

'Go Back Where You Came From'

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By AFENI SHAKUR

On the lips of almost every person in America is that strange word—Attica. Few, however, are willing to admit that had the American public voiced its concern when they were asked to by those inmates (weeks before), we would not have the blood of 40 human beings on our hands. We forget that some of those same people asked for these same basic demands a year earlier at the Tombs in Queens. They were duped at that time by empty promises.

Those of us who traveled the four hundred-odd miles to that armed camp feel more than outrage. There is tremendous grief and frustration. We went there with a proposal that would have saved lives, and yet we were barred from relaying that message. Instead, we were threatened at gun point and told to "go back where you came from."

Five times we approached the town of Attica and five times we listened to shotguns, rifles, and carbines being cocked at our heads. We were searched, interrogated and threatened.

Through persistent telephone calls to the negotiating team, we finally got our message to the inmates. The Governments of North Vietnam, North Korea, Algeria and Congo Brazzaville had indicated to the Black Panther party that they would accept in to their countries any inmate of Attica prison who wished to leave. At the command of the inmates, a jet would land at Kennedy Airport to safely transport those inmates to a "non-imperialist country."

Let us examine the value of such a proposal objectively. It is a fact that two to four hundred inmates who pushed for the demand had little to gain by any other terms. Those with prison terms exceeding seven years had absolutely nothing to lose but their lives. With the proposal came a new life in a country which would not condemn them to a cage for the rest of their lives. Some feared execution (rightly so) immediately after a surrender. They refused to die as anything but determined young men of dignity.

Some of us were in New York City jails during the insurrections here and we felt the negotiators should negotiate alongside the inmates instead of for them. We could have at least made it clear to the inmates that any promises of amnesty were not worth the paper they were written on. Their only hope in avoiding reprisals was

to receive safe passage out of America.

We went to Attica Saturday night and were met by an 8 A.M. to 8 P.M. curfew. Despite the fact that the town was practically deserted, we were flagged down by eight state troopers and a small group of town residents at a roadblock a mile from the concentration camp. They were, to the man, armed with .357 Magnum shotguns or semiautomatic carbines.

We identified ourselves to a trooper sergeant, while his backmen cocked their shotguns and leveled them at each of our heads. We informed the sergeant that we had vital information concerning the negotiations. He suggested we give him the information. We refused and were ordered to leave Attica.

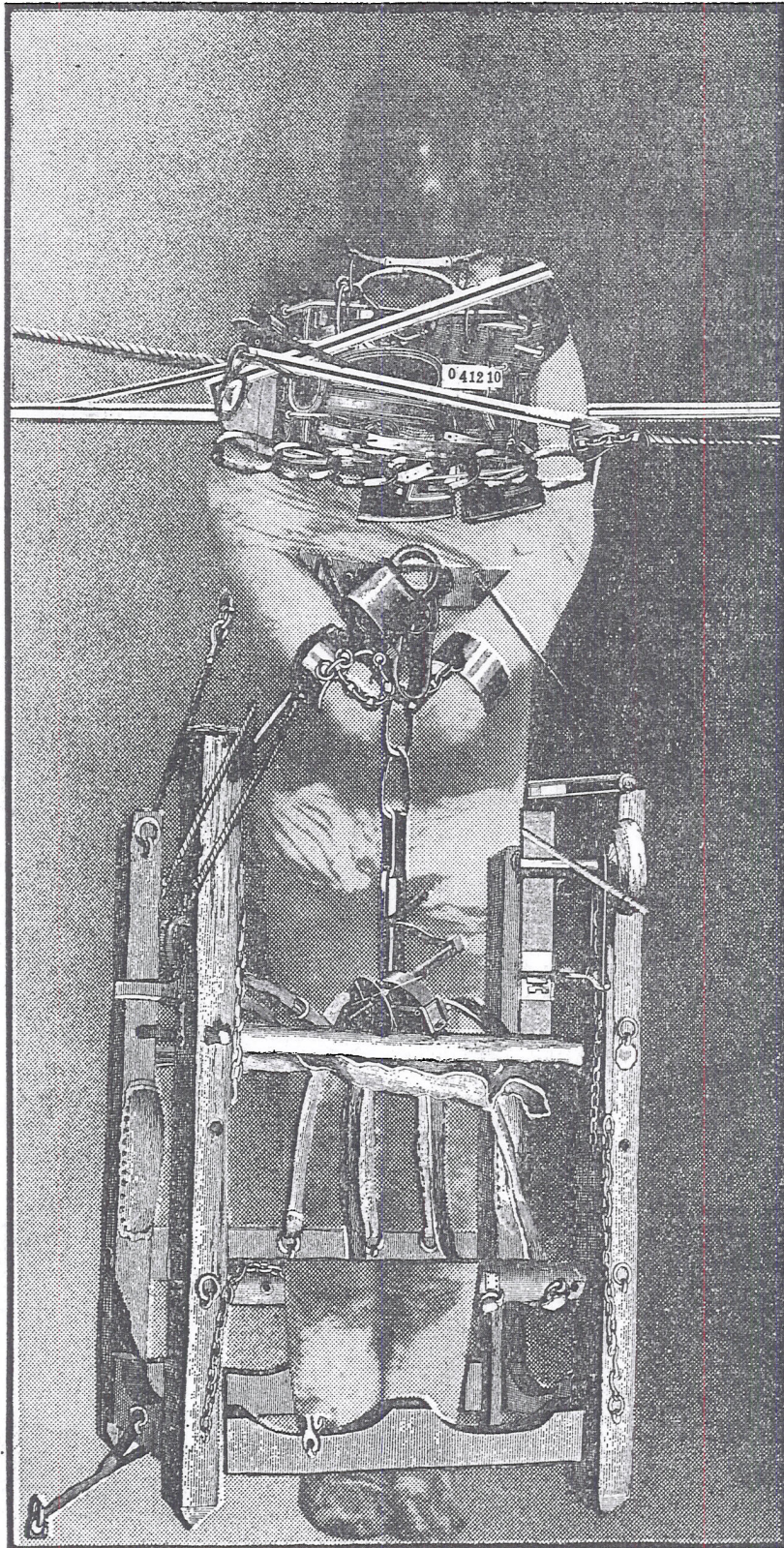
The following morning (Sunday), we woke up William Kunstler of the observers committee and gave him the information to relay to the inmates. Dr. Curtis Powell, another observer, had attempted to see the inmates on Saturday morning. He managed to get outside of the prison that day only because the roadblocks weren't set up until the troopers declared the curfew.

The police and the state troopers were so hostile toward him that Delores Costello of WBAI asked the press if Dr. Powell could sit in their cars because she believed they would kill him.

Bobby Seale of the Black Panther party had permission to return, yet they still refused to let him go in. All any of us wanted to do was save the lives of our incarcerated brothers and they denied us this. The storm troopers were determined to have their bloodbath and they persisted in blocking anyone who attempted to stop it. And now the massacre has happened! It cannot be undone. Those people, all of them, were murdered on the direct orders of Governor Rockefeller and President Nixon.

Attica 1971 sounds like Moncada 1953. The unflinching fight for human dignity of those inmates black, brown and white, must be carried forth by all of us who call ourselves human beings. The prisoners of Attica traded whatever racism they had for a common goal of liberation. Brothers Elton, Sam, Champ and the rest—we will not fail you as we did on September 13th. The torch of liberation has been lit and we indeed shall carry it forth.

Afeni Shakur was a defendant in the New York Black Panther trial.



Anita Siegel