

By JACK NEWFIELD

Elliot Barkley died a year ago today. He died in the yard of D block at Attica. Barkley was 21 years old and black. He was in Attica for violation of parole. He had violated parole by being unemployed, and he was unemployed because he was fired when his boss discovered he was an ex-con.

A year ago today, Walter Dunbar, the deputy commissioner of corrections, stood outside the gray, 30-foot wall of Attica and informed the media that inmates had murdered nine hostages by slitting their throats, and that one hostage was castrated, his testicles stuffed in his mouth. Dunbar said the storming of the prison was "an efficient, affirmative police action."

A year ago today Nelson Rockefeller released a statement from his home on Fifth Avenue that began: "Our hearts go out to the families of the hostages who died at Attica." He pointedly offered no sympathy for Elliot Barkley's mother, living in Buffalo's black ghetto, or for the children and widows of the 29 inmates who died by his decision.

It is now a year later, the picture have slowly emerged, and I think it is clear who should be punished.

Every hostage who died on Sept. 13, 1971, was killed by state police guns. The official version of slit throats and castration was disproved by the autopsies. We now know thanks to the McKay Commission hearings that between fourteen and seventeen corrections officers, without permission, fired into the yard of D block with their own hunting guns, and that they killed two inmates. We now know that the state police were firing dum-dum bullets, which are outlawed under international law and the Geneva Convention. We now know that 450 rounds of ammunition were fired into the yard in that "efficient," action, hitting one out of every ten inmates. We now know the inmates had no guns and fired no bullets. We now know, after a public screening of the official film

of the police assault, that the first warning to the inmates to surrender came after four minutes and twenty seconds of heavy shooting. We now know that it wasn't only the inmates, and the hostages, and observers' committee who pleaded with the Governor to come to Attica, but that Corrections Commissioner Russell Oswald, on three separate occasions, implored the Governor to come.

There is also now sufficient evidence to suggest another factor in the Attica massacre not mentioned by Governor Rockefeller or Commissioner Dunbar. That factor is racism.

On Sept. 13, 1971, 70 per cent of the 2,254 men in Attica were blacks and Puerto Ricans; whites somehow end up in nice prisons like Walkill. But not one of the guards at Attica was black or Puerto Rican. And not one of the 2,800 residents of the town of Attica was nonwhite. The guards in Attica called their batons "nigger sticks."

Of the 600 state police who stormed Attica, not one was black. When they surged into the yard, they were chanting, "White power, white power."

The racism even extended beyond death. In the Attica morgue, the dead guards were tagged with their names. The dead inmates were tagged, "P-1," "P-2," and so on.

Conditions inside Attica today are worse than before the riot. Most of the 28 inmate demands that Commissioner Oswald quickly agreed to, and admitted were "long overdue," have still not been implemented. There is still no narcotics program for inmates, the food is still served with glass, bugs and hair in it, there are still frequent complaints of brutality and race-baiting by guards.

More than eighty Attica inmates, presumed "militants," have been locked in solitary confinement for the last 365 days. Most have been dispersed among other upstate prisons, but twenty are still held in Attica's isolation unit. The men are in 6 by 8 cages that have no chair, no mirror,

no desk. The windows in their cells have been painted over so they have not seen the sun in a year. The cells are arranged so the men cannot see each other. They are permitted to exercise ten minutes a day, and granted one three-minute shower a week. Some have lost as much as 50 pounds. And they have not been formally charged with anything or given a hearing.

One of the most deeply felt of the 28 demands was the removal of the two prison doctors, Sternberg and Williams. They are still there. One inmate in isolation went to Dr. Williams with severe chest pains. He was refused medication and told: "You should have died in the yard, nigger." Another inmate has a chronic bone infection in his leg. For months he was denied antibiotics, and given twenty aspirin a day. He will soon have his leg amputated.

Attica was not unique in our recent history. Several times we have watched the state kill, and the killers receive the special amnesty of the powerful. At the Algiers Motel, at Orangeburg, at Kent State, at Jackson State, the law acted as an outlaw and escaped accountability.

On this first anniversary of Attica, I meditate on the short life of Elliot Barkley, and know that Nelson Rockefeller will never be held to account.

*Jack Newfield is an editor of The Village Voice.*

There are 700 import-exp  
at Bank of America, New York  
concentrate solely in the field of  
tional banking and financing, and  
offer better service. We work on  
the-clock basis to speed your transac-



Drawing by Brad Holland for a poster published by a group of former Attica prisoners