

# We Can Expect More Atticas

By WILLIAM J. GOODE

The Attica bloodshed demands an answer to the anguished question our politicians keep asking, "What is wrong with our sick society?"

All the killings at Attica, whether of guards or prisoners, are tragic; we should all feel compassion for those killed, and for their families and friends. But these killings are, in a larger sense, a symptom of much deeper problems in our nation. Literally hundreds of studies over the decades have reported findings that prove our nation as a whole, like our prison systems, pursues policies that generate more violence. Consequently, we can expect more such killings in the future.

I do not believe that strong statement is political at all, for it is based on data from good sociological research.

(1) In any social system—whether a nation, a conquered country, a gang, a prison, or a family—violence breeds violence. If you use violence to control people, they will hate you and will use it themselves when they get the chance.

(2) If you strip away from a human being the very fundamentals of his humanity—sex and love, meaningful work, and freedom from arbitrary violence—as American prisons do, then he will see at once that there is no

point to "improving himself in prison," for as long as he is there he can win back none of them.

All of the organizations that have been successful in changing men's hearts, such as the Catholic orders, West Point in its prime, or medical schools, inform their members that their old selves must be thrown away, but they offer in return a higher dignity through belonging to the new organization: meaningful work, human acceptance, and fraternal solidarity. We do the reverse in our prisons; we take all these things away.

(3) All social order and obedience to authority rests basically on legitimacy, on people's belief that the system is fundamentally decent, fair, honorable, and protective to its members. If leaders blatantly lie in order to persuade the people, they destroy credence, faith, and legitimacy. Both respectable citizens and prisoners withdrew some of their support of the system when they learned that they were fed lies: The Attica prisoners did not slash the throats of the guards, did not castrate them, did not even have guns, and apparently the attacking lawmen killed both prisoners and guards.

(4) If you don't want violence between guards who are almost all white and prisoners who are mostly

black, you must bring in more black guards. Their presence keeps the racism of the white guards in some check, and lowers their eagerness to use force. The prisoners, in turn, are less inclined to use force and indeed are more likely to feel that both black and white guards have some sympathy with them.

(5) If you want to gain the loyalty of some prisoners, to persuade many that their best interests lie in reforming themselves, to convince most that violence is a poor policy, you must consult with them on almost all the problems of running the prison. Dozens of studies have shown that arbitrary rule is ineffective, administration without participation is unwise, rule by fiat is destructive.

Again, I repeat: These statements are not political propaganda. They have been confirmed by many studies in a vast range of different settings—prisons, families, corporations, imperial colonies, and nations. Perhaps they prove no more than really wise men have always known, and sociological research was not needed to prove them. If so, it is high time we listened to those wise men.

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