

Inmate Tells Hearing of Life at Attica

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ROCHESTER, April 14 — A 50-year-old black inmate who conceded that his life in the Attica prison was far better than that of the average convict there told the McKay Commission here today of prison routines that even in the absence of overt brutality "harass" and "dehumanize" inmates.

"You don't have to put a hand on me to degrade me," said the inmate, Edward Young, who has been in the Attica Correctional Facility since 1960, serving a 30-to-60-year sentence for the killing of his father-in-law.

The commission, headed by Robert B. McKay, dean of the New York University Law School, was appointed to investigate the circumstances of last September's rebellion at Attica. Thus far it has explored prison life through testimony of inmates and members of the custodial staff. When it resumes its hearings in New York City on Monday, it will focus more directly on events leading up to the five days of turmoil, which ended with the deaths of 43 inmates and other

Young explained today that as a World War II veteran receiving \$40 a month in disability payments he was in a favored position. Then, too, he said, his youth in upstate Jamestown, where he lived in a white neighborhood as the son of a "loving" minister father, gave him advantages that most of Attica's city-born blacks and Puerto Ricans do not have.

Restrictions of Prison

He told of his two daughters in college and of never having experienced racial discrimination in childhood. Young said he now held "one of the best jobs in the prison," power-house clerk. He is trusted by the administration and has a pass that lets him move freely through the prison. He is also trusted by the inmates and was elected in March to serve on Attica's new inmates liaison committee.

But having explained all this Young noted the many ways prison bureaucracy restricted his life and that of his fellow convicts.

Prisoners, he said, are not allowed to receive cigars or cigarettes from their families, even though these things are not forbidden at other institu-



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Edward Young of Jamestown at the Rochester hearing

tions. Packages have to weigh no more than 15 pounds. And last month he was told he could no longer receive a lemonade drink he had been getting from his family for years.

He told how his brother once brought him six pairs of undershorts on a visit. "Three of them were blue and I had to give those up for security reasons," he said, drawing laughter from the commission and a handful of spectators watching the hearing. Under a state regulation, inmates are not permitted blue clothing, since this is the color of guard uniforms. The underlying assumption of this rule is that men could escape disguised as guards.

As to racial prejudice, he said that when he first came to the prison "it was worse than anywhere I've been, Mississippi or Alabama." He said there were separate white and black sport teams and different haircuts for whites and blacks.

Within the last few years the situation has improved, he said, noting that now blacks can hold almost any job in the institution. He added, however, that there were very few guards who could relate to urban slum youths.

"I get along with most of

the guards," he said. "I like the same things they do—bowling, hunting and fishing. But how can they understand a kid from Bedford-Stuyvesant who never had a father, never went to Yankee Stadium, never had a chance."

Once, he said, he had heard a guard—one of the three or four he regards as "outright racists" use the term "nigger." But worse than racism, Mr. Young said, is the failure of the system to treat men like adults.

"Can you imagine," he said, "year in and year out you're an adult and you can't think, you can't express an opinion."

"The administration always expects you to act the same, to line up every day the same. They don't know and they don't care if an inmate may have gotten a letter telling him his wife's pregnant and he's been in jail for three years."

Young's testimony was the highlight of today's hearing, which also included statements by correction officers and the directors of two prison workshops. All of these people said that more programs were needed and that more money had to be provided by the Legislature.