

# The Officer-Inmate Relationship: Its Role in the Attica Rebellion

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This report evaluates the officer-inmate relationship at Attica, and its contribution to rising tensions culminating in the September, 1971 riot. The findings are derived mainly from intensive interviews with 30 inmates and 30 members of the staff at the Attica Correctional Facility conducted between February and April 1972.

In addition, during this period I held informal discussions with inmates and officers in their eating facilities, recreation area (E block and the yard), at sick call, in HBZ\*\*, on the galleries of the different companies and at places of work such as the metal shop. I have also read more than 1,000 interviews with inmates conducted by various staff members as well as all the transcripts of the 13 days of public hearings held by the New York State Special Commission on Attica.

The inmates I interviewed were selected to reflect diverse and representative types: old and young; white, black and Spanish-speaking; conformist and militant.

The interviews with personnel at Attica ranged from the Superintendent (both old and new) to correction officers on the lower echelons and also included those whose jobs strongly affected or could have affected the lives of the inmates, such as chaplains, medical doctors, and the director of the school program.

Informally, I have talked with more than 200 officers and inmates, including group discussions.

Of the myriad problems that beset Attica, many, seemingly unrelated, were expressed or reflected in the interaction between officer and inmate. So pervasive and intense is this relationship that in it one can perceive the key to the quality of prison life.

## I. Background of the Correction Officer

First, mention should be made of the men who hold the job of correction officer (C.O.). What kind of person the officer is and what the prison system expects of him tell a great deal about the philosophy behind his approach to the inmate.

### 1. *Motivation for Job*

The most commonly cited reasons for choosing the career of correction officer are job security and good pay. It is often a family tradition; many officers note that other members of their families are or have been correction officers.

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\*\* HBZ stands for Housing Block Z and is the segregated area where inmates are sent for punishment. Ninety-eight of the alleged ringleaders of the riot were confined there from September 13, 1971 through April when I made my last visit.

## 2. *Training for Job*

Formal training for officers (a course lasting 2-3 weeks) was offered at Walkill until the beginning of World War II (1941) and did not resume again until the late 1950's. At the time of the September uprising more than one third of the Attica officers had received no training.

Resumption of the two-week training course was described by the officers as having little meaning for them. Heavy emphasis was placed on self-protection, the maintaining of discipline, the principles of custodial care, and the handling of administrative chores such as filling out forms and other kinds of paper work.

## 3. *Cultural Background of the Correction Officer*

At the time of the uprising only one of the 398 officers was Puerto Rican and none was black.

Eighty-seven percent of the correction staff came from a rural background and most were from areas not far from Attica. On the other hand, 54% of the prison population was black and 9% Spanish speaking, and approximately 77% of the inmates were from urban backgrounds. This marked contrast leads to a great deal of friction and tension. Furthermore, the C.O. is neither motivated nor trained to work with the inmate in a constructive fashion. His lack of training in human relations and the wide cultural gap between his own rural white background and the inmate's urban and ghetto background ensure mutual misunderstanding and distrust. Basically the set-up was almost an adversary system rather than a helping one between officer and inmate.

## **Discussion**

The whole philosophy of the role of the correction officer should be radically altered if the prison system is to perform its function of rehabilitating its inmates.\*

Training in human relations should be an essential part of a program for officer recruits and it should include courses in sociology, penology, and psychology. Many techniques in group and individual therapy and counselling can be taught, such as sensitivity training, encounter therapy, role reversal (to enable two people to understand each other's problems and perspective), ventilation, and psychodrama.

I am not suggesting that officers be fully trained therapists, nor do I think all inmates need or would benefit from traditional psychotherapy techniques. These suggested courses and techniques need only be designed to allow the officer to understand the inmate better, to open channels of communication so that learning, growth, and change can really take place.

Without rapport, genuine caring and a trusting relationship, there can be no constructive changes in the inmate's attitudes or life style.

Potential officers should be carefully screened for the kind of sensitive job they should be doing. Although the motivations of good pay, job security and family tradition are not necessarily bad for many jobs, they are not useful in work which deals so basically in human relations. The motivation should be similar to what is expected of (but not always realized) in those going into the helping professions such as teaching, social work,

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\* The term "rehabilitation" is commonly used as a goal for the inmate. For convenience sake I will continue to use it in this report but it should be noted that the term is not quite accurate in its use regarding inmates. To rehabilitate is to restore to good health, to restore to former capacity, to restore to good operation. The key here is the implication that the individual had been at one time doing well and that rehabilitation will "restore" him to that state. With the vast majority of Attica inmates this concept is invalid. These men have never had it good or made; most had led disadvantaged lives politically, socially, and culturally prior to their imprisonment. The term "habilitation" would be a more appropriate description of what the prison system must achieve for these individuals.

general medicine or psychiatry. No officer I interviewed gave as a reason for entering prison work that he wanted to help others or that he had any interest, talent or particular qualification making him suitable for the job.

A course in the basics of human relations would involve, minimally, one year of preparatory study, with continuing on-the-job education and training.

After the uprising, the administration made efforts to recruit more black and Puerto Rican officers in order to reduce the cultural and ethnic disparity between officers and inmates. Although in principle the concept is valid, I believe this is an example of how a remedy may be ineffective if the more basic, underlying causes of the problem remain unchanged. In fact, the immediate results of this policy may well intensify frictions if expectations of dramatic improvement are unfulfilled.

Black officers will be expected to relate better to black inmates, and to treat them more sympathetically. (At least the black inmates will expect this.) Thus, the black officer will find himself in a ticklish situation. The administration and his white colleagues still go by the system, which does not encourage closeness with inmates; if the rules of the game are to be followed, the black inmate will not get much better treatment from a black guard. His frustration and anger at this may be expected to increase since it will be twice as hard to take the same abuse from a "brother" as from a white officer.

If the black or Spanish-speaking officer became too chummy with members of his own ethnic group he would likely gain the enmity of white officers and white inmates, and might possibly increase racial polarity.

There is the further problem of blacks and Spanish-speaking officers finding acceptance in a community like Attica. Moreover, a black officer raised in upstate New York may be further removed, culturally, from black inmates who are products of a New York City ghetto, than would a white officer or inmate who came from an urban environment.

Although many black inmates reacted favorably to the idea of having more black officers, some felt this would make no real difference. Their complaints are that they need to be treated with some dignity and humanity and that this is the issue regardless of whether the officer is white, orange, or purple. The more "militant" inmates were the ones who reacted most scornfully to this measure, dismissing it as being without any real substance. They see it as tokenism, a sop, and as not addressing the basic issues.

The point is that what must change dramatically is the whole concept of officer-inmate relationship based on overall prison philosophy and attitudes. This concept would be rooted in the principle that inmates are rehabilitatable. The prison program must be designed to achieve such rehabilitation through officer-inmate relationships that provide corrective emotional experiences and through efforts to develop necessary skills, both social and occupational, so that when the inmate re-enters society, he is fully prepared to lead a constructive life. If these changes do not occur, measures such as instituting a three-month training program (if two weeks is deemed too short) and recruiting more "minority" officers will indeed be tokenism and will fail to correct or even alleviate the causes of inmate rebellion.

## **II. Issues of Conflict Between Officer and Inmate**

A full study of the workings of Attica seen through the prism of the officer-inmate relationship reveals a continuous chain of events and attitudes that seem locked in a pattern of ever-increasing tension and strain. It is difficult to see how this pattern can be broken without turning around the whole concept of how a prison should function. As I noted in the previous discussion on the make-up of the officer, the philosophy of Attica, as seen through the behavior of the C.O., emphasizes custody and security. In the vigorous effort to achieve these objectives, the environment becomes both anti-therapeutic and anti-rehabilitative.

I will enumerate some of the prevailing attitudes and customs to illustrate the extent

to which the C.O.'s policy and behavior at Attica fanned inmate discontent to the point where confrontations, open conflict and, finally, tragedy, were inevitable.

1. *The Attempt to Achieve Total Conformity and De-individualization* has been a long-standing policy of prison authorities to make enforcement of discipline easier. The theory was that if they could make the inmates conform and if they could discourage independent thinking, then somehow the prison would be more secure and safe from turmoil, since the prisoners would be unable to "act up."

Starting with the obvious and symbolic act of giving an inmate a number as a way of stripping him of a personal identity, and continuing through all the trivial humiliations of the inmate's daily life, the underlying theme is an unmistakable attempt to rob him of individual identity. Lining up by height, no talking in line while marching, wearing the same drab uniform and hair style—all these rules and techniques enforce the theme.

The countless ways that officers tried to impress conformity upon inmates have always been deeply resented, although often in silence, out of fear of punishment. But few men willingly surrender their identity—which is a kind of dying—without a struggle on some level. It is this rape of the individual's personality, the systematic grinding down of whatever self-esteem the inmate still has left, that makes so many inmates feel dehumanized.

Prison security is bought at too high a price—and the security itself is no longer absolute. The times are such that open rebellion, rather than docile acceptance, may soon be the more usual response to this kind of repression. In the light of present psychological understanding of basic human needs (and criminal offenders are still fully human) it is abundantly clear that rehabilitation simply cannot occur under such strictures that the prison system imposes on the C.O.'s and, in fact, all departments of Attica.

Some recent relaxation of rules at Attica appears to indicate greater permissiveness: some talking on line is now permitted, along with some minor variations in dress and hair styling; lining up is no longer according to height. But these modifications only reflect the greater permissiveness of society in general; in no way do they reflect any fundamental change in Attica philosophy. In fact, most officers interviewed were unhappy with the increased looseness in discipline because it meant they had less control over the inmate.

2. *Keeping Inmates from Getting Together*, keeping them disorganized, and fostering factionalism were policies designed to prevent inmates from feeding each other grievances and stirring up anything that would be a challenge or threat to the status quo.

Inmates were not allowed to go out of their own yard, so that the four cell blocks—A, B, C, and D—remained isolated from each other. C.O.s were pleased that whites, blacks and Spanish-speaking inmates were at odds with each other, and officers became equally concerned when they learned of the accord reached by the leaders of the Young Lords, Black Panthers, and white militants before the uprising. Suspicion gathered around any inmates who would cluster in the yard and C.O.s kept a watchful eye on these "potential trouble-makers."

Again we see the paradox of a system which is presumably dedicated to preparing inmates to live more harmoniously when they leave the prison, but which actually encourages isolationism and racism, and fosters animosities in a "divide and they will stay conquered" spirit. To encourage inmates to become part of a larger group, to permit open access to fellow-inmates—such an atmosphere could provide learning and rehabilitative experiences under a different set of Attica guidelines. Instead, any reaching out to others is systematically thwarted. The C.O.s thus unwittingly encouraged clandestine meetings and the setting up of groups whose character would indeed cause the very kind of trouble that the prison sought so determinedly to avert.

3. *The C.O. Must Not Become Too Friendly with the Inmate.* The Attica policy discourages the C.O. from getting too close to the inmate so that he does not "sink to their level," "cause them to lose respect," "lose control over them." These arguments, all cited by C.O.s in interviews, again illustrate the intense dedication to the ideal of strict discipline as the means of ensuring security.

With only this repressive, hostile influence exerted upon him, the inmate's negative response is a foregone conclusion. If he cannot escape, his next logical move would be to try to force some change from within. If he cannot succeed by nonviolent means, such as strikes or petitions for reform (and both were tried in vain), his anger will continue to build until some kind of explosion becomes a necessity, if only to prove he is still alive and that he retains some control over his own destiny.

4. *"A Person Cannot Be Rehabilitated Unless he Wants to Be."* This is a statement many C.O.s make to justify why so little is done for the inmate. It covers up, or attempts to, the fact that the C.O., given his own limitations and those imposed by the system in which he is functioning, could not achieve any rehabilitation, even if he wanted to. It further allows the C.O. not to be consciously aware of how little good he is doing, and not to be dissatisfied with the results.

Many inmates do indeed appear to be resistant to rehabilitation, but this is often *their* defense against the underlying knowledge that there is none to be had in Attica. Theoretically, given the right approach, every human being is capable of change. But the Attica approach, as exemplified by the C.O., simply could not be more antirehabilitative. On different levels, every inmate senses this and, again, in different ways, reacts against the "correctional facility," a phrase which reflects more wishful thinking than factual reality. The less a man feels he is being helped, the less he feels obliged or willing to "cooperate" by remaining passive and obedient. Conversely, the more one feels he is being destroyed, the more convinced he becomes that *any* action to stop this process is justified.

5. *Racism.* The vast majority of officers (I am talking of white officers, since, at the time of the September, 1971 riot there were no black officers and only one Puerto Rican among the C.O. staff of 398) denied, on direct questioning, that they harbored any prejudices against black or Spanish-speaking inmates. They do not view racism as a problem at Attica.

It is difficult to understand the significance and the extent of racism in prisons, because not all prisons are the same, any more than are all communities. Also very few racists talk candidly about their prejudices, especially in interviews with the staff of an investigative commission. Furthermore, many officers (as well as inmates and the population in general) have racist feelings they are not consciously aware of, and so do not speak with total candor even when they attempt to do so.

As in the larger society beyond the prison walls, racism pervades all of Attica in varying degrees. Although few officers will admit that they treat black and Spanish-speaking inmates differently from whites, this claim conflicts with a number of objective findings:

1. Statistics and observations of which inmates have the "good" and the "bad" jobs.
2. Unconscious slips (anecdotal material, jokes, use of racist expressions) by officers in general discussions and in answering questions.
3. Specific accounts of biased treatment cited by black and Spanish-speaking inmates, and perhaps most significantly, supported by white inmates.

One officer, for example, said that there was no racism in Attica, not even among the inmates themselves. When I pointed out the daily phenomenon of voluntary self-segregation that goes on in the mess hall, where tables end up being filled mostly with inmates of one race, his reply was: "How would you like to sit between two coloreds while you were eating?"

Another officer, also disclaiming any racist attitudes, was asked why whites were pre-

dominant in the "good" jobs such as clerical and hospital posts, while blacks and Puerto Ricans were very much overrepresented in the "bad" jobs such as duties in the metal shop and grading companies. He answered as follows: "They (black and Spanish-speaking inmates) are better suited for those jobs." And another officer stated: "It is hard to find coloreds who can do good clerical work." In addition to the fact that there are enough blacks qualified to do the kind of clerical work needed, the use of the term "colored," common among C.O.s when they are trying to talk respectfully about blacks, always conveys some degree of underlying prejudice.

There seems then to be a good deal of unconscious, as well as conscious, racism among officers and, although it may be no greater than what is present in society at large, its effect is more intense at Attica, since the prisoner can find no escape from it—no way to avoid confrontations and unpleasant experiences when the interaction is so ever-present, and the quarters so close.

Another position C.O.s take is discouragement, in active or nondirect ways, of black-white friendships. Several whites who were friendly to one or more blacks were told they would not get certain privileges they wanted while they kept up such friendships. Job discrimination has been used, according to some white inmates, as a penalty for their fraternizing with blacks. They were often called "nigger-lover" and were sometimes the target of snide remarks implying that there must be a homosexual basis for the liaison, since there could be no other explanation for such an unnatural relationship.

Racist attitudes among officers, and in the institution as a whole, were an undeniable factor among the tensions leading to the uprising. And just as aggressive responses to racial bias are increasingly common outside prison, this trend exists inside as well. Inmates today feel that they have the right, even as prisoners, to rebel against being further put down on the basis of race.

The officers' encouragement of factionalism among white, black and Spanish-speaking inmates was in part a reflection of racism and in part merely another way to keep the inmates divided. In the past this has not been generally a difficult problem for the officers, since a large number of inmates, again reflecting society at large (after all, they *were* part of the outside society before becoming inmates), carried fairly strong prejudices into Attica.

Most white inmates, especially the older ones, admit to harboring anti-black feelings and others, who denied such feelings, nevertheless expressed their prejudices unwittingly, as did the officers cited earlier. Some white inmates, who almost never talk to a black inmate, would explain: "I don't have anything against them; I just don't feel like having much to do with them." Many whites also liked the idea that they received favored treatment over the black and Spanish-speaking inmates. The habit of self-segregation seen in the mess hall, is also practiced in the yard and in E block dayroom where separate clusters of white, black and Spanish-speaking inmates are the rule.

Older white inmates, less militant and political, tended to be more overtly racist than the younger whites, who were militant and more political.

Against this general background, there had been some dramatic changes prior to the Attica uprising. With the influx of the "new inmate"—the younger and more politically and socially aware—there began to be an increasing feeling among inmates that they are all victims of an oppressing system, built and controlled largely by a middle-class, white establishment, and that all prisoners have more in common against this "enemy" than they have differences among themselves. This new sense of common interest permitted the "new" inmates to bury their mutual antagonisms or at least to lay them aside in the interests of a united effort toward bettering their conditions. This newly founded alliance, though still loose and somewhat uneasy, was more or less formalized in the months before the uprising when leaders of the different ethnic groups, including white activists came together.

Correction officers viewed this solidarity as a threat to them and to the system, and

rightly so. Not only did these younger inmates become better organized and more powerful when they stopped fighting each other, but they also influenced some of the older, more passive whites and blacks into going along with them, and made others more aware that they too could actively do something, even in prison, to change the system which they felt was destroying them.

Racism has always been an unsettling force in this country. The openly rebellious reaction to it developed gradually, but by now must be recognized as an explosive reality, within prison as well as "outside." While it is a microcosm reflecting the forces and emotions of the larger society, the prison actually magnifies and intensifies these forces, because it is so enclosed. In prison there is no possible escape from oppression, whether the oppressor is an individual man or the system itself. Every injustice becomes cruelly magnified in direct proportion to the narrowness of one's world. And prison is literally the smallest possible world.

6. *The "New Inmate" and the "Old Officer"*, with their vast differences in the behavior and attitude each expected of the other, presented a classic case of an irresolvable conflict of interest.

The new young inmate, as noted, has helped to reduce certain kinds of divisiveness among inmates, yet he has also brought other kinds. Some older inmates, who wanted only to do their time with no hassles, felt no empathy with the young "agitators." In fact, some stated they felt they had more in common with the officers than with this new breed of young inmate. These older inmates had spent 10 or more years in different prisons, they knew their role and they knew the officers' role; they were satisfied with that. And so was the officer. The paradox here is that these "good" inmates have histories of heavy recidivism. They learn little in jail and undergo nothing that can even vaguely be referred to as "rehabilitation."

On the other hand, the new type of inmate, with all his abrasiveness and hostility and for all the challenge he offers to the system, is more capable of change himself and, therefore, potentially is *more* rehabilitatable than the older, jailwise "con" ever was. To many older cons, prison has become an alternate life style—in some ways safer and easier than his life on the outside. Yet ironically, the C.O. and the prison system, being ill-equipped to handle the new order of inmate, label him "incorrigible" and "unrehabilitable." These are terms used for some of the inmates residing in HBZ. Besides talking to about 30 HBZ inmates casually while walking on the galleries, I interviewed two-at-a-time, in some depth, 12 more of the alleged leaders. Although there was some variation in the degree of motivation and commitment, it was rather surprising to note that even though all of the alleged leaders have been segregated from the rest of the prison population since the September uprising, and have been stripped of almost all ordinary prison privileges, their morale is higher than of the inmates in the general population. The commitment to a belief and philosophy (whether it be Muslim, Black Panther, Young Lords or whatever) is enough to sustain them through the great stress they have undergone. They care enough about change, and believe enough in their own power to achieve it, that they simply will not settle for the old system.

Many of these inmates thought of themselves as political prisoners or victims of society. As political prisoners, they believe that their unpopular activist attitudes and their demands for change in the societal structure (including the penal system) have led to a policy of harassment by authority institutions: false arrests, unfair trials, unjust prison sentences, and finally, discriminatory treatment at Attica. Muslims, Black Panthers, Five percenters, Young Lords, and Weathermen all fall into this category. I found that inmates housed in HBZ were especially vociferous in describing what they saw as official acts of persecution based on their political and social philosophy.

Many political prisoners would also hold society primarily to blame for their own criminal acts. By denying them equal treatment and opportunities, by practicing discrimination, these men charge, society is ultimately responsible for forcing them to

engage in criminal activity. Thus, they view themselves as victims of society. Rehabilitation for this group would mean society and prisons have to change before *they* can be expected to. This of course squarely challenges the system, and there is little give in the system. At this point, however, these men are not yet good risks for rehabilitation. Blaming society for all their ills constitutes an excuse for not trying to adjust to society. Nevertheless, my experiences at HBZ lead me to believe that if Attica gave some sign of meeting their needs, and if a program were designed to channel their frustrated energies, this group would be the most receptive of any I encountered in Attica.

In fact, many who undoubtedly have leadership qualities could be used to great advantage by the Attica administration to help motivate other inmates to move in the direction of positive change. Thus the "troublemakers" could be, ironically, very helpful to an administration which simply does not see this group's potential for helping Attica as well as itself.

This may sound somewhat fanciful to some readers, but I am convinced of the soundness of this proposition. In addition to influencing other inmates to become better motivated for change this very process of helping others would work in a most positive manner on the HBZ inmates. Helping others is one of the best ways of helping yourself.

The officers neither accept nor basically understand the concept that a person committing a crime is not fully and solely responsible for his action. These inmates are viewed simply as trouble-makers and the cause for prison unrest. Even the militants, however, indicated they would put up with prison if their treatment were more humane. Over and over one hears the cry from inmates that they want to be treated as human beings with some dignity and respect. When they complain that their manhood is taken away at Attica, they are speaking of a continuing dehumanizing and brutalizing experience. There was no chance for these inmates to accept the present Attica system (pre or post riot). They saw in it their own destruction. Rebellion, even at the risk of their lives, was preferable.

The correction officers, unable to respond to this new inmate except with suspicion and more repressive tactics, are further delineated as symbols of oppression, since most policies are mediated through the line personnel.

7. *Looser Discipline and Increased Permissiveness* in the last few years have served only to increase the stress situation for officers and inmates. I noted earlier some of the minor concessions allowed inmates, such as in their personal attire and talking privileges while marching. The increasing permissiveness occurring in society over the past decade has infiltrated the prison system as well, but Attica has been unable to absorb these changes in a comfortable, constructive manner. Thus, changes that might have been turned to Attica's and the inmate's benefit actually backfired, contributing further toward increasing tensions between C.O. and inmate.

Since officers have learned to expect obedience and to enforce discipline, they have been uneasy about how to handle the new trend toward looser discipline. Old rules were in some cases changed only unofficially, or else selectively enforced, so that neither officer nor inmate knew quite what to expect or what to do. This created an atmosphere of uncertainty, ambiguity and unease, which contributed to the growing distrust and alienation between officer and inmate.

Although laxness in rules and discipline would seem to appeal to almost all inmates, for different reasons it satisfies almost no one.

A number of old inmates, white and black, reacted negatively to the looser code because they felt more comfortable if they knew exactly what was expected of them and what they could expect; what was punishable and what was not. They wanted as little trouble from the officers as possible, and to offer the least provocation. These inmates wanted simply to do their time and not have any hassles. This could best be accomplished under rigid rules with no ambiguity or inconsistency in their application.

Other inmates, mostly the "new" inmates who were assertive in attempting to im-



prove their living conditions at Attica, had greater expectations when the tight reins were slightly loosened. When nothing positive happened, they felt more frustrated and bitter, as if they had been tricked into optimism and then betrayed.

Another aspect of the reduction of oppresiveness was that it was like opening a crack in the door. Many inmates inevitably wanted a wider crack. This is analogous to the situation outside in a society where, after many years of suffering severe oppression and dehumanization, blacks have been given something more than what they had. They are neither pleased nor grateful for this, in fact, new freedoms may make them even more painfully aware of how much and for how long they suffered unjustly. The desire both in prison and in society is for the oppressed to want unjust and oppressive conditions to be righted more quickly and more fully. Without full retribution, whatever concessions are granted are viewed bitterly as too little and too late. Giving a little invariably whets the appetite for more. And in these times the disadvantaged will no longer passively submit to inhuman conditions. They are part of the society which fostered the conditions that led to "criminal activity," and society will have to play a more constructive and active role in "rehabilitation."

So looser discipline for no useful or thoughtful purpose has only added strains for both C.O. and inmate, and contributed to the mounting tensions between the keeper and his charges.

8. *The Night Stick* carried by officers is significant for its symbolic meaning to officer and inmate, and is symptomatic of what is so basically wrong in the officer-inmate relationship. Its apparent purpose—providing self-protection—is in fact of only minimal importance, since officers are almost always in situations where they are greatly outnumbered by inmates; it would take but two inmates to neutralize whatever physical advantage the stick provides its carrier.

The stick's real function is to serve as a symbol of authority, power, and implied force, a force that the officer can exert over the inmate in any given situation.

Inmates resent bitterly this symbolic meaning of the stick. It stands as a constant reminder that there can be no trust or friendship between C.O. and inmate. Again we see the symbol of discipline, custody, and security setting barriers between the holder of the stick, and the one against whom he can wield it. It stands for brutality at the expense of compassion, and as an implied threat of violence and brutality, which sets the stage for retaliation by violence.

An incidental note which refers back to the discussion on racism, is that the night stick is also well known to both officers and inmates as "nigger stick," by which term it is made quite clear who the first target of attack would be in case of trouble.

9. *Brutality* is another issue of great importance for the inmate at Attica, although it is unclear as to how much actual physical brutality occurred in Attica prior to the rebellion. Officers tend to underplay it, and some inmates would seem to exaggerate its prevalence. There is also some confusion in that the use of the word is often meant psychologically, rather than physically. Some inmates claim to have seen physical brutality often, others to have seen none at all. This discrepancy holds true in other areas as well—notably homosexuality and drugs. A certain inmate, depending upon his location, friends, and personal inclinations and traits, may see much of certain activities, while others see little or none.

Some observations, however, are cross-validated by inmates and officers. For example, it seemed clear that a relatively small number of officers—the actual number is debatable, but at least one inmate and one officer reported incidents in which 2 other officers struck blows not in self-defense. (The same 2 officers were named.) The majority of officers, however, do not seem to use undue force.

My impression from hearing different viewpoints of widely varied sources at Attica, is that although physical brutality has occurred, it is not so widespread or common as the amount of talk about it would lead one to think. However, the *threat* of physical

force is omnipresent and the psychological brutality, to which all inmates are subjected, on a chronic basis, can hardly be exaggerated.

The damage done to the inmates from this source is incalculable; the resentment and bitterness thus engendered contributed heavily to the eruption of September 9, 1971.

So, finally, it is probably not terribly important just how much physical brutality occurred, because the brutalizing experience on a psychological level is just about universal at Attica.

### III. Conclusions

I have outlined some of the main areas of conflict between officer and inmate leading to the September uprising. These conflicts stem from prison philosophy and operation, both emphasizing custody and security at the expense of rehabilitation.

There are, of course, other problems, apart from the direct officer-inmate clashes; problems exist in every area of Attica life, but they all have their roots in the same general philosophy, which simply does not allow a prison to function therapeutically for its inmates.

The physical layout (splitting Attica into four sections, each isolated from the others); the parole board hearings (quick, arbitrary decisions, often handed down without explanations to the inmate); the wage structure (twenty-five cents up to a maximum of a dollar a day), better suited to a child's allowance than to a man's pay; inadequacy of medical care, recreation, school or vocational programs; all have contributed to the sharp rise in discontent prior to the riot. These conditions still exist today.

Whether it is the wage scale or the medical treatment, the underlying structure and approach invariably combine to create a dehumanized and emasculated feeling in the inmate. "They take away your manhood" is the common refrain.

For the officers to believe in the system which operates through them, they must actually consider the inmate to be not fully human, whether or not they consciously admit this attitude, even to themselves. In such an environment, the officer loses some of his own humanity through his engaging daily in brutal and brutalizing behavior. He may remain quite unaware of what he is doing, or of the effect of his actions on the inmates with whom he deals. This is how the oppressor, locked in the same world as the oppressed, becomes brutalized and dehumanized too.

There were many warnings of what was to come in September, 1971. These warnings were pleas for change and they were offered in a non-violent form. There were the strikes: in the metal shop, to protest the low wages\*; at sick call, to demonstrate to Commissioner Oswald how serious were their grievances against the inadequate medical care they were receiving. There was the July Manifesto (1971) demanding wide reforms, which was sent to Commissioner Oswald but received no satisfactory response.

The Jackson Day Memorial fast, mourning Jackson's death and the July 4 (1971) "peace pact" entered into by black, Spanish-speaking and white "militants" indicated that the inmates could organize and present a more unified front.

Officers were at a loss to cope with the situation. Every officer I interviewed, as well as the psychiatrists and heads of other departments, foresaw real trouble ahead. No one knew quite when or in what form it would come, but they all knew it was coming. Some officers began leaving their wallets home, so insecure did they feel. They did not remember ever doing or feeling anything similar in their many years of service at Attica.

The inmates were demanding some voice in determining how their lives were to be lived, even in prison, or at least demanding that someone hear their voice and respond.

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\* Although they won a small raise, they stated that it was negated by a rise in commissary prices.

But there was no response. No communication meant there was no safety valve through which any of the pressure might be released. Eventually there had to be an explosion. The precise incident in the yard involving a scuffle between officer and inmate only determined the moment that Attica actually ignited. But by this time, any small event or non-event would have triggered the explosion. The actual precipitating event was unimportant. It could have been anything.

The aftermath is perhaps even sadder and grimmer than was the holocaust itself, because virtually nothing had changed as of April 1972, when I last visited Attica.

Two showers a week were then permitted, compared with the previous one a week. But as one inmate put it, sarcastically, "Great, only now we have less to do that gets us dirty," referring to the fact that, after the uprising the few permitted activities at Attica were curtailed or eliminated during construction repairs to riot-damaged facilities.

The one showcase change which was much publicized was the election of an Inmate Liaison Committee in March of 1972. This group of 28 elected inmates was to represent the prison population and maintain contact with the administration "on matters relative to the general welfare of the inmate community." But as of April the liaison committee was still complaining that they were not meeting with the officers or having their problems and suggestions respectfully attended to. They claimed petty harrassments and resistance such as not getting a typewriter, or a mimeograph machine to either formally write their constitution or disseminate information to the general prison population. There still was no Spanish-speaking or black inmate working in the hospital. To their question concerning this matter a note was received stating that only a porter's job was open. The Committee felt it could not work effectively because its constitutional by-laws could not be typed for Commissioner Oswald's approval.

The committee felt that a backlash sentiment against its formation had developed in the administration and that this sentiment had prompted official moves to hamper its functioning. The members of the committee told me quite clearly that they expect another riot. Again no one was listening to their complaints, despite the official awareness that the troubles all began because there was no responsive ear to listen to them.

Almost all the officers I interviewed who were part of Attica in September, 1971, spoke of wanting to retire, of finding the job no longer satisfying as it once was for them. They really seemed unaware that anything in their behavior might have been wrong. They did what the system asked of them. None had the imagination or will to change themselves or the system. They cannot return to the old ways which have demonstrably failed. Yet they are not prepared for new approaches. Some recommendations for a new kind of officer and a new philosophy at Attica are offered in my discussion of the problem of officer functioning. These recommendations appear in the first section of this report.

After the second day of the public hearings on the Attica rebellion, the inmates on E block (the only block where inmates can watch T.V. indoors) were no longer permitted to watch the telecast of the proceedings. The reason given for the censorship was that it had been unfair to the rest of the prison population, who did not have access to T.V. That this "unfairness" would hold equally true for watching anything on T.V. was obvious to all inmates. The authorities did not even try to think up a reasonable excuse. Again, the policy of no communication had been imposed. Public hearings about Attica were closed to Attica inmates, the most vitally concerned segment of the public. Again, the inmates' status had been reduced to less than human proportion.

The decision to institute a 3-month officer training program is another instance of tokenism, in this case an attempt to satisfy the criticism that two to three weeks of training is insufficient for a correctional officer.

Sprinkling the staff with black and Spanish-speaking officers, as I indicated earlier,

can even produce a negative effect unless it is accompanied by fundamental operational changes.

The liaison committee, as noted, feels it has been had. Its formation had been publicized as auguring a change in policy, but the members of the committee say this too was an empty gesture, another unfulfilled promise. The set-up is not working for them, nor for the inmates they are supposed to be representing.

Many officers and others testified at the public hearings that more money was needed to carry out better programs at Attica. Indeed, some seemed to indicate that money could solve most of prison ills. I would like to emphasize that I think this is more wishful thinking, which glosses over the really profoundly radical changes that are needed in the whole philosophy of how Attica should operate. Surely Attica could do with more money for many things that could realistically improve conditions for the inmates but money alone will be largely wasted. First there must be dramatic changes in policy, which I feel are far more crucial to the task of making Attica relevant to inmate needs.

It is tragically significant that the first funds are earmarked for equipment or other measures designed to make Attica more secure. The lesson to be learned—that true rehabilitation is the only security Attica can ever have—has yet to be learned.

In asking inmates what has changed at Attica since the riots, many point to the new gun tower commanding the yards of Attica; it is a larger symbol than the night stick, but it will prove just as ineffective in containing prisoners who are looking for another kind of change.

In the officer-inmate conflict that played so large a role in leading to the bloody riot, both officer and inmate were defeated and no Phoenix has yet risen from the Attica ashes. As of April both groups said conditions are worse than before the riot.

Promised reforms are both small and late in coming.

There must be a bold, imaginative restructuring of the prison so the line officer begins to deal with the prisoner as a fellow human being, not as a caged animal.

The pressures are building anew and there is not much time.

The indicators at this point are that the Attica tragedy will happen again.