

9 1 faith.

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2 Q Were you a Muslim prior to coming to Attica?

3 A No.

4 Q What attracted you to the Muslims when you
5 came to Attica?

6 A What attracted me was the moral and the
7 spiritual uplifting that I got from Islamic faith,
8 which the correctional department, Department of
9 Correctional Institutions could not give me.

10 You see, this is what I was looking for. I
11 wanted something to take the place of my reason for
12 being there. I needed something to supplement for my
13 drug addiction. For doing--committing felonies, crimes.
14 I needed something to take the place of this and they
15 had no program there that I found that was qualified
16 to give me this.

17 So consequently, when I came into the faith
18 of Islam, this supplemented all that that I was looking
19 for.

20 Q Brother Matthews, we've talked and the
21 Commission has heard about the routines at Attica.

22 We have heard about the long hours that in-
23 mates spend in their cells. We have heard about the
24 few hours they spend on the yard. We heard that they
25 spend very little time together.

110 A Right. 168

2 Q The Muslim's attracted you.

3 A Right.

4 Q You said that they gave you the orientation
5 and the hope that you looked for.

6 A Right.

7 Q When do Muslim's have the opportunity to give
8 you this orientation?

9 A Let me clarify that.

10 You used the word "they". It was one brother
11 in particular that came to me. At this particular time
12 he was the only brother in the whole institution that
13 had this particular ideology of thought of El Islam.
14 He seen me, right. I, in turn, tried to run from him
15 because at that time I didn't think that I was ready to
16 become a Muslim. I didn't think I was ready to embrace
17 El Islam, but he convined me otherwise and he made me
18 understand and realize my need for El Islam, so I
19 embraced it.

20 Now, after embracing, I found out that we came
21 into quite a lot of obstacles. I had no place to
22 worship and no place to pray. We had no place where he
23 could congregate with our own brothers who believed in
24 El Islam. We tried to get a place to pray, a place to
25 worship. This particular brother went to Mr. Mancusci

1
11 and asked Mr. Mancusci if the followers of El Islam 169
2
3 could have a particular place to pray.

4 He, in turn, told the brother that you already
5 have some place. They at this time had some guys
6 coming from UB and they were giving in--instructing
7 the brothers in Orthodox Muslim.

8 Q And you weren't an Orthodox Muslim?

9 A Right.

10 Q You distinguish an Orthodox Muslim--

11 A I would like to say I am a Sunai (Phonetic)
12 Moslem, who follows the teaching of the Prophet
13 Ibin (Phonetic) Mohammed of Old.

14 Now, you have individuals or prisoners who say
15 that they are Orthodox Muslims, right. You have indi-
16 viduals who say that they are Sunai Muslims. You have
17 various thoughts but it all comes under one banner of
18 El Islam.

19 Q The followers of Mohammed, the Muslims, the
20 general population of Muslims follow Elijah Mohammed?

21 A Yes. There are a very great many at Attica.

22 Q Do they have a place of worship?

23 A They have meetings that I believe are held in
24 the Mess Hall, right. But at one time they were denied
25 this also. They were discriminated against greatly and
they had to put in quite a few writs in order to have

1 what they have now.

2 Q The Orthodox Muslims at this point, you say,
3 do not have a place to worship?

4 A Right. Like I said. The fellows that are
5 coming in from UB, right, how should I say, are not
6 ordained or Imans. Imans mean a spiritual guide or
7 teacher.

8 Q They are coming from what school?

9 A They are students.

10 Q From what school?

11 A The University of Buffalo. They come in and
12 they teach El Islam to the best of their ability, right.
13 But now what we want, what the brothers in Attica wanted
14 was someone who--from our group, right.

15 Q A black representative?

16 A A black representative.

17 Q These are white students?

18 A Yemen, Syria, from Arabia or from--

19 Q How often do they come into the institution?

20 A Once a week.

21 Q How long has this practice been permitted?

22 A This has been permitted maybe six or seven
23 months now.

24 Q Are there any other preliminary doctrines
25 to your faith which are not permitted to practice?

1 A Such as eating swine. This is forbidden, 171
2 pork, pig, the hog. This is forbidden to any devout
3 Muslim. I just got finished scanning this sheet here,
4 which is--

5 Q At this time, I would like to show the
6 Commission a menu which we received from the institution
7 and you have a copy of it in front of you, Mr. Matthews.

8 A Right.

9 Q I would like you to look at the top line. I
10 believe it is August 15.

11 A Right.

12 Q 1971?

13 A Right.

14 Q If we look at Sunday breakfast menu of
15 August 15, we will see you have Corn Flakes, milk,
16 fresh fruit and bread. Because of your faith, I under-
17 stand you are not permitted to eat certain meals.

18 Would you be able to eat that meal?

19 A Yes.

20 Q Now, we will look at the second meal of the
21 day which I believe is the heaviest meal, am I correct?

22 A Correct.

23 Q That is the heaviest meal of the day at Attica?

24 A Yes, it is.

25 Q Would you read down that menu, please?

1 A Grilled hamsteak with rasin sauce. 172

2 Mashed potatoes, brown gravy, mustard. Parkerhouse
3 rolls, Oleo, Lima beans, strawberry ice cream, bread
4 and coffee.

5 Q At that meal, what would you eat from that
6 meal?

7 A Strawberry ice cream. Possibly the lima
8 beans depending on what they were cooked in.

9 Q If they were cooked in pork, you could not
10 eat it?

11 A No.

12 Q Do you generally eat lima beans?

13 A No, because I myself don't have a great
14 taste for lima beans. Mashed potatoes with no trim-
15 mings. Just simply eat the mashed potatoes with some--
16 with the oleo. I put the oleo on the mashed potatoes.

17 Q What about the grilled hamsteak?

18 A That's definitely out.

19 Q You also would eat in that meal the mashed
20 potatoes, possibly gravy--no gravy?

21 A No gravy at all because the gravy more or
22 less came from the hamsteak.

23 Q You would have the rolls?

24 A Right. I would.

25 Q And you would have the strawberry ice cream

1 and the bread?

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2 A Right. And I would drink the coffee.

3 Q So then you would return to work in the
4 metal shop?

5 A Right.

6 Q And you would come back in the evening for
7 your third meal?

8 A Right.

9 Q If the camera would move over to the third
10 meal, we will ask Mr. Matthews what he would select
11 from that dinner?

12 A That all depends if I was hungry but even in
13 that there is not too much to choose from. I would
14 drink the tea, take the pineapple jam back to my cell
15 and they could keep the French onion soup.

16 Q The largest meal of the day at Attica is the
17 noon meal?

18 A Right.

19 Q And if you will look at--you have looked at
20 the menu. You have determined you would only eat
21 very little from that large meal.

22 A That's right.

23 Q How do you supplement your diet or do you
24 supplement it?

25 A Yell, first of all, you learn how to fast.

1 You learn how to condition your body mentally and 174
2 physically as in relation to food.

3 Now, you know that the meats in the institu-
4 tion, the great majority of them is pork. They tell
5 you that they're going to have hamburger steaks that
6 are strictly beef, you understand. But now, if you
7 bit into it you find out that it is not only beef,
8 it is bread and pork. The majority of it being bread.
9 The next being pork. And very little beef. So now
10 what you have to do is if it is not a chicken or if
11 it is not a fishstick, you leave it alone.

12 Q So on the average day at Attica, would you
13 go to all three meals?

14 A Right. Well, it is compulsory that you go
15 to the morning meal and the noon meal. The evening
16 meal is left up to your discretion. You can go or
17 lay in your crib. On the weekends you can miss the
18 morning meal and you can miss the evening meal but you
19 cannot miss the noon meal. You have to go to the noon
20 meal.

21 Q Do you believe when you see the food prepared
22 or food has been prepared for you and if it is listed
23 that something is non-beef, that it is--or non-pork--
24 that it is non-pork?

25 A I have had prisoners, guys that work in the

1 mess hall say you can eat that, brother, that's 175
2 good. Or this is all right, brother.

3 The majority of the guys, I should say some
4 of the guys, right, if there happens to be a fellow
5 believer of Mohammed who works in the mess hall. These
6 guys, they really get down what's happening with their
7 food business, right. So now they're going to make
8 their brothers aware of what's happening with the menu.

9 So 9 times out of 10 if they tell you that
10 you can eat it, it's permissible, but now, myself,
11 understand, no one is going to help me to enter the
12 gates of paradise. I have to do this myself. I have
13 to use my own discretion. When I come across and I
14 see something that I don't think is permissible, I
15 don't fool with it. And 9 times out of 10 it's
16 supposed to be beef hamburgers or beef hotdogs, they
17 tell me brother, that's beef. I say that's cool, but
18 I am not going to trust it anyway. I will simply
19 have me some coffee or I will have me some vegetables
20 and I will be through with it.

21 Q Do you receive any food packages from home?

22 A Right.

23 Q How often are you permitted to receive one?

24 A Once a month.

25 Q Are there any limits on the size of the pack-

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2 A There is a limitation on the packages. You
3 get one package a month and on a holiday. The package
4 cannot weigh but, I believe it is 25 pounds, I'm not
5 at all sure. But it is so many pounds. Anything over,
6 they send it back or they put it in the garbage or
7 they eat it themselves.

8 Q Do you use the package or the foodstuffs
9 in the package to supplement your diet since you
10 don't eat much in the mess hall?

11 A Definitely. Definitely. This is--a package
12 coming from the street, coming in from home with loving
13 care, the guys in the institution treasure this. This
14 is a treasure.

15 Q You have just discussed the particular prob-
16 lems you are faced with that Muslims have. These things
17 presently exist? Is the diet that you looked at dated
18 August 15, 1971 substantially--

19 A This is what's happening now. This is what's
20 happening now.

21 Q You apparently haven't given up your inten-
22 tion to further your education?

23 A No, I haven't given up even though I know
24 that--I felt as though the correctional department or
25 my superiors have shot me a curve. I'm not going to

1 lose faith. I'm going to see on my own to the best 177
2 ability that I have to better myself.

3 Q At Attica that means--does it mean using the
4 library?

5 A The library?

6 Q The library at Attica.

7 A Yes, you can use the library.

8 Q Are you satisfied with the listings of books
9 in the library?

10 A Not really. The majority of the literature
11 that I have I have sent away for. I sent on my own.

12 Q What kind of books did you recently send
13 for?

14 A Well, the only books that I am interested in
15 right now is books pertaining to El Islam, my religion.
16 As far as a formal education, I just forgot that. As
17 far as reading, writing and arithmetic to help me out
18 in the street, I just cut that loose when they shoot
19 that book up on me. I forgot about that.

20 Q As a result of the offer of the self-study
21 course and then your subsequent involvement with the
22 Muslim experience, you have abandoned the institutional
23 approach to education?

24 A Right.

25 Q Have you had occasion to use the medical

2 A Yes. Right.

3 Q Would you tell us about some of your ex-
4 periences up there?

5 A I was trying to explain a case, my particular
6 case, to a one Dr. Williams. When I was in the service,
7 when I was in the service I got what is known as a
8 permanent strain. Afterwards when I got out of the
9 service I went to a urologist so he told me there
10 was no operation that they could perform. It wasn't
11 a hernia. The best that he could do was to give me
12 some pain pills to kill the pain and give me a special
13 apparatus to wear.

14 Q This was a doctor on the street?

15 A This is a doctor, a urologist, a specialist,
16 he gave me a special apparatus to wear. To hold myself
17 intact. At times I may be sitting down and it comes
18 on me. Severe pain. It's hard for me to walk. Very
19 uncomfortable. I can't work. I am not supposed to
20 work but I do work. So now, this particular day I
21 went over to see Mr. Williams, Doc Williams in order
22 to find out if I could possibly get a jock strap to
23 wear.

24 So now I was trying to explain to him my
25 conditions and how it came about. I also tried to

1 explain to him that this happened to me prior 179
2 before coming to Attica. It didn't happen to me in
3 Attica. It happened to me when I was in the service.
4 I ran out to him what the specialist, the urologist
5 told me. I then told him about me being in Japan and
6 lifting heavy objects and what not.

7 So after the end of the conversation he was
8 doing something like this, so he said, I tell you what
9 you do. He said why don't you write to Japan for help.

10 So I then turned around and gave him a piece
11 of my mind which he quickly told the police to lock me
12 up.

13 Q Were you locked up?

14 A Oh, yes, definitely. Definitely.

15 Q Are you now doing any--are they now doing
16 anything about your condition?

17 A In reference to that--

18 Q In reference to Attica medical facilities?

19 A I had written up a writ and I was going to
20 present this to the proper authorities but during
21 the riot it was lost so at this particular stage I haven't
22 anything in reference to this effect.

23 Another instance I would like to--

24 Q On that first instance when you went to the
25 doctor at Attica, you asked for medication or some aid

1 for your condition?

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2 A Right.

3 Q You were told to call Japan.

4 A I was told to write to Japan for help.

5 Q Or write to Japan. You then mouthed off?

6 A Most definitely.

7 Q Then they locked you up?

8 A Yes, sir.

9 Q Were you locked up because you responded to
10 the doctor?

11 A Yes.

12 Q And did you then go before the disciplinary
13 committee?

14 A Right. I went before the disciplinary com-
15 mittee. They told me I was wrong and the doctor was
16 right. So I think I got maybe, I believe this particu-
17 lar time seven days, five days. I can't remember.

18 Q And nothing was done about your condition?

19 A About my what?

20 Q Your condition at that time?

21 A Oh, no, that was it.

22 Q You had occasion to use the medical facilities,
23 which you find to be inadequate and the library which
24 you have almost abandoned?

25 A Right.

1 Q The diet doesn't meet your needs either? 181

2 A No.

3 Q How do you manage to psychologically sur-
4 vive?

5 A Well, through my present program which is
6 studying El Islam.

7 This is how I manage to survive. I manage
8 to get down to the core and to the nature of my particu-
9 lar case. I manage to understand and read out and
10 rationalize what brought me to Attica. After doing
11 this I started working on this. And at present this
12 is what I'm doing. I'm trying to reorientate myself,
13 I'm trying to do a 360 degree turn around.

14 Q You said in the beginning when you came to
15 Attica or you prepared yourself to come to Attica,
16 you anticipated tremendous hostility, you anticipated
17 just the kind of harm visited upon you which you heard
18 that took place in these institutions. You came to
19 Attica and you found out that a lot of these things
20 are true.

21 A Right.

22 Q Prior to coming to Attica, you had some
23 experience with the Black Panther Party?

24 A Right.

25 Q You had some experience with some other

1 political experience?

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2 A Right.

3 Q Now at Attica you are involved with Muslims.
4 Have you found that the Muslims or the Black Panthers
5 or the Young Lords or SDS group if they exist, do you
6 find any of these groups receive different kinds of
7 treatment from officers at Attica?

8 A Most definitely. The average officer believes
9 that these various organizations and groups are a threat
10 to them. Physically, mentally, maybe morally, I don't
11 know.

12 But they definitely feel as though the brothers
13 are a threat when in actuality what the brothers are
14 trying to do, they are trying to find themselves.
15 They are trying to find an adequate program in order
16 to give them a meaningful understanding as to why
17 they exist.

18 Now, the institution has no type of program.
19 So a man has to find his own program and these are what
20 the brothers are trying to do. They are trying to find
21 their own program. They are trying to find it them-
22 selves on their own because nobody is giving them any
23 help from the correctional department.

24 Q You said, you just said that the officers find
25 the brothers to be a threat to them.

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A Right

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Q You said that the officers find the brothers to be a threat. You said further that the brothers are in fact really getting themselves together.

A Right. The brothers don't care nothing about the officers. They are not there to intimidate officers. They are not there to try to make it hard for the guards. They are there trying to better themselves. They could care less about intimidation of the officers. You see what I mean?

Q I do.

You mentioned that these groups receive a different kind of treatment. I mentioned in that group a group like SDS. Basically that's a white organization. We have learned through interviews that many inmates, many other white inmates who may be sympathetic to black groups, how are they treated by officers?

A Well, the white inmate who are sympathetic to the blacks are treated by the officers on a very low scale.

Q What do you mean by that?

A When I say low scale, that they take a dim view of a white prisoner being cordial to a black prisoner. Let's face it, it's that inferiority and superiority. White over black. Racism versus black brothers,

1 Puerto Ricans. Simple as that. And when
2 they see a white prisoner fraternizing or getting chummy
3 with a black inmate, they don't dig it. They don't
4 like it. They try to crush it.

5 Q What measures are used to crush that?

6 A They might bring the white guy off to a side
7 and shoot a question upon his belt as to why you hang
8 out with the niggers. How come every time I see you
9 walk in the yard with Joe Blow. Why don't you stay
10 with your own kind. Don't they stink. Things like
11 this.

12 Q This is what the officers say to the white
13 inmates?

14 A Right.

15 Q Do officers say anything different or anything
16 similar to black inmates who hang out with white inmates?

17 A Very seldom. You see, you got a thing
18 where now the young brothers, brothers as a whole and
19 prisoners throughout New York State, they are a different
20 breed than ten years ago. They are a little different
21 than the guys was back in the Al Capone days. The
22 brothers now are becoming aware of themselves. They are
23 waking up. They are understanding what's going on in
24 relationship to black and white. They are beginning to
25 find out what makes the world go round. And they are

1 not taking any crap from anybody. And they are 185
2 standing under and they are letting the establishment
3 guards and everybody else realize this. What they
4 are--the message they are trying to get across is, if
5 you treat me like a man, I will respect you as a man.

6 But if you treat me other than that, this
7 is the only thing that you will receive in return.

8 Q You feel that your manhood is being threatened
9 at Attica?

10 A Most definitely. Most definitely. Manhood
11 at Attica is intimidated 24 hours a day, 265 days a
12 year.

13 Q You have been there well over 365 days.

14 A A year this month.

15 Q I am sorry, almost 365 days?

16 A Right.

17 Q You were sentenced to five to ten years.

18 A Right.

19 Q Do you feel that you could tolerate that
20 kind of intimidation for five to ten years?

21 A Well, you don't feel as though you can tolerate
22 it. You know that it is wrong but you know that you
23 only have a certain amount of say so. You can only
24 do but so much so what you have to learn how to do is
25 roll with the punches.

1 Q Do you think that over a period of 186
2 time that this attitude will change?

3 Do you think that perhaps next year that there
4 will be a different view?

5 A You see, what has to happen is that a whole
6 complete system of awareness between Correction Depart-
7 ment and inmates, this has to be all turned around and
8 reorientated because at the present, the way they have
9 it at the present, five years from now, ten years from
10 now, 20, 30 years from now, it is not going to be any
11 different.

12 It is going to be the same. It is not going
13 to be any different.

14 Q We talked a lot about political groups.
15 Special reactions of officers to white inmates and
16 black inmates. You are a fairly young man. And you
17 must have a need for recreation. Is there anything at
18 the institution that you participate in?

19 A As far as recreation goes, you have handball.
20 Basketball at present. That's all. Before the riot
21 you had weights in the yard, you can run in the yard.
22 Chess, checkers, card playing. But all of this was
23 done in the yard.

24 Now, the yard during the week days is approxi-
25 mately 45 minutes from Monday to Friday. Saturday and

1 Sunday you get two changes to go to the yard. 187

2 Once in the morning, once in the afternoon. You
3 might spend 45 minutes in the morning in the yard on a
4 Saturday or Sunday and in the afternoon, evening, you
5 might spend an hour to an hour and a half in the yard.

6 On Saturdays and Sundays. During the week
7 its 45 minutes. Within the period of a day you have
8 to get all your recreation in in 45 minutes. The majority
9 of the time you have an hour. You take your 45 minutes
10 but you get about 30.

11 If the brother you want to see, he is on
12 another company, you understand, you talk to him for
13 15 minutes. If you want to get your recreation off,
14 you get your recreation off with the other 15 minutes.

15 Then it is time to come back in and go to your
16 home.

17 Q You talked a lot about grievances you have
18 with regard to your experience at Attica. Do you have
19 a--if you have a grievance, to whom do you communicate
20 it, how do you challenge it?

21 A Well, you have a grievance. You drop a tab
22 to the PK. You are supposed to go in the chain of
23 command. From the Sergeant to the Lieutenant, from the
24 lieutenant to the captain, from the captain to the
25 colonel. From the colonel to the assistant deputy warden.

1 From the assistant deputy warden to the big man, 188
2 the chief head of state; that's how you are supposed
3 to go.

4 Nine times out of ten when you want to see
5 the big man, you wind up seeing the lieutenant, PK.
6 Because they are, they used to be the principal
7 runners of the institution. And this is who you
8 talk to, right. If you had a grievance, they will tell
9 you something like, I will see what I can do about it.
10 You might get something done, you might not. Nine
11 times out of ten what he does is move you.

12 Q What do you mean move you?

13 A Well, whatever your grievance was, maybe you
14 didn't like the way the particular officer treated
15 you. You got a grievance against a particular officer.
16 And you bring it up. During the outcome of it you are
17 moved maybe to another block. They sent me, get rid
18 of you.

19 Q They move you to another block?

20 A They move you to another block.

21 Q Based upon what you said about the officers,
22 the general administration of Attica, the particulars,
23 the diet, the library, the recreation, the relationship
24 of black inmates, white inmates fostered by you, say the
25 administration or officers, it seems to me that the

1 black inmates have grievances. What happens if 189
2 a black inmate sends a grievance in?

3 A When a black inmate has a grievance, if it
4 is one which constitutes legal action, court action,
5 right, well, his best bet is to take it to the courts.
6 The Court of Appeals. Because inside the correctional
7 facility, there is no alleviation or there is no--no
8 redress.

9 Q No redress?

10 A There is no justification at all so what you
11 have to do is write you a writ. You have to write a
12 writ to the Court of Appeals. This is where you get
13 any action, if any. This is where you will get it at.
14 Because you are not going to get none coming from the
15 correctional institution. You are not going to get any
16 there. Forget about that. That's out.

17 Q Do you write letters, Brother Matthews?

18 A Right.

19 Q How often do you manage to write letters?

20 A Seeing that I'm not married, no fiance, no
21 girlfriend, I write to the only loveable person I know
22 in the world, and that's my mother.

23 Q Do you receive any literature?

24 A Yes, I do.

25 Q From anyone other than your mother?

1 A Well, I might receive a letter or two 190

2 from a particular organization. A lawyer's organiza-
3 tion that I have written to or pertaining to a legal
4 matter or maybe to a book store but other than personal
5 correspondence, nobody but my mom.

6 Q You have talked about your--you were given
7 five to ten years at Attica.

8 A Yes.

9 Q When you arrived at Attica and after spending
10 almost a year in that population, surely you talked
11 to other inmates who were convicted of a similar crime?

12 A Right.

13 Q Who may be doing less time than you are?

14 A Right.

15 Q How do you react to this?

16 A Well, quite naturally, this makes me wonder
17 about the juridicial system in the State of New York,
18 right. I think when I got sentenced for my five to
19 ten, third degree burglary, it was my first felony
20 offense. I had been busted previously before but all
21 charges, I thought, were misdemeanors. So this, as
22 far as I am aware of the fact, this is just--this is
23 my first felony bust.

24 So now when I receive the max, and had I
25 went to court and had a jury trial, I couldn't have