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MANIFESTO: The Attica Liberation Faction Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform, 1971 (/manifesto-attica-liberation-faction-manifesto-demands-and-anti-depression-platform-1971)

Editors, *The Black Agenda Review* (/author/Editors, *The Black Agenda Review*) 18 Aug 2021

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MANIFESTO: The Attica Liberation Faction Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform, 1971

Black August: Remembering the Attica prisoner demands as the 50th anniversary approaches.

MANIFESTO: The Attica Liberation Faction Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform, 1971

On September 9, 1971, two weeks after the murder of George Jackson at San Quentin State Prison, 1,281 men incarcerated in New York State's Attica Correctional Facility began one of the most significant prison uprisings in U.S. history. For four days, the prisoners had control of Attica, holding 42 members of the prison staff hostage. They attempted to negotiate with the state and prison authorities for improved living conditions and the expansion of their political rights. Their demands were enumerated in "The Attica Liberation Faction Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform." The Manifesto is a remarkable document. It offers a harrowing view behind the prison walls, describing a place where violence, torture, and punitive deprivations are routine. It also shows a profound historical awareness of a shift in penology from a philosophy of rehabilitation to one of mere punishment, and the transformation of the prison from a place of reform to a "concentration camp." Moreover, as a document collectively produced by the prison rebels themselves, it reflects a radical democratic practice and a defiant and bold assertion of humanity by people living in conditions that were meant to make them inhuman.

New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller refused to accede to the prisoner's demand. On September 13, 1971, after four days of negotiations, he ordered state police to take back control of the prison. In a bloody spectacle of tear gas and bulletins, they stormed Attica killing more than 43 people, including thirty inmates. The rebellion was crushed.

As part of The Black Agenda Review's continued commemoration of Black August, we "The Attica Liberation Faction Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform."



THE PREPARATION AND CONTENT OF THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN CONSTRUCTED UNDER THE UNIFIED EFFORTS OF ALL RACES AND SOCIAL SEGMENTS OF THIS PRISON.

IT IS A MATTER OF DOCUMENTED RECORD AND HUMAN RECOGNITION THAT THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE NEW YORK PRISON SYSTEM HAVE RESTRUCTURED THE INSTITUTIONS WHICH WERE DESIGNED TO SOCIALLY CORRECT MEN INTO THE FASCIST CONCENTRATION CAMPS OF MODERN AMERICA.

DUE TO THE CONDITIONAL FACT THAT ATTICA PRISON IS ONE OF THE MOST CLASSIC INSTITUTIONS OF AUTHORITATIVE INHUMANITY UPON MEN. THE FOLLOWING MANIFESTO OF DEMANDS [IS] BEING SUBMITTED:

We, the inmates of Attica Prison, have grown to recognize beyond the shadow of a doubt, that because of our posture as prisoners and branded characters as alleged criminals, the administration and prison employees no longer consider or respect us as human beings, but rather as domesticated animals selected to do their bidding in slave labor and furnished as a personal whipping dog for their sadistic, psychopathic hate.

We, the inmates of Attica Prison, say to you, the sincere people of society, the prison system of which your courts have rendered unto is without question the authoritative fangs of a coward in power.

Respectfully submitted to the people as a protest to the vile and vicious slave masters:

The Governor of New York State

The N.Y.S. Department of Corrections

The N.Y.S. Legislature

The N.Y.S. Courts

The United States Courts

The N.Y.S. Parole Board

And those who support this system of injustice.

The inmates this prison have vested the power of negotiation regarding the settlement of the stipulated demands within the judgement and control of these men:

Donald Noble 26777

Peter Butler 26018

Frank Lott 26148

Carl Jones-El 24534

Herbert Blyden X. 22480

All and any negotiation will be conducted by prison and state authorities with these five men.

These demands are being presented to you. There is no strike of any kind to protest these demands. We are trying to do this in a democratic fashion. We feel there is no need to dramatize our demands.

We, the men of Attica Prison, have been committed to the New York State Department of Corrections by the people of society for the purpose of correcting what has been deemed as social errors in behavior. Errors which have classified us as socially unacceptable until reprogrammed with new values and more thorough understanding as to our values and responsibilities as members of the outside community. The Attica Prison program in its structure and conditions have been enslaved on the pages of this Manifesto of Demands with the blood, sweat, and tears of the inmates of this prison.

The program which we are submitted to under the façade of rehabilitation are relative to the ancient stupidity of pouring water on a drowning man, inasmuch as we are treated for our hostilities by our program administrators with their hostility as medication.

In our efforts to comprehend on a feeling level an existence contrary to violence, we are confronted by our captors with what is fair and just, we are victimized by the exploitation and the denial of the celebrated due process of law.

In our peaceful efforts to assemble in dissent as provided under this nation's United States constitution, we are in turn murdered, brutalized, and framed on various criminal charges because we seek the rights and privileges of all American people.

In our efforts to intellectually expand in keeping with the outside world, through all categories of news media, we are systematically being denied our right to the status when we insist on our human rights to the wisdom of awareness.



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(/) MANIFESTO OF DEMANDS

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1. WE DEMAND the constitutional rights of legal representation at the time of all parole board hearings and the protection from the procedures of the parole authorities whereby they permit no procedural safeguards such as an attorney for cross-examination of witnesses, witnesses in behalf of the parolee, at parole revocation hearings.
2. WE DEMAND a change in medical staff and medical policy and procedure. The Attica Prison hospital is totally inadequate, understaffed, and prejudiced in the treatment of inmates. There are numerous "mistakes" made many times; improper and erroneous medication is given by untrained personnel. We also demand periodical check-ups on all prisoners and sufficient licensed practitioners 24 hours a day instead of inmates' help that is used now.
3. WE DEMAND adequate visiting conditions and facilities for the inmate and families of Attica prisoners. The visiting facilities at the prison are such as to preclude adequate visiting for inmates and their families.
4. WE DEMAND an end to the segregation of prisoners from the mainline population because of their political beliefs. Some of the men in segregation units are confined there solely for political reasons and their segregation from other inmates is indefinite.
5. WE DEMAND an end to the persecution and punishment of prisoners who practice the Constitutional Right of peaceful dissent. Prisoners at Attica and other New York prisons cannot be compelled to work as these prisons were built for the purpose of housing prisoners and there is no mention as to the prisoners being required to work on prison jobs in order to remain in the mainline population and/or be considered for release. Many prisoners believe their labor power is being exploited in order for the state to increase its economic power and to continue to expand its correctional industries (which are million-dollar complexes), yet do not develop working skills acceptable for employment in the outside society, and which do not pay the prisoner more than an average of forty cents a day. Most prisoners never make more than fifty cents a day. Prisoners who refuse to work for the outrageous scale, or who strike, are punished and segregated without the access to the privileges shared by those who work; this is class legislation, class division, and creates hostilities within the prison.
6. WE DEMAND an end to political persecution, racial persecution, and the denial of prisoner's rights to subscribe to political papers, books, or any other educational and current media chronicles that are forwarded through the U.S. Mail.
7. WE DEMAND that industries be allowed to enter the institutions and employ inmates to work eight hours a day and fit into the category of workers for scale wages. The working conditions in prisons do not develop working incentives parallel to the many jobs in the outside society, and a paroled prisoner faces many contradictions of the job that add to his difficulty in adjusting. Those industries outside who desire to enter prisons should be allowed to enter for the purpose of employment placement.
8. WE DEMAND that inmates be granted the right to join or form labor unions.
9. WE DEMAND that inmates be granted the right to support their own families; at present, thousands of welfare recipients have to divide their checks to support their imprisoned relatives, who without outside support, cannot even buy toilet articles or food. Men working on scale wages could support themselves and families while in prison.
10. WE DEMAND that correctional officers be prosecuted as a matter of law for any act of cruel and unusual punishment where it is not a matter of life and death.
11. WE DEMAND that all institutions using inmate labor be made to conform with the state and federal minimum wage laws.
12. WE DEMAND an end to the escalating practice of physical brutality being perpetrated upon the inmates of New York State prisons.
13. WE DEMAND the appointment of three lawyers from the New York State Bar Association to full-time positions for the provision of legal assistance to inmates seeking post-conviction relief, and to act as a liaison between the administration and inmates for bringing inmates' complaints to the attention of the administration.
14. WE DEMAND the updating of industry working conditions to the standards provided for under New York State law.
15. WE DEMAND the establishment of inmate worker's insurance plan to provide compensation for work-related accidents.
16. WE DEMAND the establishment of unionized vocational training programs comparable to that of the Federal Prison System which provides for union instructions, union pay scales, and union membership upon completion of the vocational training course.
17. WE DEMAND annual accounting of the inmates Recreational Fund and formulation of an inmate committee to give inmates a voice as to how such funds are used.
18. WE DEMAND that the present Parole Board appointed by the Governor be eradicated and replaced by the parole board elected by popular vote of the people. In a world where many crimes are punished by indeterminate sentences and where authority acts within secrecy and within vast discretion and given heavy weight to accusations by prison employees against inmates, inmates feel trapped unless they are willing to abandon their desire to be independent men.



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WE DEMAND that the state legislature create a full-time salaried board of overseers for the State Prisons. The board would be responsible for overseeing the legal rights of inmates, their families, friends and lawyers against employers charged with acting inhumanely, illegally, or unreasonably. The board should include people nominated by a psychological or psychiatric association, by the State Bar Association or by the Civil Liberties Union and by groups of concerned involved laymen.

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- 20. WE DEMAND an immediate end to the agitation of race relations by the prison administration of this State.
- 21. WE DEMAND that the Dept. of Corrections furnish all prisoners with the services of ethnic counselors for the needed special services of the Brown and Black population of this prison.
- 22. WE DEMAND an end to the discrimination in the judgment and quota of parole for Black and Brown people.
- 23. WE DEMAND that all prisoners be present at the time their cells and property are being searched by the correctional officers of state prisons.
- 24. WE DEMAND an end to the discrimination against prisoners when they appear before the Parole Board. Most prisoners are denied parole solely because of their prior records. Life sentences should not confine a man longer than 10 years as 7 years is the considered statute for a lifetime out of circulation, and if a man cannot be rehabilitated after a maximum of ten years of constructive programs, etc., then he belongs in a mental hygiene center, not a prison.
- 25. WE DEMAND that better food be served to the inmates. The food is a gastronomical disaster. We also demand that drinking water be put on each table and that each inmate be allowed to take as much food as he wants and as much bread as he wants, instead of the severely limited portions and limited (4) slices of bread. Inmates wishing a pork-free diet should have one, since 85% of our diet is pork meat or pork-saturated food.
- 26. WE DEMAND an end to the unsanitary conditions that exist in the mess hall: i.e., dirty trays, dirty utensils, stained drinking cups and an end to the practice of putting food on the tables hours before eating time without any protective covering over it.
- 27. WE DEMAND that there be one set of rules governing all prisons in this state instead of the present system where each warden makes rules for his institution as he sees fit.

IN CONCLUSION

We are firm in our resolve and we demand, as human beings, the dignity and justice that is due to us by our right of birth. We do not know how the present system of brutality and dehumanization and injustice has been allowed to be perpetrated in this day of enlightenment, but we are the living proof of its existence and we cannot allow it to continue.

The taxpayers who just happen to be our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters and sons should be made aware of how their tax dollars are being spent to deny their sons, brothers, fathers and uncles of justice, equality and dignity.

Attica Liberation Faction

Donald Noble 26777

Peter Butler 26018

Frank Lott 26148


Carl Jones-EI 24534

Herbert Blyden X. 22480

*The Attica Liberation Faction Manifesto is available through Freedom Archives (https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=144&format=Manifesto). It has also been reprinted in the Institute of Race Relations' journal *Race and Class* (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0306396811414338>) and in *Attica Prison Uprising 101: A Short Primer* (<https://project-nia.org/uploads/documents/Educational-Curricula/Attica%20Prison%20Uprising%20101.pdf>) by Mariame Kaba and Project NIA.*

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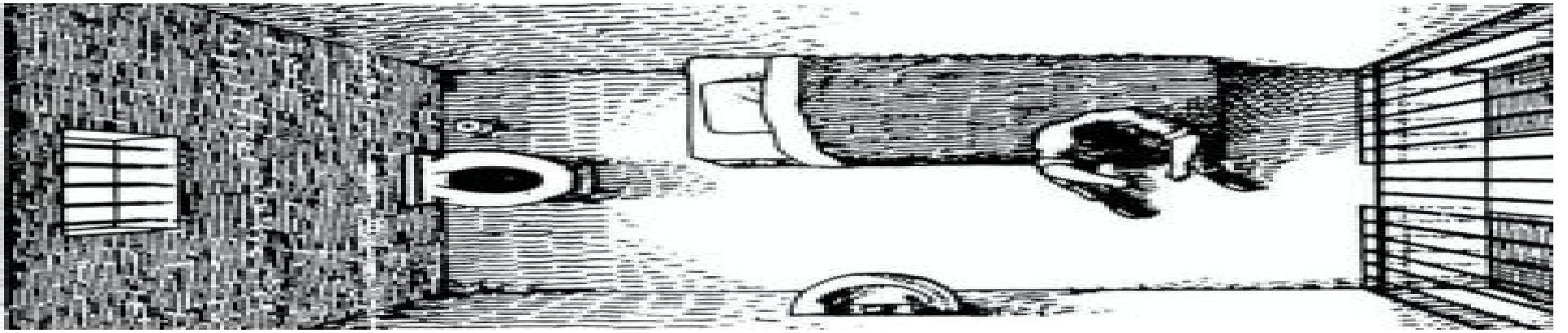
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