

Commentary on the 40th Anniversary of the Attica Prison Riot

By William F. Brown

As vividly chronicled on WBTA Radio in recent days, by reporters who lived with the horror of a prison riot forty years ago: bitter memories are revived.

There is revulsion at the bleeding hearts and do-gooders who defended the inmates as persecuted victims in an unfair prison system. With the help of high-priced attorneys and a hint of racism in the background, the inmates – many black – involved in the uprising, and families of life-long criminals, were given a generous compensation package.

This was folly in the justice system. We reward the vicious men – killers, rapists, drug dealers – who started the riot, and excuse them for the “undue force.” Who started the “undue force?” First, they killed a young corrections officer. Then they torched the prison chapel. The cell blocks were next, with millions of dollars in repairs to be financed by law-abiding taxpayers.

The women and children of Attica who lost husbands and fathers in the four-day revolt, had to wait years for a smaller compensation package. The victims became victims a second time!

The tragedy of Attica was the confusion that lost focus on the issue: inmates started the riot. It should have been ended with force, in hours – not days. The dreamers prompted people to insist that Governor Rockefeller should sit down and talk with the lowest in society. He didn't – so we had one sensible response.

The State Police were blamed...again, "undue force." The Department of Corrections was blamed. The staff at Attica was blamed. Do we have any blame left for the hardened criminals who started and fueled the riot? How should society deal with menacing thugs, who have recklessly and without remorse or respect, viciously assaulted the law and order that rules behavior?

The tragedy of Attica, even after forty years and blurred memories, is to pardon any transgression, any sense of personal responsibility. Instead, blame law officers who are doing a dangerous job; a job they were sworn to do.

Let's remember Attica of September, 1971 as an insurrection of evil men who were not punished as they should have been. Some still blame the state for this unprovoked and deadly assault on society.

God in His mercy will bless the innocent victims, who to this day remember and mourn. In His righteous justice, He will condemn the killers to an eternal punishment much worse than Attica's forbidding walls.

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