

Blood in the Water:
The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy
By Heather Ann Thompson

Information revealed in the book that has not been made public.

The Riot/Rebellion

- As the Attica riot unfolded, unbeknownst to the American people, the **highest levels of government were interested in, and being informed of, goings on there**—the FBI, CIA, President, Vice President, Attorney General, Army, Navy, Marines, etc.
- Contrary to the narrative offered by the state of New York, state officials had already decided to retake the prison with force before speaking to the prisoners on the morning of Sept 13. **Commissioner Oswald was expressly told not to tell the prisoners that if they didn't surrender the morning of the 13th, the troopers were coming in. The prisoners believed until the final moments that negotiations were still in play.**

The Retaking of the Prison

- **The governor and his administration ordered the forceful retaking of Attica knowing that its own employees—guards being held as hostages—would be killed.**
- When they entered the prison, **troopers deliberately removed all of their identifying badges and brought in their own personal weapons as well as used ammunition designed to cause maximum damage. Worse, troopers did not record the serial numbers of any of the weapons they used and were actually told by their superiors not to fill out weapons discharge forms as was expected protocol. This made it easy in the immediate aftermath to conceal where bullets had come from.**
- **Nixon supported the retaking of Attica so Rockefeller would owe him a political favor. On the Nixon tapes he says Rockefeller “owes us one now; that is just a matter of fact.”**

After the Retaking

- Following the retaking, **numerous parties (judges, doctors, elected officials, people appointed to look into Attica, and even the U.S. Justice Department) failed in the face of strong evidence to protect prisoners from retribution and many suffered days of torture and abuse.**
- **Officials explicitly and knowingly lied to the media by attributing trooper injuries and deaths to prisoners. Deputy of Corrections Walter Dunbar said that he had seen trooper Mike Smith castrated by prisoner Frank “Big Black” Smith with his own eyes, an event that never occurred.**
- **Local funeral directors performing autopsies were intimidated by troopers and pressured to deny that hostages had in fact been killed by law enforcement.**

The State's Cover-Up

- In the 8 weeks following the retaking, and after an official investigation into the uprising and its deaths had begun, the **Rockefeller administration held a series of secret meetings to get everyone's stories straight—at that meeting were high ranking officials from the New York State**

Police as well as the head of the Attica investigation itself. Heather has the final document that came out of this meeting; existence of the document was denied for years.

- State officials allowed the New York State Police investigators (from the same body that had retaken the prison and killed 39 hostages and prisoners) to clean up Attica's D Yard right after the retaking and to collect or discard whatever evidence it chose to. It also placed these same NYSP investigators in charge of interrogating prisoners in order to help the state make criminal cases against them. **Top officials in the NYSP worked to thwart the investigation, tampered with evidence, and forced at least one trooper who had shot a prisoner to death to retire.**
- **State officials had strong evidence against very specific high ranking troopers in the NYSP who had tampered with the investigation. They also knew which troopers had killed specific prisoners and which trooper had killed one of the hostages, but did not indict any of them.**
- For the last 45 years the state of New York has refused to release the names of the troopers or correction officers whom they suspected of committing crimes at Attica. They have also never revealed the names of the high-ranking troopers who protected them from indictments. **This book finally reveals the names of the troopers and COs whom the state had evidence against for deaths or injuries during the retaking but never indicted.**

The Criminal Trials

- **The state of NY indicted 62 prisoners by relying on faulty and compromised evidence.** The NYSP coerced prisoners to act as witnesses against other prisoners through a mix of intimidation and promises of parole for cooperation. **These state and police investigators also coached these witnesses to finger particular prisoners they were interested in indicting, ignored other leads, and used witnesses whom they knew to be unstable or to have changed their stories numerous times.**

The Civil Trials

- **State officials deliberately misled hostage widows and surviving hostages.** By getting them to sign checks that were, unbeknownst to them, drawn from workmen's compensation funds, they rendered these same Attica victims ineligible to sue New York state for what they had endured.

The Fight Continues

- **The state continues to obscure Attica's true history. For 45 years the state has held thousands of boxes of materials related to this uprising that it has made nearly impossible for the public to access.** The New York State Police union continues to fight every effort to open the records. While Heather has had some luck filing FOIA requests, recently the State Attorney General's office denied her access, and the New York Archives Unit director Jim Folts denied both Heather and other survivors access to records as well.
- **There are Attica documents that Heather had access to that have now disappeared.** Some of the most important documents Heather found were in complete disarray in the Erie County Courthouse in Buffalo, New York in 2006 (grand jury transcripts, documents from the criminal trials, the record of Rockefeller's secret meeting, and most importantly the document from inside the Attica Investigation laying out key evidence against members of law enforcement). All of them are, according to one reporter who tried to find them, no longer there. Apparently court employees now claim no knowledge of them ever being there. For a brief time an employee of the New York State Museum in Albany had given Heather access to other Attica artifacts, but now public access to these artifacts is denied.