Attica “seemed all but inevitable,” according to both Clark and New York state legislator and Attica observer Herman Badillo.<sup>91</sup> If the uprising had not begun on September 9<sup>th</sup>, it would “have happened on the nineteenth or the twenty-ninth.”<sup>92</sup> As Clark articulated, “it was like dominoes.”<sup>93</sup> If you knocked one down, if one thing went wrong or was irregular, the whole institution would fall. After breakfast on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>, the first domino fell.

At about 10 minutes before 9 A.M., the men of Five Company were marching towards A-yard according to standard procedure, when they and their supervising officer, Kelsey, realized

---

<sup>89</sup> Rosenfeld ed., *Official Report*, 105.

<sup>90</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> Herman Badillo and Milton Haynes, *A Bill of No Rights: Attica and the American Prison System* (New York: Outerbridge & Lazard Inc., 1972), 25.

<sup>92</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

that the gate to the yard was locked.<sup>94</sup> Just as Clark opened his mouth to ask the C.O. what was the matter, another officer called Lieutenant Curtiss hurried down the hallway toward Five Company and Kelsey, yelling, “Niggers back to your cells,” and pushing the inmates as he ran.<sup>95</sup> One inmate, tired of the abuse, gave Curtiss a healthy shove or possibly hit him on the side of the head, causing him to slip and fall as other guards ran to help him.<sup>96</sup> The prisoners “easily overpowered the five guards they found in their way” and moved to take Times Square, “the strategic point of intersection for four passageways connecting A, B, C, and D cell-blocks,” though Wicker’s account states that the riot oddly did not spread out of the passageway or A-block and into Times Square for about ten minutes as staff failed to quash the rebellion.<sup>97</sup> Wicker argues in *A Time to Die* that the rebellion was able to continue unchecked because the only emergency protocols developed by Attica Correctional Facility were for natural disasters, and furthermore, staff members were unable to spread word of the rebellion throughout the institution due to the antiquated communications system. In any case, once the inmates bypassed the gate to the passageway leading to A-block—with the help of a cracked bolt that snapped under bodily pressure—they were able to open hallways leading to B, C, and D blocks, thus spreading the uprising throughout the prison and injuring guard William Quinn in the process.<sup>98</sup> Quinn was unable to secure A-gate against the tide of inmates and when overwhelmed by inmate forces his skull was fractured in two places, according to the *New York Times*’ comprehensive report on the riot.

---

<sup>94</sup> “Hour by Hour,” 44.

<sup>95</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 22.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 22. Wicker, *A Time*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> “Hour by Hour,” 44. Wicker, *A Time*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 15.

After heading upstairs to Five Company and securing a terrified older corrections officer in one of the cells in Eight Company as per his sobbed request, Clark returned to Times Square, where he saw a large bespectacled C.O. the inmates called “Tree trunk” carrying the unconscious Quinn in his arms.<sup>99</sup> Clark stated that Tree trunk was shouting for help, so he recruited two other inmates to fetch a mattress for the injured man. After noticing that Quinn was bleeding from the nose and mouth, Clark and Artie Weber, an inmate with an upcoming parole hearing, carried the unconscious guard out to the gate of A-block with the help of a few other prisoners.<sup>100</sup> Weber told the *New York Times* that, eager to dissociate himself from the rebellion, he slipped out of the rebel-held territory as Quinn was carried to safety. The other guards remaining in the A-block cells—Curtiss, Kelsey, Miller and Tree trunk among them—were also allowed to leave. Before “a rough social order was created” by inmate leaders elected by each cellblock, however, many of the officers not lucky enough to escape the rioting prisoners were beaten and forced to run through a gauntlet of clubs, pipes, and other weapons.<sup>101</sup>

Less than an hour had passed, and most of the inmates who had joined the rebellion were congregating in D-yard, a place that now seemed like “another world” to the prisoners, a world of “warmth” where “the sun was shining and everyone was smiling,” with the exception of the hostages.<sup>102</sup> The captive guards and civilian employees of the prison huddled in the TV corner of the yard, many of them bruised and bleeding. Hastily elected security guards, mostly black Muslims, surrounded the group of hostages. Though Oswald and other state officials believed that “no fewer than 200” Muslim “moderates” were protecting the hostages from harm due to

---

<sup>99</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 23.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25. “Hour by Hour,” 44.

<sup>101</sup> “Hour by Hour,” 44. Wicker, *A Time*, 16.

<sup>102</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 27-28.

their belief in nonviolence, this betrays their ignorance of Black Muslim doctrine. As Clark explains:

“The state has projected the image that it was the Muslims who were protecting the hostages. This is not true. Muslims know that all white men are devils, and we do not protect devils. We didn’t start this riot. We were thrown into the middle of it, and we were simply using them to help us bargain... The reason why the Muslims took control is because of our discipline and our unity.”<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, by all accounts, the frightened hostages were well cared for and were even given food, cigarettes, medical care and mattresses before many of the inmates during the four days of negotiation.<sup>104</sup> Tom Wicker’s first visit to D-yard, along with Clarence Jones, Arthur Eve, Herman Badillo, John Dunne, and members of the press, included a visit to the hostages, who, as inmate leader and respected jailhouse lawyer Roger Champen assured the observers, were “livin’ better” than the inmates were.<sup>105</sup> For the hostages, however, the days of negotiation were long and nightmarish despite attention to their needs.

### **Negotiations: Holding Out for Amnesty**

Reflection on the course of the negotiations between the prisoners and the state as well as the effectiveness of the Citizen’s Observer Committee vary across both primary and secondary accounts of the riot, as do interpretations of the demands made by the rebellious inmates.

According to Oswald, the first outsiders allowed into D-yard to meet with the inmates were University of Buffalo Professor Herman Schwartz and New York State Assemblyman Arthur O. Eve.

Eve and Schwartz did not leave the yard empty-handed, but rather returned bearing a list of five “immediate demands.” These demands included “complete amnesty” for all actions taken

---

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34.

<sup>104</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 54. Badillo, *No Rights*, 44-45. Oswald, *My Story*, 220. Clark, *Brothers*, 32. Hanson, “Hostages’ Story,” 79.

<sup>105</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 54.

during the rebellion, “speedy and safe transportation” to a “non-imperialist country” for those of the inmates that wished it, placement of the Attica inmates under federal jurisdiction, the reconstruction of Attica under the supervision of the inmates, and requests for negotiation through radical lawyer William Kunstler, journalist Tom Wicker, and Black Muslim Minister Farrakhan, among others. Oswald took these demands to mean that “the revolutionaries were in charge from the outset,” and “Attica was... much more than a spontaneous riot against poor conditions.”<sup>106</sup> He took the position that the inmates were not willing to compromise on the immediate demands. Both Wicker and Badillo, however, recounted a vote taken by Brother Herbert Blyden during which most inmates expressed their indifference to the demand of transportation to non-imperialist countries because they knew that it would never be realized. Demonstrating his lack of comprehension of inmate attitudes, Oswald maintained that the five initial demands “overshadowed” the practical proposals agreed upon by the rebels and made negotiations difficult.<sup>107</sup> The practical proposals were much more palatable to the Commissioner because they were straightforward requests, what Oswald classified as “a traditional statement of prison reform.”<sup>108</sup> Congressman Herman Badillo lent significance to the presentation of the demands in two separate lists—the first “contradictory and propagandistic” and the second a

---

<sup>106</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 85.

<sup>107</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 90. Badillo, *No Rights*, 59. Oswald, *My Story*, 91-93. Clark, *Brothers*, 41.

<sup>108</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 93. The demands included (from Oswald, 92): apply minimum wage to prison jobs, allow inmates to be politically active, institution of true religious freedom, an end to censorship of written material from outside the institution, allow inmates to communicate with whomever they wished at their own expense, full release (without parole) for inmates who had reached their conditional release date, cease administrative resentencing of inmates returned for violation of parole, institute rehabilitation programs for inmates according to their offenses and needs, educate correctional officers in understanding, introduce a healthy diet for inmates, modernize the inmate education system, give the inmates a doctor willing to examine and treat them, establish inmate grievance committees to meet with prison officials on a quarterly basis, give the inmates more recreation time, end segregation and punishment, and remove inside walls to create one yard.



straightforward statement of requests for practical reforms within the institution.<sup>109</sup> Since the demands were divided into two separate documents, it seemed to Badillo that the prisoners were willing to negotiate with the state.

Despite prolonged back and forth between the inmates and officials, it was the demand for amnesty that became the central issue in the Attica negotiations. Amnesty was the most controversial demand that was almost unanimously agreed upon among the rioters, who felt that it was well deserved considering the circumstances and treatment of the inmates in Attica. As Flip Crowley explained to Tom Wicker after elaborating on the crimes committed against him at Attica:

“Now in the middle of all that kind of shit... in the course of the commission of all these crimes against *me*, brother, *I'm* up here paying my debt and squaring it out, if one of *them* gets hurt or held awhile, does that make it look different for me to demand amnesty? They holding *me* in the joint here for all these years, and we're holding these hacks a few days and treatin' 'em good, but they charge *us* with kidnapping.”<sup>110</sup>

Though Oswald had agreed to prohibit administrative reprisals for acts committed during the uprising, the demand for amnesty was problematic because District Attorney of Wyoming County Louis James had already denied this request, stating that he would still prosecute the inmates for crimes committed during the course of the riot. Furthermore, James argued, he did not have the authority to grant the inmates criminal amnesty. Considering the importance of amnesty to the inmates, the observer group selected Wicker, Julian Tepper of the National Law Office in Washington, and Clarence Jones to drive to James' house in Warsaw on the 11<sup>th</sup> and ask him to reconsider. But although James listened closely to the observers' pleas, he said he had “no power to grant amnesty even to save hostages' lives” and that he wasn't sure if he felt it

---

<sup>109</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 57.

<sup>110</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 113.

would be the right course of action even if he could pursue amnesty for the inmates.<sup>111</sup> The most he could promise the rebels was fair trial, and he signed a statement to be delivered to the inmates in which he articulated that he was against “indiscriminate mass prosecutions” and said he would prosecute “honorably, fairly and impartially.”<sup>112</sup>

### **“Out of Chaos” Came the 28 Points**

Jones presented James’ statement to the observers in the Steward’s Room at Attica, only to find that Kunstler and others were immediately opposed to presenting the document to the inmates. Schwartz, Wicker, and possibly others among the observer committee believed that there was room to negotiate with the prisoners, who might be persuaded to accept something less than a 100% guarantee of amnesty.<sup>113</sup> The committee let the amnesty issue simmer and decided instead to compile a comprehensive list of the inmates’ demands and use it to draw up a package of compromises between the state and the rioters. This package, usually referred to as the 28 points, was composed by the committee—minus Soto, Wicker, Tepper, Fitch, Paris and a few others—with the help of Oswald and his number two, Walter Dunbar.<sup>114</sup> Oswald “made it plain to the committee that the “immediate demands” for complete amnesty, transshipment to other countries, and removal of the superintendent [Vincent R. Mancusi] were not negotiable,” but believed that if the inmates were interested in prison reform, they might accept a reduced list of their demands.<sup>115</sup> Many of the 28 points simply granted the inmates the basic constitutional rights Attica had previously denied them. Later on Saturday afternoon, Governor Rockefeller

---

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>112</sup> Rosenfeld ed., *Official Report*, 248-249.

<sup>113</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 142.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>115</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 117-118.

called with his approval of the compromise package. Oswald, who considered the 28 points as coherent and productive material brought out of destruction, later wrote:

“Out of chaos, we had brought twenty-eight points. I had accepted them and the governor had accepted them, All the inmates had to do was to say yes—and there would not have been any deaths at Attica other than that caused by the injuries the rebels inflicted on Corrections Officer Quinn... Had the rebels said yes, prison reform would have moved ahead at a greatly accelerated pace... If the rebel inmates cared about prison reform, they would [have] accept[ed] the twenty-eight points.”<sup>116</sup>

On Saturday afternoon, William Quinn succumbed to his head injuries and died at Rochester General Hospital. As the town of Attica mourned, the observer committee readied themselves to present the 28 points in D-yard and Black Panther leader Bobby Seale arrived at the prison. Seale had at first been denied access to Attica on the orders of Oswald, but since some of the observers hoped that the Black Panther leader—who would be “trusted, respected and listened to” in D-yard—would endorse the 28 points, the Commissioner took a chance and permitted him to enter the institution.<sup>117</sup> Besides, as Kunstler argued, not to admit him might have jeopardized the possibility of acceptance of the compromise package.

At 8:30 P.M. on Saturday, Seale strode into the Steward’s Room where the observers were gathered. Walter Dunbar briefed Seale, reminded him that he must try to get the inmates to release the hostages and warned him not to agitate the inmates. To Tom Wicker, the famous Panther did not seem like a man to pin the observer’s hopes on, a sense evoked by this description of Seale in *A Time to Die*: “[he] had the hard edges and intense air of a revolutionary, one whose absorption in an abstract if genuine cause had dulled in him the sense of humanity that first had drawn him to that cause.”<sup>118</sup> Bobby Seale went over the 28 points with Clarence

---

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>117</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 154.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

Jones, listening closely to Jones' interpretation of the historic significance of the document.<sup>119</sup>

When Jones concluded his explanation, Seale announced that he would not recommend the document until he had consulted with the inmates in D-yard and with Black Panther leader Huey Newton. This was an "appalling disappointment" to Oswald.<sup>120</sup> Seale and the observers entered the yard at 9:30 P.M. despite the authorities' realization that the Panther leader would not endorse the 28 points. Recalling his experience at Attica and in D-yard, Seale wrote:

"Now, I knew that the prisoners were waiting on what I would say, that the Black Panther Party was crucial there. I knew I could not compromise the prisoners' demands, but I had to talk to the prisoners themselves... I went into the prison yard and sat with some of the inmates at a big long table in the yard."<sup>121</sup>

As he sat with the inmates, Seale talked in a quiet voice, telling the brothers in D-yard that "it definitely looks like to me we gone get some kind of change—revolutionary change, you know" before informing them that he would have to consult with the Black Panther Party Central Committee before deciding if he would lend his support to the compromise package drawn up by the observers.<sup>122</sup> He left the yard after promising to return with a response regarding the 28 points the next morning. To subdue the inmates, who were angry that the observers were attempting to leave after only fifteen minutes, Jones presented the 28 points along with his view that it was the "best possible" package the rioters could hope for.<sup>123</sup>

After realizing that the 28 points did not include amnesty, however, Brother Richard X. Clark spoke for many of the inmates when he said, "You are now looking at a bunch of dead men. What amnesty means to us is what insurance means to a family."<sup>124</sup> Clark later explained

---

<sup>119</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 224.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 224.

<sup>121</sup> Seale, *Lonely Rage*, 220.

<sup>122</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 170-171.

<sup>123</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 172-173. Oswald, *My Story*, 225.

<sup>124</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 174.

that the observers took the inmates' refusal of the 28 points more seriously than the prisoners themselves did, relating that, "to them [the observers], our refusing... might lead to all of us losing our lives," but that "what they couldn't understand is that we had nothing to lose."<sup>125</sup> He also asserted that many of the inmates were wary of agreements made with the state since they did not believe officials would follow through with reform. This vehement rejection of the 28 points concerned the observers, some of who began to believe that negotiations would grind to a halt if Governor Nelson Rockefeller did not come to Attica to meet with them. William Kunstler believed that the Governor's refusal to come to Attica was a "monstrosity" and that his desire to restore law and order above all else was "a rotten exchange for life."<sup>126</sup> Badillo outlined his reasons for recommending that Rockefeller meet with the Committee of Observers:

"Rockefeller's arrival would, we felt, give greater credibility to the demands that were accepted... If Rockefeller came, if he promised to enforce protection of prisoners' rights, and, *had* he shown the willingness for some form of executive amnesty, then the crisis might yet be resolved without force... It seemed to us that only Rockefeller's presence could avert a senseless massacre of both hostages and inmates."<sup>127</sup>

Oswald was not receptive to this request. The only reason he saw for the recommendation that Rockefeller leave his Pocantico Hills estate for Attica was to uphold the Governor's public reputation as a humanitarian.<sup>128</sup> As Badillo explained, after the rejection of the 28 points on Saturday, Oswald's "attitude was: There's nothing to discuss, we've agreed on these points and they've turned us down; from now on, it's just a question of time until we go in."<sup>129</sup> And on Sunday afternoon, Oswald decided that the time had come to ready the state troopers amassed outside the prison walls. At 1:05 P.M. that day, he told the observers that he had sent the inmates

---

<sup>125</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 114.

<sup>126</sup> Anita Johnson and Claude Marks, *Prisons on Fire: George Jackson, Attica & Black Liberation* (AK Press AKA024-CD, 2002).

<sup>127</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 76-77.

<sup>128</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 232.

<sup>129</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 77.

an ultimatum—though he maintained in his memoir that the statement was an invitation to the inmates to resume negotiations without the committee of observers—requesting that they release the hostages, accept the 28 points, and help to restore order at Attica.<sup>130</sup> The inmates informed Oswald on Sunday evening that they would not accept his invitation and would not release the hostages. At 10:35 P.M., the Committee of Observers disbanded, with nine of its members choosing to stay in the steward’s room at Attica overnight. The state prepared its entirely white police force for the takeover.

### **A State Sanctioned Massacre**

In the chill dawn of Monday September 13<sup>th</sup> 1971, the New York State Police officers gathered in front of Attica were informed that the time had come to finish retaking the prison. Troopers were reminded that, “hand-to-hand combat was forbidden and that no one was to shoot except in defense of self, another trooper or a hostage” while correctional officers were warned that they were not to “participate in the assault due to their emotional state” and lack of military training.<sup>131</sup> The observers awoke to the sounds of the police briefing and looked out on “hundreds of blue-helmeted state troopers gathering in the grassy area between the main gate and A-block.”<sup>132</sup> Oswald entered the steward’s room at 7:30 to tell the observers that he was giving the inmates an hour to release the hostages and agree to negotiate outside of D-yard before the state would move to recapture the facility. He informed Badillo, Wicker, Eve, Gaiter, Paris, Steel and the others gathered there that if they did not leave Attica immediately, they would be locked into the steward’s room until the prison was under state control.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 235. Badillo, *No Rights*, 83.

<sup>131</sup> Pamela Shelton, *History of the New York State Police, 1917-1987* (Richmond: Taylor Publishing Company, 1987), 94-95. *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>132</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 91.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*.

At 9:44 A.M., the prison power was shut off.<sup>134</sup> The whirl of helicopter blades reverberated through the air as the two National Guard CH-34 aircraft rose into the gray sky. At 9:46, the first chopper released canisters of tear gas above Times Square and the second dropped gas canisters on D-yard. Badillo remembers that: “After a period of gunfire and tear-gas canisters exploding, we could hear a broadcast from the... helicopter: ‘Place your hands on your heads and surrender to the officer nearest you. You will not be hurt.’ The message was repeated again and again” in English only.<sup>135</sup> Accounts from inmates inside the yard indicate that there was no resistance from inmates after the CS gas was dropped. Indeed, it would have been almost impossible for the rebels to fight back. As Badillo related in the introduction to *A Bill of No Rights: Attica and the American Prison System*: “CS gas is much more powerful than teargas. It chokes, blinds, and suffocates anyone without protection.”<sup>136</sup>

According to Wicker, the observers did not have gas masks and were forced to place wet handkerchiefs over their faces in an attempt to escape the gas. The inmates, even more severely incapacitated by the gas and armed only with makeshift weapons, were helpless. Inmate Frank “Big Black” Smith remembered the takeover of the yard:

“It was a slaughter, like, man. It was, uh, people were defenseless, all right? They had sticks and, uh, homemade weapons to defend themselves, but this doesn’t compare to a man with magnums... And next thing I know, there’s this big helicopter flying over us and teargas is coming from everywhere. There’s a whole lot of shooting. So naturally everyone is running for cover, you know?”<sup>137</sup>

The spray of bullets the rebels tried desperately to escape came from 12-gauge shotguns carried by the majority of state troopers involved in the takeover. Rockefeller’s speechwriter, Joseph

---

<sup>134</sup> Shelton, *Police*, 95.

<sup>135</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 96.

<sup>136</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 5.

<sup>137</sup> Anita Johnson and Claude Marks, *Prisons on Fire: George Jackson, Attica & Black Liberation* (AK Press AKA024-CD, 2002, compact disc). Excerpt from a statement by Frank Smith.

Persico was troubled by the state's selection of that particular weapon: "A key consideration in putting down the revolt had been to save the lives of the hostages... and the situation appeared to call for the most precise and discriminating application of force. But the most imprecise of weapons, the shotgun, had been used by the "rescue squad." Why?"<sup>138</sup> In his memoir, Commissioner Oswald attempted to justify the use of shotguns over the more precise and less deadly handguns and batons the police and corrections officers were also trained to use. He stated, "Against such odds, in such a crucial operation, only the shotgun commanded the respect and the firepower to deter or to prevent seizure of State Police weapons by determined inmates who escaped the more disabling effects of the gas."<sup>139</sup> Attorney Elizabeth Fink of the Attica Defense Committee suggests a different reason:

"There were 4,500 rounds of ammunition fired on a cage of people and there were 1,289 people in it. They used... shotguns with 8 to 12 36-caliber bullets with an indiscriminate 50-yard spread. And the reason why they did all that was because they wanted to kill a lot of people."<sup>140</sup>

The incapacitating CS gas had immediately blinded most of the inmates in the yard, but the troopers reportedly ignored their signs of surrender. Additionally, many corrections officers disregarded the order not to involve themselves in the takeover and opened fire on the yard.<sup>141</sup> Inmates who had surrendered with their hands on their heads or who were laying still on the ground were shot. Prisoners running from the state forces were shot in the back.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller*, 139.

<sup>139</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 279-280.

<sup>140</sup> Johnson, *Prisons on Fire*. Excerpt from a statement by Elizabeth Fink.

<sup>141</sup> Shelton, *Police*, 95. Attica corrections officers were held responsible for the death of at least one inmate and one hostage. Also see Oswald, *My Story*, 287.

<sup>142</sup> Johnson, *Prisons on Fire*. From a statement by attorney Michael Deutsch.



### **The Abuse Continues: The Guards Brutalize as the State Tells Lies**

At 9:52, the firing stopped. Inmates lay face down in the mud. Some were dead, some wounded, all were choking and crying from the “gas, shock, pain and fear.”<sup>143</sup> By 10:10, the shivering and coughing inmates were already being pushed and kicked back into A-yard. Less than 20 minutes after the denouement of the state takeover, the corrections officers had reclaimed control of D-block. Some of the state troopers also stayed behind. Fueled by four days of anger and fear for their colleagues in the yard, they began to brutalize the inmates:

“People were laying on the ground and as soon as you made any movement to put your hands over your head, wham! I didn’t want to move until I was told to move. I waited for a trooper to approach me... and tell me, “Spic, get up!” ... Anybody who could stand, wounded or not, was made to walk and led into another yard where about 50 troopers armed with shotguns and rifles made us crawl on our bellies... It was like driving cattle.”<sup>144</sup>

Guards and troopers screamed racial epithets at the inmates as they crawled into A-yard. “Start crawling, you white niggerlover.”<sup>145</sup> Despite horrific images of inmates inching on their stomachs through the mud and near universal reports of the occurrence of vicious beatings as inmates ran through a gauntlet of guards to get back to their cells, Oswald maintains that the guards merely “prodded [the inmates] along with batons, more in the manner of an old fraternity hazing than a beating.”<sup>146</sup> Dr. John C. Cudmore of the National Guard refuted this euphemistic account of the events, stating to the McKay Commission that upon entering A-yard at 10:25, he observed C.O.s clubbing, shoving, and kicking inmates down the steps as they emerged from E-tunnel.<sup>147</sup> This makeshift gauntlet was the least of Big Black’s concerns. Corrections officers

---

<sup>143</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 286.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 287. Excerpt from an interview with an anonymous Attica inmate conducted by Robert Harsh for *Christianity and Crisis* (May 19, 1972), p. 136.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 288.

<sup>146</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 289.

<sup>147</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 288.

identified him as the head of rebel security and pulled him out of the crowd of inmates crawling in the A-block area. They laid him down on a table under the catwalk in the A-block yard, placed a football under his throat and told him that if the football fell he would be killed.

“For the next two hours I was constantly used as a human ashtray and spittoon. They dropped hot shells, shotgun shells, bullet shells on my body. I have spots on my body now that I can show you and also I have burn marks on my body between my legs, on my legs, on my stomach.”<sup>148</sup>

As guards tossed lit cigarettes and hot shells onto Smith’s body and threatened to shoot his testicles off with a pistol they continually accused him of castrating one of the C.O.s who was held hostage in the yard. Confused and in pain, Big Black denied any knowledge of the castration. This reported emasculation was only one of the false rumors spreading throughout the institution and the town of Attica. Officials who claimed to have witnessed the deplorable acts that occurred before the state takeover released exaggerated reports of inmates’ abuse of the hostages to reporters huddled outside the gates of the prison.

The rumors of brutalities suffered by the hostages at the hands of inmates were lent credibility by Assistant Correctional Commissioner Walter Dunbar and were reported by the press as factual statements. Press and corrections officers at the scene “accepted as uncontested fact [Director of Public Information Gerald] Houlihan and Dunbar’s statement that: 1) the hostages died when inmates slashed their throats; 2) one hostage was emasculated; [and] 3) two hostages were killed twenty-four hours before the takeover.”<sup>149</sup> Houlihan also told the *Rochester Times-Union* that inmates had attached a teargas canister to a guard’s chest and set it off, that they had carved the hostages’ faces with homemade blades and that they had disemboweled a

---

<sup>148</sup> Attica Defense Committee, *Voices From Inside: 7 Interviews with Attica Prisoners* (New York: Great Jones Printing Company, 1972. Taken from an interview with Frank “Big Black” Smith.

<sup>149</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 108.

corrections officer.<sup>150</sup> Though these details were later proven false by the state medical examiner on September 14<sup>th</sup>, this statement was accepted by the press and by American citizens for twenty-four hours following the state recapture of the prison. Representative Herman Badillo and the other legislators present were given a tour of D-yard after the inmates had been locked away:

“Dunbar pointed to a pool of blood and said this was where the hostages had been... placed in execution positions. The reason people had to be killed and wounded, he told us, was that, when the tear gas was dropped, prisoners began cutting the throats of the hostages... He described how sharpshooters lined up on the roofs of surrounding blocks and skillfully picked off the prisoner-executioners without killing the hostages. He said all the hostages had been killed by prisoners cutting their throats.”<sup>151</sup>

Legislators were shocked when they passed Big Black lying on the table with the football under his chin, but Dunbar assured them that Smith had castrated a hostage—implying that his act justified the cruel and unprofessional actions of the guards. But on September 14<sup>th</sup>, when Monroe County Medical Examiner Dr. John Edland examined the bodies of eight hostages and 19 inmates, he found that “not a single hostage had been killed by knife wounds.”<sup>152</sup> Edland found on September 15<sup>th</sup> that the Department of Corrections had asked additional medical examiners to double-check his findings. Edland was sure that his results were unquestionable, so he invited the medical professionals to view the bodies in his office after stating that, “It doesn’t take a medical degree to tell if someone’s genitals are lacerated.”<sup>153</sup> The misrepresentation of the facts, however, had done its damage.

Though state officials proved that their statements regarding the riot could not be trusted, the media continued to rely on both Oswald and Rockefeller—who was not at the scene—for statements on Attica. Badillo wrote that, “the fact Rockefeller and Oswald could command the

---

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-98.

<sup>152</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 302.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* Herman Badillo spelled the doctor’s name “Edlund” rather than “Edland” (see *No Rights*, 119)

headlines allowed them to ride roughshod over the facts.”<sup>154</sup> Many of their interviews with the press focused on the takeover of the institution before Deputy Attorney General Robert Fischer told the men it would be wise not to discuss Attica in public. In a CBS segment with Walter Cronkite, Oswald told the newsman that in his opinion that State Police forces had acted with great restraint. Cronkite fired back, “Well, it seems almost impossible, if they were restrained, that over one hundred men were shot—more than that, I suppose, in total.”<sup>155</sup>

## **An Examination of the Origins of Unity in D-yard**

### **Desegregation, Dehumanization, and D-yard Unity**

The bloodshed and horror comprising the ending of the Attica rebellion has come to define many accounts of the riot, but the profound unity of the D-yard nation that crystallized after initial chaos on September 9<sup>th</sup> should not be forgotten. The death toll that mounted in a matter of minutes during the takeover made Attica unique and granted the riot the unfortunate status of the deadliest prison uprising in America. Accounts are shaped around the Monday morning takeover—Oswald’s in particular reads like a 357 page justification of the D-yard siege and the lies that were printed as truth after the takeover—but it was the unity among the inmates in D-yard that lent humanity to a rebellion state officials tried to characterize as cruel and barbaric. It was this solidarity that gave the prisoner rights movement a human face and became fodder for the media coverage of prisons that encouraged reform. Thus, D-yard unity has been the central theme of many Attica interviews and the inspiration behind inmate accounts of the events. Speculation still abounds, however, as to what conditions and emerging philosophies within

---

<sup>154</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 120.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

Attica created this powerful solidarity and fueled the enormous collective action effort of the uprising.

Many 1960s and 1970s era prison activists thought of the prison as “a microcosm of the larger American society”<sup>156</sup> because tangible, direct control over the lives of prisoners by the government made it easier for the inmates to observe concentrated flaws and injustice within federal and state systems. Discrimination, denial of constitutional rights, and myriad other faults were especially evident within Attica at the time of the uprising. While New York State prisons were officially desegregated after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, de facto segregation did not occur within New York prisons until several years later. Attica was “administered on a segregated basis until the mid-1960s.”<sup>157</sup> Despite desegregation of yards and prison activities, blacks and other racial minorities recognized that they were still treated unequally. Attica’s administration was entirely white and, by most accounts, racially intolerant.

At the time of the uprising, complete integration of the facility was relatively new to Attica. White and black prisoners were adjusting to sharing space with one another on an equal level. This transition was a gradual one that occurred during a period of American societal turmoil outside the walls of the facility. Radicals outside of the institution were beginning to recognize prisoners as a class with revolutionary potential, and this support compelled prisoners to unite across racial lines. Instead of creating heightened racial enmity among prisoners, the transitional integration period—which was marked by an influx of minorities from inner city areas—allowed for unity to form in isolated and rural Attica against bigoted guards as common oppressors. Moreover, common recognition of a prisoner class enabled the political

---

<sup>156</sup> Cummins, *Rise and Fall*, 151.

<sup>157</sup> James B. Jacobs, “Race Relations and the Prisoner Subculture,” *Crime and Justice* 1 (1979): 5, accessed March 31, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1147447>.

radicalization of Attica inmates as well as the racial solidarity that crystallized a united D-yard society possible. It is difficult to state outright that prisoner solidarity caused the riot, but the functioning and longevity of the resistance in D-yard was clearly based upon the ideological unity of the prisoners. Despite competing prisoner organizations characterized by racial and religious ties, alliance to radical political philosophies came to define many Attica cons and allowed them to unite across race and class lines. This phenomenon is illustrated by the shared set of terms used by black, white and brown prisoners to describe their common oppressors and the conditions of their oppression.

Complete integration of the prison system was generally predicted to exacerbate racially motivated violence among inmates. Studies conducted in Texas prisons, however, showed that desegregation of cells actually decreased incidences of racial violence.<sup>158</sup> The rapport between staff and inmates was of greater concern in Texas since rural white guards were charged with managing minority inmates who hailed mostly from urban areas. Relationships between C.O.s and inmates “that exist on diverse cultural backgrounds may breed racial tension and inhibit understanding among these groups,” causing dangerous misunderstandings within the institution.<sup>159</sup> This perilous dynamic emerged at Attica years before the integration of Texas correctional facilities.

Corrections officers expressed their discomfort with the influx of inner city blacks while inmates, especially African Americans and Puerto Ricans, were angered because they were

---

<sup>158</sup> Trulson, Chad R., James W. Marquart, Craig Hemmens, and Leo Carroll, “Racial Desegregation in Prisons,” *The Prison Journal* 88 (2008): 291, accessed March 8, 2012, doi: 10.1177/0032885508319208.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 293.

“treated like dogs.”<sup>160</sup> One Attica C.O. held hostage during the rebellion explained his disconnect with metropolitan inmates to the *New York Times*:

“For years, Attica had been known as a good place to do time... Then we started receiving large numbers of inmates from the metropolitan New York City area who had different ways of thinking. They didn’t understand us and we didn’t really understand them. Before, we never had any trouble”<sup>161</sup> ...

The corrections officers’ frustration with the institution’s newer population manifested itself through bigotry and harsh treatment of the inmates. Overt racism was even visible to members of the Citizens’ Observer Committee. New York State Assemblyman Arthur O. Eve was shocked when a corrections officer called him “Boy,”<sup>162</sup> but inmates heard racial slurs and experienced discrimination on a daily basis within the institution. Guards even referred to their nightsticks as “nigger sticks.”<sup>163</sup> This emotionally abusive rhetoric, whether or not it was coupled with physical abuse, deepened the divide between prisoners and guards. In July of 1971, the prisoners sent Commissioner Oswald a manifesto referencing harsh treatment at the hands of prison employees: “... the administration and prison employees no longer consider or respect us as human beings, but rather as domesticated animals, selected to do their bidding in slave labor and furnished as a personal whipping dog for their sadistic, psychopathic hate.”<sup>164</sup> Personal autonomy and recognition of the humanity of the prisoners, from the perspective of all inmate accounts, were nonexistent at Attica. Roger Champen related in an interview with Bruce Soloway of Pacifica Radio that inmates could choose to “be a man” or “be a robot” in prison. If an inmate chose to “stand up and speak about things,” all of a sudden he would be “a horrible person... a

---

<sup>160</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 54.

<sup>161</sup> Hanson, “Hostages’ Story,” 18.

<sup>162</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 217.

<sup>163</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 44.

<sup>164</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 28.

communist... a radical... a lot of things other than a man.”<sup>165</sup> In the same interview, Carl Jones-El stated that only a few officers “try to relate with the inmates, but the big majority don’t.”<sup>166</sup>

Dehumanization of inmates was and still is standard procedure within correctional facilities. In his pioneering work *The Prison Community*, sociologist Donald Clemmer examined the common experiences inmates undergo that initiate them into the prison community. Upon entering the institution, each inmate “is compelled to accept an inferior role,” which is further enforced by the inmate’s “anonymous status” emphasized by prison uniforms and assigned identification numbers.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, “in the eyes of the warden and prison staff, the inmate... [is] without distinction and power.”<sup>168</sup> This leveling process allowed the Attica prisoners who participated in the uprising to identify themselves as a class with the potential to fight against the system that denied them their human dignity. Black, white, or brown, inmates were viewed collectively as a voiceless class of societal outcasts. Thrown together in an institution that sought to keep them divided and powerless, the new generation of socially and politically conscious prisoners at Attica came to view themselves as men exploited by the repressive upper echelon of American society. In the 1960s and 1970s as radical literature and politicized inmates flooded the system, many prisoners learned to identify with one another regardless of race. They were united in their opposition to abusive guards and their frustration over the failure of reform. As one inmate explained in a 1972 interview, “[the officials and guards] don’t care what the Supreme Court says.”<sup>169</sup> Denial of civil and Constitutional rights was commonplace. In the

---

<sup>165</sup> Attica Defense Committee, *We are Attica: Interviews with Prisoners from Attica* (New York: Great Jones Printing Company, 1972).

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Thomas G. Blomberg and Karol Lucken, *American Penology: A History of Control, Enlarged Second Edition* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 124.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>169</sup> Attica Defense Committee, *We Are Attica*. From an interview with Jerome Rosenberg.



months leading up to rebellion, however, Attica inmates became determined to reach out and seize their own humanity by way of a powerful culture of solidarity. They wanted to take back their rights and become politically relevant. They wanted their shouts of liberation to echo across the nation.

The conception of prison inmates as a class unto themselves was not unique to Attica. It emerged from the radical political philosophy of groups like the Black Panther Party, who “saw prisoners as a disgruntled, embittered, and potentially revolutionary force.”<sup>170</sup> The Panthers defined inmates not as criminals, but as political prisoners, and attempted to unite inmates by combatting racism. They argued that white inmates also suffered from oppression by political and economic forces. As BPP founder and leader Huey P. Newton explained from a California jail, the white prisoners could identify with the Panthers because “they realize that they are not in control... [and that] there’s someone controlling them and the rest of the world with guns.”<sup>171</sup> Newton articulated that the Panther agenda of revolution appealed to white prisoners since they also wanted to gain some autonomy and control over their lives. As changing demographics and growing political consciousness among prisoners at Attica inspired guards to increase keeplocks and other forms of punishment, inmates became aware of “the *class* nature of the prison system.”<sup>172</sup> This awareness enabled black, Puerto Rican, and white prisoners to unite in consciousness and abhorrence of their mutual oppression.

---

<sup>170</sup> James B. Jacobs, “Stratification and Conflict Among Prison Inmates,” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 66 (1975): 480, accessed March 31, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1142887>.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 481.

<sup>172</sup> Bettina Aptheker, “The Social Function of Prisons in the United States,” in *If They Come In the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, ed. Angela Y. Davis et al. (New York: New American Library, 1971), 47.

### **A New Sort of Rebellion: The Emergence of a Prisoner Class**

In a March 1972 interview with *Liberated Guardian*, newly released Attica brother “Ron” explained the difference between the 1971 uprising and previous rebellions at Attica. He told his interviewer that past rebellions involved inmates fighting against inmates, but that “when peoples’ consciousness became aroused, they began to know more” and realized that they were “in this situation together.” Ron also cited “the mood” outside of the institution as a contributing factor to the solidarity that made D-yard society possible; this demonstrated that prison walls were permeable and messages urging racial unity expressed by organizations like the Panthers could reach inmates and help convince them to form cross-race coalitions in the interest of political goals. Newton emphasized the concept that prison walls could not hinder the movement, stating that, “as long as the people live by the ideas of freedom and dignity, there will be no prison which can hold our movement down.”<sup>173</sup> He stressed the importance of a community network both inside and outside the walls. As Newton articulated, “ideas move from one person to another in the association of brothers and sisters who recognize that a most evil system of capitalism has set us against each other, when our real enemy is the exploiter who profits from our poverty.”<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, “the walls, the bars, the guns and the guards [could] never encircle or hold down the ideas of the people.”<sup>175</sup> Ideas were transient and attitudes of those outside the prison, specifically of movements that saw revolutionary promise in the inmate population, could inspire prisoners to unite across racial lines. Despite growing adherence to radical political ideologies and the burgeoning idea that a revolution could occur behind prison walls, Ron admitted that it was “hard to build up the trust” between different racial groups and radical

---

<sup>173</sup> Newton, Huey P., “Prison, Where is Thy Victory?” in *If They Come In the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, ed. Angela Y. Davis et al. (New York: New American Library, 1971), 51.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

organizations within the prison. Carl Jones-El echoed Ron's sentiment in Soloway's February 1972 radio interview:

“Any form of togetherness that is tried to be brought about by the inmates as a whole, you know, no one excluded, the institution don't want this. When you see black and white associated together... first thing that will happen, a rumor will start, is that they having a homosexual relationship. You know, it just can't be a straight up relationship”...

During the months leading up to the riot, however, inmate Sam “Mad Bomber” Melville wrote that a group of prisoners had formed “under the title of the Anti-Depression league” to combat racial division within Attica and “to form revolutionary awareness relating to our prison condition.”<sup>176</sup> After the publication of the first issue of his newsletter, *The Iced Pig*, Melville expressed his excitement over the increasing politicization of the convicts: “We've gathered a coterie of young freaks and we rap politics a lot.”<sup>177</sup> *The Iced Pig's* first issue had expressed a radical definition of Attica inmates as political prisoners rather than criminals:

“Of primary importance is t coming awareness of ourselves as *political prisoners*. No matter how heinous t “crime” u have been convicted of... u are a political prisoner just as much as Angela [Davis]. *Every act has a cause and effect*. T cause of your “crime” is that u found yourself in a society that offered no prospects for a life of fulfillment & sharing w/ your brothers & sisters... A society whose every facet & angle is thoroughly controlled by t Pigdogs of t corporation giants of Amerika. T apparent *effect* of your “crime” is that now u find yourself locked behind tons of steel & concrete, completely brutalized... But t *real effect* is that u have become waste material to Amerika's ruling class”<sup>178</sup> ...

By reading material like *The Iced Pig* or George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* and participating in inmate-run history and law classes given in the yard, Attica prisoners could become conscious of the political, social and economic conditions that had pushed them to commit crimes. Education

---

<sup>176</sup> Leslie James Pickering, *Mad Bomber Melville* (Portland: Arissa Media Group LLC, 2007), 94. This quote was excerpted from Melville's correspondence.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>178</sup> Sam Melville, *Letters from Attica* (New York: Morrow Publishing, 1972), 161. *The Iced Pig* was handwritten, then carbon-copied and distributed among the inmates. Since it was handwritten, Melville used these time and space-saving abbreviations: t = the, u = you, w/ = with

and discussion were both popular and democratizing among many of the prisoners. Attica inmate Donald Noble recalled a collective sentiment: “We felt the people should come together and get a better idea of the conditions here... so behind this we would hold meetings in the yard... whoever wanted to come and listen to our political [discourse] was welcome.”<sup>179</sup> Much of the inmate-run education at Attica was formalized and adhered to a regular schedule. Roger Champen offered a law class to about 40 or 50 men in the exercise yard on weekends. Frank Lott, sentenced to 50 years to life for killing a police officer, gave history classes. Champen and his inmate pupils attempted to empower Puerto Rican prisoners to fight their cases by teaching them English in addition to the law. Lott focused on supplementing his classes with help for young prisoners who were battling drug addiction. He encouraged “the younger fellows” to “be an asset to [their] communities” when they were released from Attica.<sup>180</sup> The new ideology that came with recognition of oneself as a political prisoner rather than a criminal led formerly apolitical inmates towards coalition with and acceptance of their fellow convicts as common victims of a repressive system.

The acquisition of knowledge of history and the law gave inmates tools to question their oppressors both at Attica and in the courtroom. They were able to discuss and evaluate each other’s experiences. Such talk undoubtedly produced understanding of similar treatment within the legal system and by corrections officers. In the conception of themselves and their peers as victims of capitalist and bigoted oppressors, Attica inmates began to perceive a class of convicts that could transcend race and, in some cases, political ideology. Jerome Rosenberg, a fiery jailhouse lawyer nicknamed “Jerry the Jew,” expressed his understanding of commonalities

---

<sup>179</sup> Anita Johnson and Claude Marks, *Prisons on Fire: George Jackson, Attica & Black Liberation* (AK Press AKA024-CD, 2002, compact disc). Excerpt from a statement by Donald Noble.

<sup>180</sup> Attica Defense Committee, *Voices From Inside*. Taken from an interview with Frank Lott.

among the inmates that placed them on an equal level, saying that, “in prison, we’re all discriminated against because we’re prisoners.”<sup>181</sup> Rosenberg admitted, however, that within Attica, “there are certain groups that are discriminated against more.”<sup>182</sup> In a 1972 interview, he related that the guards were “bigots” and “racists” who hated “when the different nationalities mix[ed]” and did “anything in their power to keep that separation.”<sup>183</sup> Though Rosenberg was one of the most outspoken leaders of D-yard society, it was George Nieves who articulated the philosophy behind the uprising of a convict class composed of political prisoners rather than criminals most eloquently. Nieves, convicted of manslaughter,<sup>184</sup> maintained that:

“We’re not criminals in prison. We’re people that are here for various reasons. We can’t be judged because our conditions were in many cases economical in nature... September the thirteenth was not something that was revolutionary in nature... This did not start by one man, twelve men or fifty men they have now. This was started by the conditions which united all the people within these various blocks.”<sup>185</sup>

After proffering his stirring analysis of the common plight of prisoners, Nieves states that the state takeover of the prison was not a complete departure from normal state policy. He indicates that both the of unity within D-yard and the heinous actions of the New York State Police on September 13<sup>th</sup> were inspired by the economic conditions within America. This is the same realization that prompted Jerry Rosenberg to conclude that “people outside should awaken themselves to the fact of what is going on now in our system, in our country. People have to

---

<sup>181</sup> Attica Defense Committee, *We Are Attica*. Taken from an interview with Jerome Rosenberg.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> David W. Chen and Randall C. Archibold, “Attica Siege Still Shadows Its Survivors,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 2000, accessed April 3, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/09/nyregion/attica-siege-still-shadows-its-survivors.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

<sup>185</sup> Attica Defense Committee. *We Are Attica*. Taken from an interview with George Nieves.

unite.”<sup>186</sup> Though it took time and common suffering, Attica prisoners were able to achieve “strong unity and solidarity.”<sup>187</sup>

### “This Place is Ours”: The Development of D-yard Society

Despite the best efforts of the Attica guards to “divide and conquer,” attempts by political radicals like Rosenberg to bring inmates together began to exhibit results.<sup>188</sup> In mid-August of 1971, Attica C.O.s watched a meeting in one of the exercise yards between members of the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords and Black Muslims. The Young Lords were “apparently serving as intermediaries” in a conversation that would forge an amicable relationship between the Panthers and the Muslims.<sup>189</sup> This truce between these powerful groups meant that Attica inmates were close to achieving the cross-racial unity they would display to the country from D-yard. As Russell Oswald stated in his memoir, “it has often been said that there was no ‘racism’ in D Yard and there was not. They were in it together.”<sup>190</sup> Oswald came to comprehend the strong accord among the Attica inmates after a visit to D-yard, but this solidarity had been cultivated over a long period of time and exhibited already in the mess hall memorial for George Jackson. Sam Melville chronicled the growing unity in the weeks before the uprising:

“I can’t tell you what a change has come over t brothers in Attica. So much more awareness & growing consciousness of themselves as political revolutionaries... Still bigotry & racism, black, white & brown, but u can feel it beginning to crumble in t knowledge so many are gaining that we must build solidarity against our common oppressor”<sup>191</sup> ...

---

<sup>186</sup> Attica Defense Committee, *We Are Attica*. Taken from an interview with Jerome Rosenberg.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Jacobs, “Stratification,” 481.

<sup>190</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 18.

<sup>191</sup> Melville, *Letters*, 168-169. Excerpted from an August 1971 letter. Melville used these time and space-saving abbreviations: t = the, u = you, w/ = with.

In a piece entitled “Prison, Where is Thy Victory?” Huey Newton outlined the significance of the disintegration of racism behind bars and lauded “the single greatest achievement of [prisoner] resistance,” which he deemed to be “the growing unity of Black, Brown and White prisoners, for the fomenting of racial hatred by prison authorities has been the main bulwark of... terror.”<sup>192</sup> The exhibition of cross-racial bonding and religious toleration in D-yard proved the power that could stem from oppressed inmates through their recognition of their inferior place and forced silence in America.

The beginning of the uprising on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1971 was chaos. As Richard X. Clark recalled, “brothers were yelling and screaming,” there were “a couple of small fires in the guard booth in the yard,” and corrections officers were crying out for help.<sup>193</sup> He remembered that it was “black in that corridor” where the uprising had begun as Five Company headed back from breakfast. He could see a light at the end of that corridor, though, so after he had secured some of the corrections officers in the cells he ventured outside. When he stepped into the yard,

“... the sun was shining and everyone was smiling. There was a warmth there I had never felt before at Attica. For the first time since I had been in the joint, I felt liberated; I had a sense of freedom... Everyone was laughing. People were shouting my name. ‘Yo, Brother Richard! This place is ours.’”<sup>194</sup>

Out of the disorder and anger of rioting inmates had come a sense of happiness. Clark recognized, however, that their celebrations could not go on at the expense of organization in the yard. They had to set up a negotiating committee to communicate with prison officials. Though “at first the idea was to get someone from each group: the Muslims, the Panthers, Five Percent, Weathermen,” the inmates quickly realized that if they did, they would be “isolating” themselves since “most of

---

<sup>192</sup> Newton, Huey P., “Prison, Where is Thy Victory?” in *If They Come In the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, ed. Angela Y. Davis et al. (New York: New American Library, 1971), 53.

<sup>193</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 22.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

the prison population did not belong to any group.”<sup>195</sup> The rioters decided, therefore, that they would choose two representatives from each cellblock without concern for organizational affiliation. According to Clark, the blocks gathered in separate corners of the yard to agree upon representatives for the negotiating committee. The election of representatives was not designed to inhibit complete democracy within the yard. The area reserved for the negotiating table was arranged so that the cellblock representatives could sit with their backs to a wall. This way, the rest of the yard could see them during any negotiations. Additionally, the negotiating committee was not authorized to make decisions on behalf of the D-yard nation. Commissioner Oswald quickly discovered exactly how democratic D-yard nation was when he arrived at Attica to make a deal with the inmates:

“Assuming I was confronting an organization, I asked one of our corrections lieutenants, who seemed to have a rapport with the inmates, whether I might talk with the leaders. At his call, the rebel patrol strolled up to the gate... I said, ‘What do you want? Why don’t you release the hostages?’ The four men said there were bad conditions at Attica and they had demands they wanted to make... Another of the rebels said, ‘Well, we’ll go back and you can come in and talk with us... There are no leaders. Everyone is the same. All the people have to decide this. You will have to come in and talk with the people.’”<sup>196</sup>

Despite this offer, it became clear that the inmates did not wish to negotiate with state representatives alone. They recognized that they needed citizens to bear witness to “the truth inside Attica” and carry that truth to “the outside world.”<sup>197</sup> They needed powerful people who could ensure that “the authorities wouldn’t go back on their word” when they made promises to the prisoners.<sup>198</sup>

Oswald was determined to continue with the negotiations without further incensing the tumultuous crowd of inmates who had already threatened to take him hostage. There was nothing

---

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>196</sup> Oswald, *My Story*, 84.

<sup>197</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 63.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*



for the state to do, therefore, other than to wait overnight for the members of the Citizens' Observer Committee to arrive. It was during this waiting period that D-yard society was given a chance to develop. D-yard nation was primarily composed of black prisoners, and white inmates were in the minority. While the Black Muslims, the Panthers and the Young Lords were bonded as a result of their mid-August truce, Clark reflected that at first, white inmates "were feeling very insecure."<sup>199</sup> The democratic elections of inmate representatives from each cellblock helped cement unity on the first night largely due to the efforts of Roger Champen, who "knew a lot of white dudes from his law class."<sup>200</sup> The atmosphere in the yard became "carefree" and the inmates realized that "no matter what happened later on they couldn't take [Thursday night] away from us."<sup>201</sup> Though Clark adhered to the tenets of the Black Muslim religion and maintained that the white man was the devil, his account of Thursday night exhibits the blossoming unity between white and black inmates in D-yard society:

"[A] white dude came up to me and said, 'Brother Richard, I've seen you before. I know you're a Muslim and I called you nigger, and I'm white and I know Muslims hate whiteys.' Then he threw his arms around me and said, 'I just want you to know that I'm with you a hundred percent'"<sup>202</sup> ...

The unity that grew between Third World and white prisoners lasted throughout the rebellion and even after the takeover of the prison by state forces. Clark wrote in his account of the uprising that: "people have tried to make out that our mood changed drastically [before the state takeover]... and that our unity was disintegrating. That is not true. One thing we never lost was our unity."<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

This cross-racial acceptance extended to the selection and reception of citizen observers. Black, Puerto Rican, and white leaders, reporters and photographers were chosen to come into D-yard and act as advocates for the inmates in their dealings with state officials. *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker reflected on his first visit to D-yard, recording the welcoming phrases shouted down at him from a walkway that assuaged his own apprehension and indicated solidarity among inmates and observers regardless of race: “Y’all come on in here with us, brothers... this is the place to be”... “Hey, white man! You in the right place now!” and “Right on, brothers! Power to the people!”<sup>204</sup> In *A Time To Die*, the columnist also recalled a glimpsed face in the darkness that caused him to realize the power the prisoners had as a class:

“The man did not look directly at him, but in the weak, yellow light... there was something... hard and desperate about the white face, the tattooed arm, the rigid intensity with which the man’s body seemed to be charged... That glimpsed face was white in the surrounding darkness; that sensed intensity knew no race, no color. It was the barely restrained force of the others, those on the underside of life. Here they had taken power; here he was in their power.”<sup>205</sup>

Throughout his account of the first time he entered D-yard, Wicker stressed the sense of a divide he felt between himself and the inmates: “they were on the underside and he was not.”<sup>206</sup> But before he could think much about the implications of this observation, the inmate representatives had introduced themselves and started to speak. As Wicker remembered, Attica inmate and former Black Muslim Herbert X. Blyden began the orations with a message that emphasized the power of inmate unity. He told the Attica brothers that they never had a chance to succeed in a society controlled by wealthy white men, and when “they had refused to yield to slavery and brutality or had reached out for what they rightfully considered their share, society had locked

---

<sup>204</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 48.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*.

them up.”<sup>207</sup> Brother Herb, as Blyden is called throughout Wicker’s account, was an eloquent speaker who managed to stir all of the inmates in D-yard with the passion in his voice. He concluded his address to choruses of “Right on!” from the prisoners with these words: “We are standing here for all the oppressed peoples of the world, and we are not gonna give up or knuckle under, we gonna show the way! For we *have* the way!”<sup>208</sup> When Wicker tried to ask Brother Herb his full name, he replied, “I am Attica.”<sup>209</sup>

Wicker felt uncomfortable in the yard in the face of this lower class unity due to his middle class sensibilities—as he admits repeatedly in *A Time to Die*—but Richard X. Clark remembered what he called a “changing point” for the *Times* columnist.<sup>210</sup> This moment was one Wicker himself had illustrated in a piece on inmate unity he wrote in late September of 1971. The newsman recalled a “sandy-haired white” inmate, Blease Montgomery, from a small town close to Wicker’s own hometown. Montgomery told Wicker in a Southern drawl, “Man, there’s people in here we treated like dogs down home... but I want everyone to know we gon’ stick together, we gon’ get what we want, or we gon’ die together.”<sup>211</sup> Clark wrote in *The Brothers of Attica* that Montgomery went on to say that while he was incarcerated “he found out blacks were men like him” and sometimes even “more men than he was” because they did not allow society to plant “distorted seeds” in their minds the way he had done.<sup>212</sup> Additionally, it is significant that Wicker mentioned that he was a man who relied upon “the supposed certainties of an orderly

---

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>210</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 65.

<sup>211</sup> Tom Wicker, “‘Unity!’ A Haunting Echo From Attica,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1971, 33.

<sup>212</sup> Clark, *Brothers*, 65.

world” and held tight to a “middle class sense of obligation.”<sup>213</sup> The second time he left the yard, he thought over and over, “*I didn’t really know how much they hate us.*”<sup>214</sup> Before experiencing the fiery rhetoric of the inmates and political radicals firsthand, Tom Wicker tried his best not to think in terms of “us” and “them,” but he felt a divide cut so deep between his middle class world and the prison cage of the inmates that he could not help but hold the thought in his mind. This was a perspective he considered during his discussion of inmate unity:

“Racial harmony, evident as it was, was not so prominent in Block D as were radical class and political views. Every orator pictured the rebelling prisoners as political victims, men at the bottom of the heap for whom society cared nothing, to whom it gave the worst of treatment and offered no redress of grievance.”<sup>215</sup>

The Attica inmates called themselves “brothers.” They saw themselves as men working towards a common cause and speaking for an oppressed class of Americans rather than for an oppressed race. Wicker wrote that, “once, when a black prisoner was orating at a high pitch about the disadvantages suffered by blacks in America, an inmate shouted back at him in a heavy Puerto Rican accent: ‘Don’t forget our white brothers! They’re in this too!’”<sup>216</sup> Roger “Champ” Champen remembered that as time passed in the yard, issues about race ceased to mean much to any of the inmates.<sup>217</sup>

Nothing meant anything to the prisoners any longer except their solidarity as a class. This class status would be validated by the bloody massacre that would occur at Attica just four days after the inmates attempted to claim a place in the society that refused to grant them humanity. As Wicker articulated thirty years after the rebellion:

---

<sup>213</sup> Wicker, *A Time*, 106. Wicker, *A Time*, 96

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>215</sup> Wicker, “Haunting Echo,” 33.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. From an article in the *Hartford Courant* by Stan Simon and William Cockerham, printed on February 24, 1971.

“September 13, 1971, lives in infamy... because [the day] was the sad and predictable product of conflicts that, then and now, drag down all of us... [including] Class, because ‘we,’ the orderly, affluent and law-abiding elements of society, finally pulled the trigger on ‘they,’ the downtrodden and threatening, in one of their rare protests against the way things are.”<sup>218</sup>

The prisoners at Attica, whether black, white or brown, genuinely composed their own nation. Though some inmates might not have gotten along, though the Muslims might have stuck with their rhetoric of the “white devil,” the brothers of Attica nonetheless held the same ideals and harbored desire to rid themselves of the yoke of oppression they had carried for so long. This was recognized even by the state officials, who perceived inmate solidarity as a threat and wanted to create a different narrative of Attica: one where a small minority of black revolutionaries forced other inmates to riot in order to accomplish political goals most of Attica’s population did not agree on. As Jack Newfield of *The Village Voice* articulated,

“The citizens of cellblock D should be thought of as a nation, just like the hippies at Woodstock... Governor Rockefeller and others have tried to say the revolt was caused by a few black revolutionaries. But white inmates were a part of the oppressed nation of Attica. We could see them on TV raising clenched fists of solidarity. They called the black inmates ‘brother’”<sup>219</sup> ...

### **“All Power to the People”: The Rhetoric of Attica**

Newfield’s observation of the terminology used in the yard, specifically the mention of the term “brother,” lends weight to his argument. The universal adoption of words and phrases used regularly by radicals outside the prison by the Attica inmates expressed their rejection of racial division and embrace of class unity. Even the obscenities that began to dominate inmate vocabulary during the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated the short-lived solidarity of the prison community across racial lines during those decades. Andreas Schroeder, a German-born

---

<sup>218</sup> Tom Wicker, “The Undying Lessons from a Modern Massacre,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2001, 24.

<sup>219</sup> Jack Newfield, “Attica: The animals were outside,” *The Village Voice*, September 23, 1971, 1 and 18.

Canadian poet and onetime “resident crookologist” for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, recalled the ways in which inmate rhetoric “reflected this will to solidarity.” He writes of his mid-1970s experience with prisoner unity in a Canadian prison in *Shaking it Rough*: “Cursing and general foul language was no accidental characteristic of prison language. When an inmate kicked irritably at an uncooperative piece of machinery and announced... ‘the fuckin’ fucker’s fucked, fer fuck’s sakes!’ he had neatly sandwiched two separate statements into one outburst; one direct (the machine malfunctions), one implied (jail is hell). He could always count on unanimous agreement.”<sup>220</sup> Huey P. Newton also stressed the significance of the power of rhetoric for oppressed peoples, though he qualified it by stressing that the Panthers believed that it was more important to act rather than orate:

“... language, the power of the word, in the philosophical sense, is not underestimated in [Panther] ideology. We recognize the significance of words in the struggle for liberation... in the important area of raising consciousness. Words are another way of defining phenomena, and the definition of any phenomenon is the first step to controlling it or being controlled by it.”<sup>221</sup>

The Black Panther Party believed that “words could be used not only to make Blacks more proud but to make whites question and even reject concepts they had always unthinkingly accepted.”<sup>222</sup> In D-yard, however, terms coined by the Panthers were used to empower oppressed prisoners and were employed by whites and Puerto Ricans in the same way they were used by blacks. A crucial term for the Panthers and the prisoners was “pig.” This word was used to describe both police and prison guards, though guards were also called “bulls” when they attempted to violate

---

<sup>220</sup> Neil Shover, *A Sociology of American Corrections* (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1979), 125. Quoted from Andreas Schroeder, *Shaking it Rough* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 19-20.

<sup>221</sup> Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), 163.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

prisoners' rights.<sup>223</sup> The term "pig" was coined not to insult these authority figures, but rather to further the consciousness of the oppressed classes and "in effect control the police by making them see themselves in a new light."<sup>224</sup> The use of "pig" as a descriptive term and alternative name for police officers, bigots, and fascists became extremely common within poor black communities as well as inside prison walls. Much of the population at Attica was black by 1971 and the rhetoric of ghetto communities had permeated the institution, becoming popular among radicals of all races as a way to describe common oppressors and identify with other inmates who were similarly downtrodden. Newton describes the logic behind identifying the police and prison guards with swine:

"... even though we came to the term 'pig' accidentally, the choice itself was calculated. 'Pig' was perfect for several reasons. First of all, words like 'swine' ... have always had unpleasant connotations... The pig in reality is an ugly and offensive animal. It likes to root around in the mud; it makes hideous noises; it does not seem to relate to humans as other animals do."<sup>225</sup>

Though "pig" was one of the more powerful words prevalent in Attica vocabulary, not all of the terminology brought from the black community and adopted by politicized inmates possessed such negative connotations. "Pig" was used both to cause oppressors to reflect on their actions and to unite blacks against common abuse, but another expression was created solely to empower those exploited by the American political, economic, and social systems. The phrase "All Power to the People" was meant, "to convey a sense of deep respect and love for the people, and the idea that the people deserve complete truth and honesty."<sup>226</sup> Another phrase that served as an expression of unity at Attica was "right on," which Seale maintained was used as a

---

<sup>223</sup> Seale, *Seize the Time*, 410.

<sup>224</sup> Newton, *Suicide*, 165.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

“shortened form of identifying [when] something that’s said or done was really true and really right.”<sup>227</sup>

## **In Conclusion: Lessons of Attica, the Failure of Reform, and the Modern System**

### **Who Matters to the State?: Rockefeller and the Lower Class**

The revolutionary unity demonstrated by the use of radical rhetoric by black, brown, and white politicized inmates was the sort of solidarity that American prison officials feared. As indicated by statements made by New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Commissioner of Corrections Russell Oswald, the state classified the Attica uprising as a fundamental disturbance of societal structure. Though Rockefeller “never afterward displayed any emotion over the [Attica] experience,” he did comment upon the experience in terms that suggested the fear he harbored for the safety of the societal status quo.<sup>228</sup> After the takeover, Rockefeller contended that the demands of Attica inmates “had political implications beyond the reform of the prison that it was not possible for us to conform to and at the same time preserve a free society in which people could have any sense of security.”<sup>229</sup> Oswald echoed Rockefeller in a statement that cited reasons for quelling the riot so violently and suddenly rather than using tactics of negotiation or relying on debilitating tear gas in the extraction of the hostages:

“... we were dealing with not just an uprising... to obtain prison reform. We were dealing with a... determined coalition of revolutionaries who were trying to exploit public sympathy to achieve their political objectives, to trigger a chain reaction undermining authority everywhere. This obviously was an intolerable situation, not only in terms of the lives of the hostages but also, in a broader view, in terms of preserving a democratic society dedicated to the freedom and security of all citizens.”<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>227</sup> Seale, *Seize the Time*, 411.

<sup>228</sup> Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller*, 140.

<sup>229</sup> Badillo, *No Rights*, 131.

<sup>230</sup> Useem and Kimball, *States of Siege*, 51.



The uprising had to be quashed not primarily to rescue the hostages, but rather as a public statement. Authorization for the use of deadly force in retaking the prison was unnecessary and disastrous. Rockefeller biographer and speechwriter Joseph Persico writes that a question about the Attica takeover troubled him long after the institution had been secured: “A key consideration in putting down the revolt had been to save the lives of the hostages... the situation appeared to call for the most precise... application of force. But the most imprecise of weapons, the shotgun, had been used by the “rescue squad.” Why?”<sup>231</sup> To the authorities, suppressing the uprising was about crushing the radicalized unity of the prisoners, but it was also about asserting power over the lower class as a whole. It was about showing the inmates that while radical movement support did exist for them on the outside, the state forces could still brutally remove the prisoners from any position of power they might acquire through unity. Moreover, the state was able to mislead the media for 24 hours in order to further humiliate and defame the inmates. The government had begun to realize the revolutionary potential of the prisoner class. The takeover of Attica was thus “a decisive reassertion of the state of its sovereignty and power” as well as of the influence of the wealthy white men who ran it.<sup>232</sup> Newton reflected upon the carelessness of the state for the preservation of human lives in a Black Panther Party statement released after the troopers reclaimed the institution:

“We recognize that the criminal activities of trigger-happy Nixon show clearly that he has no respect for peaceful negotiation when the victim is divided and weak. He not only killed the prisoners at Attica but he also murdered his exploited workers, the prison guards. Although most of the prisoners at Attica are Black and all the guards are White, Nixon killed regardless of color, because they were all victims.”<sup>233</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller*, 139.

<sup>232</sup> Useem and Kimball, *States of Siege*, 51.

<sup>233</sup> Newton, *To Die*, 205.

Attica was not only about the plight of the inmates killed during the takeover, but also about the state massacre of its lower-echelon employees. Rockefeller displayed no emotion over the attack because he suffered no personal losses. He was able to dandle his son on his knee at Kykuit and to go on dictating policy without regret because, in his view from above, acknowledging the deaths of the guards only mattered in public statements and the deaths of inmates did not matter at all. Despite surface-level alterations within American society resulting from the 1960s civil rights movement, not much had changed: the state apparatus was all too willing to violently repress the lower, predominantly minority, caste of American citizens in prison.

### **Nixon, Anti-Communism, and a Return to the Punitive Prison**

Violent repression of social movements during the early 1970s, including the Attica takeover, occurred under president who had built his political career upon the prosecution of lawyer and official Alger Hiss for attempted Communist infiltration of the American government. Richard Milhous Nixon rose through the ranks after helping to expose that Hiss was not only a secret Communist, but also a spy for the Soviets. The hatred of communism, presented as a philosophy and mode of government that threatened American freedom and values, laid the foundation for Nixon's political climb to the White House. In the words of Duke historian William H. Chafe, Nixon's political persona "displayed at every stage of the journey how to marry noble appeals to patriotism with the vicious smears of red-baiting."<sup>234</sup> Nixon's presidential victory in 1968 reflected American insecurity, widespread fear of communism and a retreat towards conservatism. Even his campaign slogan sought to highlight American disillusionment and suggest that conservatism was the only hope for the country: "This time, vote like your whole world depended on it." While the political consensus in America had not changed much

---

<sup>234</sup> William H. Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century: The United States from 1890-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 217.

from the 1960s to the 1970s—“it still believed in capitalism and democracy and that communism and dictatorship must be defeated”—popular politics no longer envisioned “government support for social equality and justice.”<sup>235</sup> Power had shifted to men like Nixon who emphasized the maintenance of traditional values and the continuity of the “domestic status quo.”<sup>236</sup>

Nixon’s political plan made room for the equal rights agenda of the mid-1960s in 1969, but by 1970 he had embraced a conservatism that was less focused on social justice. According to Chafe, Nixon relied on Vice President Spiro Agnew “to spearhead the politics of divisiveness.”<sup>237</sup> Agnew spoke often and with much alliteration, asserting that the country needed to “question the credentials of [protest] leaders. And if in... challenging, we polarize the American people, I say it is time for a positive polarization.”<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, Agnew argued, it was “time to rip away the rhetoric and divide on authentic lines.”<sup>239</sup> Exhibiting the 180-degree turn his policies had taken since the 1968 campaign—in which he pledged to “bring American people together” and “bridge the gap between the races”—Nixon told Americans in 1972 that the silent majority needed “to stand up and be counted against the appeasement of the... obscenity shouters of America.”<sup>240</sup> He undoubtedly would have placed the Attica inmates firmly within the category of “obscenity shouters.”

### **A Return to the “Custody” Model of Prison Administration**

Ultimately, Nixon’s favored silent majority hailed from the ranks of middle class white American citizens eager to reclaim traditional values. As white America recoiled from the tumult of the 1960s and 1970s, public sympathy for prisoners was “replaced by fear of crime and

---

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

hostility towards criminals,” an attitude which garnered support for a reassertion of “punitive penal philosophy.”<sup>241</sup> Much like the guards Trooper Anthony Strollo overheard at Attica, many corrections professionals had been unhappy with the reform enacted within the American and state prison systems during the mid-1960s. Court intervention to enforce rehabilitation programs within the prisons was common and angered the prison staff because it “implied that they could not be trusted with the discretion and autonomy that they formerly enjoyed.”<sup>242</sup> Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, many American corrections officers “believed that the decisions handcuffed them in carrying out the necessary measures to maintain order in prison.”<sup>243</sup> A former warden of St. Cloud Reformatory in Minnesota spoke on the implementation of reform in a 1972 speech to the Warden’s Association of America, for which he received a standing ovation:

“The “panacea” [reform program] is laced through and through with pamperings and appeasements. Costs are out of the question... Paperwork is mountainous. Custody and discipline are given “B” ratings in importance. Prisoners clutter passageways for days on end, slouching and gabbing while waiting turns to be oriented, classified, mollified... Elsewhere, prisoners sprawl and spew gutter-talk in pushed-up cubicles set aside for the likes of group discussions [and] group therapy”<sup>244</sup>...

The near universal popularity of this speech denouncing treatment-oriented operation of prisons demonstrates that many staffers working directly within correctional facilities resented the conception of state officials that prisons needed to be modernized through the institution of rehabilitation programs for inmates. Despite the efforts of treatment-oriented staff to work towards the mental and physical well being of inmates while maintaining the security of correctional facilities, the traditional guard factions continued to advocate for a return to strict

---

<sup>241</sup> John Irwin, *Prisons in Turmoil* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 139.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

regimes of custody and discipline. According to sociologist John Irwin, the “custody orientation” for guards follows three basic principles: that the function of the prison is to rebuke the inmates and to safeguard society, that inmates cannot be trusted, and finally that guards must maintain order through a strict disciplinary regime.<sup>245</sup> Though, as Schroeder maintains, “it is simply a fact that most guards didn’t become guards in order to satisfy some latent sadism or other perversion in their characters” even as late as 2007, 30% of California correctional officers continued to “hold the view that criminals deserve nothing but punishment.”<sup>246</sup> This attitude, unfortunately, has become a driving force in present-day penology at the expense of inmate rehabilitation and quality of life.

### **Modern Corrections: “Us and Them,” Warehousing, and Turbulent Race Relations**

Despite the exposure of brutal practices at Attica before and after the 1971 riot, the New York State Department of Corrections continues to emphasize distrust of inmates, use of physical force and the essential differences between prisoners and guards. Investigative journalist and writer in residence at New York University Ted Conover recounts his experiences at the New York City Correction Academy as a recruit and the year he spent as a CO in Sing Sing Correctional Facility in *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. During Conover’s time at the Academy, one of the first lessons new recruits were taught was to distrust the inmates and to be mindful of the differences between themselves and the men they were to guard. Sergeant Rusty Bloom, head of the Academy during Conover’s training concluded his description of the correctional officer position by stating that: “The gray uniforms are the good guys, and the green uniforms are the

---

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>246</sup> Shover, *A Sociology*, 125. From Schroeder, *Shaking It Rough*, 153. Saint James Harris Wood, “The Low Stabbing Ratio,” *The Prison Honor Program*, last modified 2007, <http://www.prisonhonorprogram.org/Docs/THE%20LOW%20STABBING%20RATIO.pdf>.

bad guys. That's what it's all about."<sup>247</sup> Correctional officers wore gray uniforms and inmates wore green pants. Though the correctional officer training included a class focused on communication with prisoners, recruits were ordered not to speak with the inmates from Coxsackie Correctional Facility who came to the Academy to clean and cook for the recruits and instructors. As Conover observes in *Newjack*, "it was an odd way to begin a job that supposedly depended upon communication techniques."<sup>248</sup> Communications techniques were taught to the recruits as part of training, but much more time was spent discussing the use of force. Constraints on the use of force in New York's correctional facilities "seemed pretty tough" to Conover until he realized that one of the requirements stated that force could be used "to enforce compliance with a lawful direction."<sup>249</sup> Conover summed this up by stating colloquially, "if an inmate wasn't doing what you told him to, as long as it wasn't 'Shine my shoes,' you could use physical force on him."<sup>250</sup> By putting in the required hours at the Academy and spending a year inside Sing Sing, Conover was able to learn how New York state correctional officers understand their relationship to the inmates and their role—or lack thereof—in the rehabilitation process and the prevention of recidivism. Academy instructor Turner clarified the job description for his students:

"If our job title, 'correction officer,' suggested a role in setting people straight, though, Turner suggested we think again. Because in reality, he said, 'rehabilitation is not our job. The truth of it is that we are warehouseers of human beings.' And the prison was, above all, a storage unit."<sup>251</sup>

It is this sort of indifference towards the inmates and the warehouse model that define the modern American prison system. The warehousing of inmates demonstrates that the lesson of

---

<sup>247</sup> Ted Conover, *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* (New York: Random House, 2000), 16.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

Attica, which Wicker states “should be remembered as a sort of collective failure of humanity... that could be repeated” were not heeded by Americans.<sup>252</sup> Warehousing causes inmates to lose sight of their own humanity. It completely denies inmate agency and reduces prisoners to the numbers they are assigned when they enter the institution. According to founder of the Lancaster Honor Yard and California Department of Corrections (CDC) inmate Kenneth Hartman, prisoners compose “a massive and bitterly angry underclass” as a result of their experiences with the American corrections system.<sup>253</sup>

As the system returned to the “custody” framework and left rehabilitation behind, “hate and distrust between white and black prisoners” were reestablished as the “most powerful sources of division” among inmates.<sup>254</sup> The number of black and Hispanic prisoners skyrocketed from the 1970s to the 1980s and inmates, wary of their peers, began relying on the support of others of their race. Self-segregation, which had never been abolished even in D-yard, became the primary way for inmates to form relationships with one another because banding with ones’ race guaranteed some protection on the yard. Racial tensions continue to prevent prisoners from uniting to create positive change in the system. In his memoir, *Mother California*, Hartman (who is white) states that there is a “never-ending battle between the 5 percent of the population that is white and the 70 percent that is black” in the CDC general population. As he describes the process of creating a shank from the metal plate inside a light fixture for self-defense from other inmates, he recalls thinking: “No one rushes me, no trouble; if they do, I’m prepared to put a lot of holes in them. I’m on my own, in the middle of a perpetual race war, and badly

---

<sup>252</sup> Wicker, “Undying Lessons,” 24.

<sup>253</sup> “A Prisoner’s Purpose,” Kenneth Hartman, last modified 2004, [http://www.prisonhonorprogram.org/Docs/The %20Power%20of%20Purpose-HARTMAN.pdf](http://www.prisonhonorprogram.org/Docs/The%20Power%20of%20Purpose-HARTMAN.pdf).

<sup>254</sup> Irwin, *Turmoil*, 139.

outnumbered.”<sup>255</sup> Throughout his account of time spent in jails and in the general population of maximum-security facilities, Hartman recalls explicit divisions and tensions between black, white and brown inmates. Conover’s account is peppered with racial epithets used by inmates to describe guards and their fellow prisoners. Racial tension and prejudice dominate the modern prison system in direct contrast to the glimpse of unity presented by the D-yard nation at Attica. Despite the supremacy of conflict between the races and the “custody” framework within American correctional institutions, the solidarity demonstrated by the D-yard nation is being slowly resurrected in one California prison yard.

### **“The Shining Star” of California Corrections and the Power of Inmate Solidarity**

The Honor Yard probably resembles what many Attica inmates envisioned when they requested to be allowed to redesign the prison as one of their five “immediate demands.” Hartman set out to allow inmates to better themselves by pioneering the creation of the Honor Yard within the California system. The Honor Yard took over a 600-bed facility at Lancaster and was created based on Hartman’s own philosophy as well as his conclusion that “the vast majority of prisoners desire simply to do their own time in as much a state of stability as possible.”<sup>256</sup> The yard has developed a “flourishing culture of positive energy that includes lowering of racial barriers and a growing sense of ownership” over ones’ actions.<sup>257</sup> Though many corrections officers and some prisoners have resisted the implementation of the prison honor program, Hartman hopes that the Honor Yard model will spread to institutions across the country so that correctional facilities can be “places of growth” and inmates can have the chance to be

---

<sup>255</sup> Kenneth E. Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption Behind Bars* (New York: Ark & Co., 2009), 54.

<sup>256</sup> “Purpose,” Hartman.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*



reformed.<sup>258</sup> By creating the Honor Yard, Hartman has, in some ways, worked to legally develop a similar society to that of D-yard—a society characterized by unity rather than division, solitude and despair.

Hartman, with support from fellow inmates and a few guards, managed to act upon the fundamental lesson communicated by the Attica riot. Prisoner rhetoric, images of inmates of all races holding their fists high above their heads, and the brief hours in which rioters tried to broadcast their plight to the world accomplished enough to create change, however small. The power of the solidarity before the takeover and subsequent abuse suffered by inmates offers a glimpse of humanity and revolutionary potential among men treated like animals by the state. According to Useem and Kimball, “one of the chief legacies of Attica was an improvement in prison conditions in the New York system.”<sup>259</sup> The two sociologists go on to quote a study of Greenhaven Correctional Facility, which asserts that, “there have been more changes at New York State’s maximum security prisons in the last five years [after Attica] than in the preceding thirty.”<sup>260</sup> During the takeover, prisoners perished together amidst clouds of tear gas and sprays of ammunition, but as Cornel West concluded on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the riot, “these brothers did not struggle in vain.”<sup>261</sup>

---

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Useem and Kimball, *States of Siege*, 57.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> Cornel West, “Untitled Lecture,” (lecture, at the Attica is All of Us Commemoration event for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rebellion, New York, NY, September 10, 2011).

Works Cited

- “A Prisoner’s Purpose.” Kenneth Hartman. Last modified 2004. [http://www.prisonhonorprogram.org/Docs/The %20Power%20of%20Purpose-HARTMAN.pdf](http://www.prisonhonorprogram.org/Docs/The%20Power%20of%20Purpose-HARTMAN.pdf).
- Aptheker, Bettina. “The Social Functions of Prisons in the United States.” In *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, edited by Angela Davis, 39-49. New York: New American Library, 1971.
- Attica Defense Committee. *Voices from Inside: 7 Interviews with Attica Prisoners*. New York: Great Jones Printing Company, 1972.
- Attica Defense Committee. *We are Attica: Interviews with Prisoners from Attica*. New York: Great Jones Printing Company, 1972.
- Badillo, Herman and Milton Haynes. *A Bill of No Rights: Attica and the American Prison System*. New York: Outerbridge & Lazard, Inc., 1972.
- Berger, Dan. “Introduction: Exploding Limits in the 1970s.” In *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, edited by Dan Berger, 1-17. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010.
- Bernstein, Lee. “The Age of Jackson: George Jackson and the Culture of American Prisons in the 1970s.” In *The Journal of American Culture* 30 (2007): 310-323.
- Blomberg, Thomas G. and Karol Lucken. *American Penology: A History of Control, Enlarged Second Edition*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010.
- Boin, Arjen and William A.R. Rattray. “Understanding Prison Riots: Towards a Threshold Theory.” In *Punishment and Society* 6 (2004): 47-65.
- Clark, Richard X. *The Brothers of Attica*. New York: Links Books, 1973.
- Carroll, Peter N. *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.
- Chafe, William H. *The Rise and Fall of the American Century: The United States from 1890 2009*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Chen, David W. and Randall C. Archibold. “Attica Siege Still Shadows Its Survivors.” *New York Times*, January 9, 2000. Accessed April 3, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/09/nyregion/attica-siege-still-shadows-its-survivors.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.
- Conover, Ted. *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- Cummins, Eric. *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

- Durden-Smith, Jo. *Who Killed George Jackson?* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.
- Dwyer, Claire. "Political Prisoners." In *Dictionary of Prisons and Punishment*, ed. Yvonne Jewkes and Jamie Bennett, 204-205. Devon: Willan Publishing, 2008.
- Gillon, Stephen M. *The American Paradox: A History of the United States Since 1945*. Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2007.
- Hanson, Warren H. "Attica: The Hostages' Story." *The New York Times*, October 31 1971.
- Hartman, Kenneth E. *Mother California: A Story of Redemption Behind Bars*. New York: Ark & Co., 2009.
- Irwin, John. *Prisons in Turmoil*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.
- Jacobs, James B. "Race Relations and the Prisoner Subculture." In *Crime and Justice* 1 (1979): 1-27. Accessed March 31, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1147447>.
- Jacobs, James B. "Stratification and Conflict Among Prison Inmates." In *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 66, no. 4 (1975): 476-482. Accessed March 31, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1142887>.
- Johnson, Anita and Claude Marks. *Prisons on Fire: George Jackson, Attica & Black Liberation*. Oakland: AK Press AKA024-CD, 2002. CD-ROM.
- Langum, David J. *William M. Kunstler: The Most Hated Lawyer in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Lincoln, C. Eric. *The Black Muslims in America*. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1994.
- Morriss, Joe Alex. *Nelson Rockefeller: A Biography*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.
- Melville, Sam. *Letters from Attica*. New York: Morrow Publishing, 1972.
- Neier, Aryeh. "Confining Dissent: The Political Prison." In *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, 350-381. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Newfield, Jack. "Attica: The animals were outside." *The Village Voice*, September 23, 1971.
- Newton, Huey P. "Prison, Where is Thy Victory?" In *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, edited by Angela Davis, 50-57. New York: New American Library, 1971.
- Newton, Huey P. *Revolutionary Suicide*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973.

- Newton, Huey P. *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*. New York: Random House, 1972.
- Oswald, Russell. *Attica- My Story*. Edited by Rodney Campbell. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972.
- Oswald, Russell. "Interview with Russell Oswald." By Sheila Bernard. *Washington University Digital Gateway Texts*, February 24, 1989. <http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eii/eiiweb/osw5427.0907.126russelloswald.ht ml>.
- Persico, Joseph E. *The Imperial Rockefeller: A Biography of Nelson A. Rockefeller*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.
- Pickering, Leslie James. *Mad Bomber Melville*. Portland: Arissa Media Group LLC, 2007.
- Rosenfeld, Steven B., ed. *Attica: The Official Report of the New York State Special Commission on Attica*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972.
- Schroeder, Andreas. *Shaking It Rough*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1976.
- Seale, Bobby. *A Lonely Rage: The Autobiography of Bobby Seale*. New York: New York Times Books, 1978.
- Seale, Bobby. *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Shelton, Pamela. *History of the New York State Police, 1917-1987*. Richmond: Taylor Publishing Company, 1987.
- Shover, Neil. *A Sociology of American Corrections*. Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1979.
- Stotland, Ezra. "Self Esteem and Violence by Guards and State Troopers at Attica." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 85 (1976): 85-96. Accessed February 11, 2012. doi: 10.1177/009385487600300107.
- Strollo, Anthony R. and Dorothy Wills-Raftery. *Four Long Days: Return to Attica*. Hurley: American Life Associates, 1994.
- Trulson, Chad R., James W. Marquart, Craig Hemmens, and Leo Carroll. "Racial Desegregation in Prisons." In *The Prison Journal* 88 (2008): 271-300. Accessed March 8, 2012. doi: 10.1177/0032885508319208.
- "The Attica Revolt: Hour By Hour: A Misunderstanding Sparked Uprising Where 41 Died." *The New York Times*, October 4 1971.
- "Thunder on the Right." CBS Television Network. Chicago, IL: February 22, 1962.

Tuck, Stephen. "We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left Off: The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest During the 1970s." *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008): 637-654.

Useem, Bert, and Peter Kimball. *States of Siege: U.S. Prison Riots, 1971-1986*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

"War at Attica: Was There No Other Way?" *Time*, September 27 1971.

West, Cornel. "Untitled Lecture." Lecture at the Attica is All of Us Commemoration, New York, NY, September 10, 2011.

Wicker, Tom. *A Time To Die*. New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1975.

Wicker, Tom. "The Undying Lessons from a Modern Massacre." *New York Times*, September 2, 2001.

Wicker, Tom. "'Unity!' A Haunting Echo from Attica." *New York Times*, September 15, 1971.

#### Works Consulted

Bell, Malcolm. *The Turkey Shoot: Tracking the Attica Cover-Up*. New York: Grove Press, 1985.

Buhle, Mari Jo, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, ed. *Encyclopedia of the American Left*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Carroll, Leo. *Hacks, Blacks, and Cons: Race Relations in a Maximum Security Prison*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1974.

Davis, Angela Y. "Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation." In *Imprisoned Intellectuals: America's Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and Rebellion*, edited by Joy James, 64-77. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003.

Dressler, Joshua, ed. *Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice*. New York: Macmillan, 2002.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Greene, Helen Taylor, and Shaun L. Gabbidon. *Encyclopedia of Race and Crime*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009.

*Ghosts of Attica*. Directed by Brad Lichtenstein. 2001. Brooklyn: Icarus Films, 2001. DVD.

Hames-Garcia, Michael. *Fugitive Thought: Prison Movements, Race, and the Meaning of Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

- Haynes, John Earl. *Communism and Anti-Communism in the United States: An Annotated Guide to Historical Writings*. New York: Garland, 1987.
- Irwin, John. *The Warehouse Prison: Disposal of the New Dangerous Class*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2005.
- Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.
- McDonogh, Gary W., Robert Gregg, and Cindy H. Wong. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Murray, Paul T. *The Civil Rights Movement: References and Resources*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993.
- Perkinson, Robert. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010.
- Perrault, Anna H. and Ron Blazek, ed. *United States History: A Multicultural, Interdisciplinary Guide to Information Sources, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2003.
- Peterson, David M. and Marcello Truzzi ed. *Criminal Life: Views from the Inside*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.
- Samuels, Liz. "Improvising on Reality: The Roots of Prison Abolition. In *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, edited by Dan Berger, 21-38. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010.
- Spiegel, Sarah. "Prison "Race Riots": An Easy Case for Segregation?" *California Law Review* 95 (2007): 2261-2293.
- Tisdale, Celes ed. *Betcha Ain't: Poems from Attica*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1974.
- Trulson, Chad R. and James W. Marquart. *First Available Cell: Desegregation of the Texas Prison System*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.