

HIDDEN WAR



FOUR STRATEGIES OF
REFORMIST COUNTER
INSURGENCY IN THE
LONG ATTICA
STRUGGLE AGAINST
PRISON

However, there was a small but important remainder, the so-called “militant minority,” the detritus of counterinsurgency that refused to be swayed by violence or inducements. By centering the experiences of these prisoners of war, an even more obscure aspect of the post-Attica prison pacification campaign is revealed.

Interestingly, Hassan's description of the Think Tank as "tame" alerts us to how imprisoned organizers found ways to critique, subvert, and exceed reformist counterinsurgency. His assertion is a direct reference to the 1973 speech delivered in Green Haven by Queen Mother Audley Moore that opened this book. DOCS reluctantly allowed this matriarch of Black radicalism into Green Haven after the Think Tank prevailed in a protracted struggle with the administration, outside volunteers, and other inmate organizations. As we saw, Moore enjoined the population to not lose sight of the fact that as colonized *and* incarcerated subjects, they had been targeted by multiple layers of captivity and war. She then spoke at length about how colonizing forces seek to "tame" Black rebellion through psychological warfare. In this way, Moore's speech situated DOCS's strategy within a much longer genealogy of anti-Black violence and revolt. As the sponsor of her visit, the Think Tank helped sustain the spirit of Revolt, even as they appeared to be going along with the program.

However, when analyzed at the population level, it is clear that DOCS views programmification as a proven, effective means of pacifying the population, and that Attica continued to shape this view for a very long time. During a 1995 hearing about potential cuts to the state prison budget, David Stallone, a representative of more than four thousand non-custodial prison staff, drew an explicit connection between well-funded prison programs and a manageable population. He stressed that "rehabilitation" was only one aspect of programmification's "dual function," the other being security. "We cannot ignore the lessons of Attica without threatening public safety," he said. "Idle time creates a vacuum that is filled by inmates themselves, creating an opportunity for inmates to organize themselves."¹⁴⁴ More than two decades after its eruption, Attica remained a cautionary tale, compelling prisoncrats to view incarcerated people as subjects of risk who are always teetering on the verge of rebellion. One of its key lessons was that, if the state does not organize and program the population, they will do so for themselves, and if this happens, the state will lose control.

It is to the incapacity of counterinsurgency to fully capture, divert, and transform rebellious Black radicalism that the final chapter turns. The interlocking strategies of expansion, humanization, diversification, and programmification targeted the captive majority: those deemed tractable, malleable, and amenable to inducement. These strategies sought to encapsulate the rebels' demands within acceptable parameters while convincing them and the public that the reforms were benign.

Although I am marshaling a critique of programmification and how it attempted to quell Black rebellion, my intent is not to denounce the incarcerated targets of this hidden war or to second-guess the decisions they were forced to make. The reformist counterinsurgency was effective because it came immediately after the Attica massacre, which demonstrated the state's unmatched capacity to inflict world-shattering terror on rebels. In this moment, imprisoned organizers were faced with three terrible options. They could stop organizing and "do their own time," as the saying goes. They could continue to engage in illegal and antisystemic rebellion, exposing themselves to greater repression. Finally, they could attempt to maneuver within and against the new paradigm of politics, which presented new constraints as well as openings.

Diaz-Cotto cites the Green Haven Think Tank, New York's first formally recognized inmate organization, as a harbinger of the prison movement's generalized decline.¹³⁷ While I ultimately concur with this analysis, it is important to acknowledge that given what they were up against, their achievements are remarkable. Originally published in 1976, *Instead of Prison: A Handbook for Abolitionists* credits the Think Tank with establishing an array of higher education, re-entry, counseling, job training, work release, and youth development programs.¹³⁸ While these ameliorative endeavors were ultimately appropriated by DOCS and redeployed to stabilize the system, they also helped a besieged population survive the ravages of war. Talk to anyone who was imprisoned in New York during the 1970s, 1980s, and to a lesser extent the 1990s, and chances are they've heard of the Think Tank and personally benefited from their organizing work. Although I have never been incarcerated, this is true for me as well.¹³⁹ This book would not exist were it not for Eddie Ellis, Larry White, Hassan Gale, and other Think Tank members who generously and patiently mentored me.¹⁴⁰

During one of our conversations about this dynamic, Hassan Gale made it plain: "We knew we were tame as an organization, but we also didn't see many other options. After Rockefeller killed his own prison guards, we understood that we wouldn't be able to get anything by taking hostages."¹⁴¹ His ambivalence about the organization he helped lead mirrors similar autocritiques by those situated within the "nonprofit-industrial complex," universities, and other sites where intellectual and political labor is channeled, captured, and co-opted.¹⁴² However, a critical distinction must be made, as the Think Tank faced this contradiction within a totalizing regime of war.¹⁴³

incarcerated organizers to participate in an aboveground, formally regulated system of institutionalized politics that made their activities easier to surveil and control.¹³⁴

We can see the inmate organization and volunteer programs working in tandem in post-Attica celebrations of Black Solidarity Day. As I showed in chapter 2, the Auburn rebellion erupted after Black radicals observed Black Solidarity Day in defiance of administrative prohibitions. In 1973, amid the reformist counterinsurgency, DOCS attempted to appease the population by recognizing Black Solidarity Day as an institutional holiday that allowed inmate organizations to organize events with participation from outside volunteers.

Still operational today, the counterinsurgent effects of these programs are evident in a 1989 memo in which a member of the program staff reflects on the activities of an inmate organization called the Black Solidarity Committee. Responding to concerns that a Green Haven event celebrating the achievements of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was too militant, the staff member cited the contributions of outside volunteers:

It is my considered opinion that several members of security on duty during the M.L.K. family event confused the excellent delivery of some of the speakers with the theoretical content of their messages. Some of the speakers spoke with the passion and eloquence of a Black Baptist preacher, but the substance of all of their speeches was conservative and status quo oriented (e.g.: they recommended a strict puritanical lifestyle). In my professional opinion, this is the most effective type of message to disseminate in a penal setting. Furthermore . . . I'm extremely happy to report that not one inmate was removed from the gymnasium for poor disciplinary behavior. Once again, the M.L.K. family event was peaceful and a tremendous asset to the wide array of programs that prevail at Green Haven Correctional Facility.¹³⁵

This scene reveals the cynical logic of programmification, with well-meaning volunteers becoming instruments of pacification, promoting “peace” amid conditions of war. It conjures Saidiya Hartman’s notion of “innocent amusements” as, amid the violence of plantation existence, seemingly benign and pleasure-filled diversions become practices of domination and technologies of terror.¹³⁶ The fact that “conservative and status quo oriented” discourses were conveyed by people who were familiar with “passionate” Black vernacular traditions was all the better, since this authenticity increased the likelihood that captives would accept and internalize these ideas.

objection. Moreover, by framing the program as a humanizing reform, it succeeded in presenting this operation in moral rather political terms.

Through MARC and other volunteer organizations, DOCS encouraged captives to focus their energies toward institutional politics, event planning, and reform-oriented activities, which enhanced the prison's legitimacy, relieved tensions, and eschewed the radical political discourse that produced and was produced by rebellion. Dr. Clark and especially Dixie Moon, MARC's chief administrator, maintained regular contact with various imprisoned groups and individuals. They made several trips to Green Haven and helped organized prison-based events that were open to the public, including picnics, prison reform symposia, and art exhibits. By performing these activities, prison-based groups and formations were able to obtain a modicum of respectability, and some, such as the Think Tank, even secured modest financial sponsorship from the Cummins Foundation, Chase Manhattan Bank, and the South 40 Corporation, a nonprofit established by William H. Vanderbilt.¹³⁰ On a much smaller scale, this process was roughly analogous to the philanthropic and corporate penetration of Black politics that the Ford Foundation and MARC helped facilitate beyond the walls.¹³¹

So-called inmate organization programs worked alongside the volunteer initiative as a key tactic of counterinsurgent programmification. The theory behind this co-optation strategy was elaborated during the 1967 Symposium on Law Enforcement Science and Technology. Alongside papers about "criminal justice information systems," computer hardware configurations, and advance surveillance techniques, a Silicon Valley-based researcher named J. Douglas Grant advocated for deploying incarcerated people as a "correctional manpower resource." Under the auspices of the Institute for the Study of Crime and Delinquency, Grant wrote, "It is becoming clearer that as long as we pour professional services into passive client recipients little modification in behavior results, but when the clients become respected participants in the service functions striking changes take place."¹³² Responding to the epidemiological model of prisoner radicalization and rebellion, Grant posited that incarcerated people could be vectors of self-help ideology, a principle he termed "contagion as a principle in behavior change."¹³³ In the wake of Attica, prisoncrats increasingly adopted this idea as a way to uproot and criminalize autonomous Black Studies programs and inoculate the population against radical ideas. As sociologist Juanita Diaz-Cotto has shown, inmate organizations successfully encouraged

RAND Corporation, an eminent counterinsurgency think tank. In a position paper, Clark states that MARC was focused on “Negroes in Northern cities,” who eschewed the “disciplined demonstrations” of the Southern civil rights movement in favor of “sporadic and self-destructive social eruptions.”¹²⁵ In *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, Robert L. Allen shows that MARC played a key role in steering the Black Power Movement toward integrationist demands and accommodationist modes of political engagement.¹²⁶ With financial support from the Ford Foundation, MARC established a fellowship program for middle-class and politically moderate civil rights activists, developed an anti-riot program in Cleveland, Ohio, and helped launch the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington-based think tank that aimed to increase the involvement of Black Americans in electoral politics.

After Attica, MARC spearheaded the publication of “The Awesome Attica Tragedy,” a tepid public statement that affirmed some of the reform demands while ignoring the rebellion’s challenge to the social order. Signed by prominent members of several civil rights organizations—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the Coalition of Concerned Black Americans, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the United Negro College Fund, among others—the statement pressured DOCS to take “seven steps toward prison reform,” including recruiting minority prison guards, providing enhanced training to prison personnel, instituting the volunteer program, and enabling religious freedom, although the reform demand for *political* freedom was conspicuously absent.¹²⁷

Programmification was an elegant solution to a growing problem. In a 1971 memo authored five days after George Jackson’s assassination, J. Edgar Hoover expressed alarm that “black extremists” were gaining psychological control over prison populations “through the various black studies programs and other so-called educational activity [*sic*] conducted within the prisons by outsiders.”¹²⁸ Two years later, Raymond Procunier, director of the California prison system, struck a similar chord while discussing the activities of radical organizations like the Prisoners Solidarity Committee and the National Lawyers Guild: “We had all kinds of laws to keep people from breaking out of prison, but we had very little preparation for people breaking into the institution.”¹²⁹ Through Volunteer Services, DOCS managed to incorporate noncombative and reform-oriented organizations like MARC so that abolitionist formations like the NLG and PSC could be excluded without public

[correctional] process with suspicion and, too frequently, have translated this suspicion into a lack of support for programs and facilities.”¹²¹ By providing outsiders with the opportunity to enter the prisons and participate in the progressive and productive aspects of carceral power, planners hoped to allay these suspicions, universalize their view of the world, and nurture the public’s investment in human caging. In collaboration with DOCS’ public relations department, volunteers were aggressively recruited, screened, and put through an extensive orientation process designed, in their words, to “develop community acceptance of the Department’s philosophy.” A program coordinator told me that a typical volunteer orientation involved “sitting in a room and having the fear of god drilled into you about how dangerous and conniving the criminals were.”¹²²

Notes from a meeting held in March of 1972 about a potential volunteer-run jobs program in Attica clarifies the kinds of “suspicion” DOCS needed to counteract. Following a presentation by Margarete Appe, the founding Director of the Volunteer Services Program, meeting attendees, most of whom were prominent parishioners of Black churches in the Rochester and Buffalo areas, raised a series of pointed questions: How many Black officials were involved in establishing DOCS policy? How could they ensure that mechanisms for screening volunteers would not exclude poor people and minorities? What was the department doing to address the “malady of white racism” in the prisons? To whom should they forward complaints of brutality communicated to them by prisoners?¹²³ These questions and concerns reveal that although they were not necessarily aligned with the radical edge of the prison movement, these respectable members of the Black middle class were also not aligned with the priorities of the state. Rather, they represented a target population that needed to be won over if carceral power was to enjoy a semblance of legitimacy. The meeting notes provide no insight into how Appe or other DOCS officials answered these questions in the moment. Yet, a subsequent document nips the question about forwarding complaints of abuse in the bud. Volunteers were not to lead investigations or advocate for reform, the document states. Rather, they were “to provide the services which will supplement and complement that which the Department has set forth to do.”¹²⁴

The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) was one of the first organizations to form a volunteer partnership with DOCS. MARC was founded in 1967 by Dr. Kenneth Clark, a prominent Black social psychologist who envisioned the organization as a Black version of the

gram aimed to permanently reconfigure Luqmon's political equation in favor of the state. "More and more," the Master Plan noted only a month later, "correctional professionals are coming to realize that the battle is won or lost not inside the prison, but out on the sidewalks."¹¹⁶ At the program's launch, hundreds of "housewives, lawyers, psychiatrists, businessmen, entertainers, ministers, teachers, policemen, and firemen" were deployed into New York prisons, facilitating a range of initiatives, including book clubs, recreation programs, street theater groups, music and art classes, Swahili classes, Alcoholics Anonymous groups, typing classes, English as a Second Language classes, group counseling, business classes, and more. DOCS claimed that 5,323 out of 14,000 incarcerated people, or 38 percent of the total population, was enrolled in at least one program by 1973, and that it had 5,000 volunteer service providers by the following year.¹¹⁷ These statistics were cited as evidence of the system's humanization and progressive evolution, its move away from simply warehousing people in cages.

Although many of these volunteers undoubtedly had altruistic and humanitarian motives, they unwittingly perpetuated counterinsurgency in multiple ways. First, their unwaged labor capacitated the carceral system, enabling it to bolster its capabilities in ways that would have been fiscally unfeasible otherwise. Second, planners surmised that because the volunteers were not employed by DOCS, captives would be more likely to see them as credible messengers who had their best interest in mind and therefore would be "stimulated to accept and participate in a variety of programs and services intended to return [them] to a normal productive life."¹¹⁸ Third, planners expected that the mere presence of outsiders, many of whom were female, would act as a tension-reducing mechanism, thereby contributing to institutional stability.¹¹⁹ Fourth, by creating opportunities for "responsible citizens" to enter certain prisons and build relationships with the captives, the volunteer program dislodged, marginalized, and criminalized ongoing efforts by captives to forge relations of solidarity with radical and revolutionary formations that sought to tear down, rather than stabilize, the walls.

The Volunteer Services Program had another core function: to propagandize the general public. The Select Committee referred to it as an aspect of a DOCS "systematic public information program," a program that also included planned prison tours for government officials, media, and select members of the public, as well as the production and distribution of educational films.¹²⁰ This public relations offensive intervened in an environment in which "citizens have tended to look upon the

Among the division's inaugural concerns was to oversee tactical concessions to key Attica reform demands, specifically the new requirements that DOCS institute "effective rehabilitation programs," "modernize the inmate education system," "reduce cell time," and allow incarcerated people "to be politically active without intimidation or reprisal."¹¹² Using the DOCS Volunteer Services Program as an example, I show that programmification was intended to co-opt the prison movement, to steer it toward status-quo-oriented institutional politics.¹¹³

During one of our many conversations, Larry "Luqmon" White, an Auburn rebel and founder of a post-Attica formation called the Green Haven Think Tank, described organizing in prison as a series of battles where captives and the state competed for the support of communities beyond the walls. He explained this dynamic to me using a "political equation" that he had used to politicize his comrades across more than three decades of incarceration. As he saw it, the strategic objective of the prison movement was to achieve "P + C vs. A": Prisoners plus the Community versus the Administration, a balance of forces requiring the incarcerated to first forge solidarity among themselves and to then forge it with political communities on the outside, and in so doing, foster a shared antagonism with the state.

At the same time, the strategic objective of the administration, he explained, was to achieve "A + C vs. P": the Administration plus the Community vs. the Prisoners. Describing state attempts to win the support of "free world" constituencies, Luqmon explained: "After Attica, when they killed all them brothers in there, the community raised hell. And you know what DOCS told them? They said, 'These are the people that were killing you all out in the street. We did that for you. We represent you. We protect you!' We are split from the community and their whole approach to rehabilitation is to expand that split and to keep the community seeing us in a particular light."¹¹⁴ Although penal rehabilitation is typically assumed to involve the psychological and cultural enrichment of crestfallen citizen-subjects, Luqmon sees the discourse of rehabilitation as a ploy to move populations toward respectability and identification with carceral ideology. His schematization of the prison movement as an ongoing battle between an insurgent force and an established regime for the active support of a broader population constitutes an organic theorization of revolutionary warfare's foundational premise: that the goal is to achieve popular legitimacy.¹¹⁵

Established in February of 1972 with federal funds from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the Volunteer Services Pro-

counter movie treats” to placate the population. It notes that resentment was the initial response, but shortly the sounds of caged men begging for seconds could be heard echoing throughout Green Haven’s cellblocks. The PLF further speculated that the ready availability of mind-altering substances was part of the pacification strategy: “Because of the steady flow of enslaving drugs & blinding wine; because of the diversionary ball playing & benevolent racism, the Forces of Liberation get only one response from G.H. inmates, ‘Don’t mess up this good thing.’”¹⁰⁷ According to the PLF, it was not the militarized and ritualized violence of the massacre that stifled the Long Attica Revolt, but the unevenly distributed humanizing reforms. “As Attica must be a symbol of our first major step toward victory, Green Haven must be symbolic of our last major defeat.”¹⁰⁸

Before moving on to the fourth strategy of reformist counterinsurgency, I am compelled to stress that diversification presents a challenge to what has been called “prison ethnography.” Within this growing field of scholarly inquiry, anthropologists, sociologists, and other academics produce research that is largely premised on obtaining administratively approved access to prisons in order to synchronically describe carceral worlds.¹⁰⁹ Although the fraught ethics of this approach have been well documented, the political strategy of diversification raises an epistemological question. How does an understanding of the prison as site of *hidden* warfare against populations on both sides of prison walls reconfigure what is knowable through standard research methodologies?

As I have shown, carceral systems should be understood as complex networks across which constellations of social phenomena—people, infrastructure, knowledge, affects, programs, violence, and so on—are unevenly distributed and circulated as part of a strategic effort to produce particular subjectivities. Adept prisoncrats can grant access to selected carceral zones, while foreclosing access to others, as a way to manage perception. If researchers do not understand and grapple with this dynamic, they risk reproducing logics of counterinsurgency. Elsewhere I have theorized letter-writing as a potential means of circumventing this impasse.¹¹⁰ However, my broader point is that perhaps the ethnography of prisons, particularly prisons in the United States, should be reconceptualized as the ethnography of war.

PROGRAMMIFICATION

An internal DOCS report from 1991 acknowledges that the Division of Program Services emerged “as a reaction to the 1971 riot at Attica.”¹¹¹

method known as neuropsychiatry.¹⁰¹ By the 1970s, under the management of DOCS, Green Haven had become known as the most liberal and forward-thinking prison in the state. While a major reason for this was Green Haven's "programming," a concept I explore next, the prison's progressive reputation also stemmed from the degree of relative freedom, mobility, and access it allowed. "Guys were wearing their own clothes, they were bringing Tupperware to the mess hall and bringing food back to their cells. Men were openly selling loose marijuana cigarettes in the yard. It was like being back in New York City," Jacob recalls.¹⁰² A 1981 report connected Green Haven's permissiveness to Attica. In stark contrast to Comstock's authoritarian atmosphere, it described Green Haven as a "free-for-all," a space where drugs, alcohol, gambling, and sex with female visitors was pervasive. "As long as another Attica was prevented, as long as anyone, inmate or officer, could 'keep a lid on,' various rules and regulations were ignored."¹⁰³

The uneven distribution of punishments and privileges is a fixture of carceral power, yet in the wake of Attica, it was deployed in more conscious and systematic ways. Although promoted as an altruistic effort to "provide more opportunities for inmate self-improvement, in more humane and less restrictive correctional environments," diversification was a strategy of penal counterinsurgency, psychological warfare, and behavior modification.¹⁰⁴ As the Select Committee asked in its first report, "what incentive is there for an inmate to accept the system when it offers little chance for transfer to a facility that grants him materially greater privileges when he has demonstrated his willingness and ability to conform to the rigid rules and philosophy of the maximum-security institution?"¹⁰⁵ It was believed that captives in highly restrictive, geographically remote, intensely violent and racist prisons like Comstock, Clinton, and Attica would be terrorized into submission via the "big stick" of repression and, conversely, that those in relatively "open" prisons like Green Haven, Wallkill, and Sutherland would be induced into compliance via the "carrot" of greater privileges.¹⁰⁶

Politically astute captives recognized the con. In 1972, Green Haven-based members of the Prisoners Liberation Front, the clandestine politico-military organization that Casper Baker Gary founded in the Tombs, published an essay describing what they called "the latest development of the N.Y. state correctional pacification program," otherwise known as "Oswald-inization" (after Nixon's Vietnamization policy). Entitled "Snacked into Submission!!!," the essay describes a new practice in which each evening prisoncrats doled out "a sickening assortment of dime-

across various New York prisons throughout the 1970s and '80s, brings this dynamic into sharp relief.

Jacob began his fifteen-year bid in Comstock. Opened in 1911 and officially called Great Meadow, the prison is located in the remote and nearly all-white town of Comstock, nestled in the Adirondack foothills, about 225 miles from New York City, where Jacob is from. Quoting a DOCS official, an FBI memo notes that next to Attica, "Great Meadow is probably the second most guard-oriented facility in the State."⁹⁴ During our conversation, Jacob described this "guard orientation" as a seemingly endless nightmare of neglect, abuse, and terror. "It was nothing but cops killing inmates and inmates killing inmates. The tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife." This was no exaggeration. An investigative report notes that in 1975, at least three captives were known to have died in Comstock under questionable circumstances, but possibly more given that DOCS did not consistently report the deaths of those in its custody at this time.⁹⁵ In 1983, Comstock guards beat and choked an outspoken Black man named William "Butch" Harvey to death, an act that was subsequently covered up by state investigators.⁹⁶

Jacob's reference to the "thickness" of carceral tension reveals that rather than eliminating rebellion-inducing affects, reformist counterinsurgency displaced and concentrated them in particular carceral sites. Humanization did not reach Comstock, Clinton, or Attica, where conditions were reportedly worse than they were before the rebellion.⁹⁷ The FBI warned that throughout 1973, "black extremists" continued to organize around grievances that were supposedly resolved in Attica, and regularly engaged in almost daily confrontations with guards. Disclosing Comstock's function within the diversified network, officials termed it "the garbage heap of the state prison system," a discourse with racist overtones given that Comstock's population was 85 percent Black and Latinx, the highest concentration of any prison at the time.⁹⁸ The Bureau also alluded to DOCS' emerging diversification strategy, recording that "a profile system of screening prisoner backgrounds and tendencies" was in the process of development and that "this system will be employed to sort and distribute various types of prisoners."⁹⁹

Jacob vividly remembers the shock he experienced upon being transferred to Green Haven, a reward for compliant behavior during his two years in Comstock. "It was like someone had lifted a curtain of tension off me," he noted.¹⁰⁰ Between 1944 and 1949, Green Haven had been used as a US Army Disciplinary Barracks, where large numbers of "psychotic" World War II soldiers were incarcerated and "treated" using a

resistance, concluding that the subject had minimal contact with reality, “psychotic tendencies,” “high past and present criminal potential,” and a “very low rehabilitation potential.”⁸⁸ Diagnoses such as this were intended to identify “psychopaths” so that they could be incapacitated. However, in a twist of tragic irony, ten years after authoring this article, Dr. A. Steven Giannell reportedly shot and stabbed his two teenaged children to death, and then stabbed himself to death. “Violent End to Life Against Violence,” read the headline in the *New York Times*.⁸⁹

The diversification strategy achieved mixed results. Officially, diversification was to occur across maximum, medium, and minimum security levels. The 1973 plan projected that the state’s captive population would reach 16,575 by 1978. Fosen’s division surmised that 35 percent would be “tractable” enough to be controlled in minimum security, 45 percent could be held in medium security, while 20 percent would require maximum security. It also noted that a small minority, less than two hundred, needed what they called “intensive prescription and control programming,” a concept I explore in the final chapter.⁹⁰ The ostensible goal of this infrastructural and programmatic diversity was to usher captives through a progressive system of behavioral modification, or as DOCS explained, to “move them upward within the system through a demonstration of responsible behavior.”⁹¹ However, this was not achieved in the immediate post-Attica context. As the 1970s wore on, this modernist vision was eclipsed by the lowest common denominator of penal administration: order maintenance. By June 1, 1981, the captive population far exceeded these projections. Only 7 percent were in minimum, 27 percent were in medium, and the majority, 65 percent, continued to be concentrated in the state’s aging maximum-security bastilles.⁹²

Despite the failure of official diversification, DOCS employed (and continues to employ) unofficial and plausibly deniable forms of this strategy. Captives have noted that in the post-Attica context, individual prisons were more likely to be populated with people who have drastically different sentence lengths and that this was a strategy designed to ensure that no prison would be filled with “lifers” who feel they have little to lose by rebelling against the state.⁹³ Moreover, within the overall network, certain prisons are known to be more or less “humanized” vis-à-vis population density, geography, program availability, saturation with violence, white supremacy, and so on. Carceral planners cultivate this diversity and employ it to maximize compliance. The recollection of Jacob, a Black man who spent more than a decade incarcerated

In 1967, AIR funded *Counter-Insurgency in Thailand*, a study that investigated how psychologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists could aid the state in suppressing anticolonial movements in Southeast Asia. AIR advocated a three-pronged approach to counterinsurgency. First was the use of “threats, promises, ideological appeals, and tangible benefits” intended to cleave support of malleable populations from the insurgency. Second, counterinsurgency should “reduce or interdict the flow of the competing inputs being made by the opposing side by installing anti-infiltration devices, cutting communication lines, assassinating key spokesmen, strengthening retaliatory mechanisms and similar preventative measures.” And finally, it had “to counteract or neutralize the political successes already achieved by groups committed to the ‘wrong side.’” Critically, the proposal references the “potential applicability” of the project’s findings on “disadvantaged sub-cultures” in the United States, suggesting that the similarities between AIR’s strategy in Thailand and Rockefeller’s campaign in New York is no accident.⁸⁴

Dr. Fosen was instrumental to the establishment of the Adirondack Correctional Treatment Education Center (ACTEC), the nerve center of DOCS’ diversification strategy. Planners called it a “specialized facility,” one that “offer[s] a spectrum of diagnostic and treatment programs . . . includ[ing] individual and group counseling, academic and vocational training, special programming for those unable to adjust to routine institutional environments, and community preparation programs for those soon to be released to the community.”⁸⁵ Captives from across the state were sent to ACTEC to be studied, classified, diagnosed, experimented upon, and sorted by an international coterie of doctors, behavioral scientists, social workers, and penal experts. No doubt informed by Fosen’s research into how different systems of taxonomy and classification could be used to guide complex organizations, his department spearheaded an “offender profile” system that grouped captives into one of eighteen categories and distributed them across the expanding prison system according to set quotas.⁸⁶

While much of the research conducted at ACTEC circulated through opaque institutional channels, some of it appeared in peer-reviewed journals. Such was the case with “Criminosynthesis of a Revolutionary Offender,” a psychological profile of a twenty-seven-year-old captive who “identifies with the Black Panthers” and was “similar to the revolutionary offenders involved in the recent Attica rebellion.”⁸⁷ Published in a 1972 issue of the *British Journal of Social Psychiatry and Community Health*, the study extends the long tradition of pathologizing Black

environment,” my analysis demystifies diversification as a strategy of war.⁷⁹ Diversification entails the cultivation of a spectrum of carceral institutions, each with unique infrastructural, staffing, and programmatic capacities, as well as the deployment of these unique capacities to stabilize the overall system. Whereas prior to Attica, individual prisons were populated with “an unplanned mixture of behavioral types and security levels,” after Attica, carceral planners strove to disaggregate the population into “homogenous inmate groups” that could be rationally distributed across an expansive and diversified network, making them easier to control.

Diversification is a form of what Foucault famously termed “biopolitics,” a technology of power that addresses “a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes. . . .”⁸⁰ A footnote buried in the McKay Commission report exemplifies this emergent population-level approach, revealing that among the Attica rebels who were in favor of prolonging the rebellion and remaining in control of the hostages until their demands were met, were “higher percentages of inmates under 30, those convicted of violent crimes, blacks, and single men.”⁸¹ Amid the reformist counterinsurgency, carceral planners weaponized this kind of statistical knowledge in order to prevent volatile “critical masses” from forming. Decades later, the late Russell “Maroon” Shoatz, a BPP/BLA political prisoner who spent nearly fifty years behind the walls of Pennsylvania’s prison system, analyzed diversification as normalized counterinsurgency. The practice of “separating and transferring the most sophisticated thinkers among the prisoners to other prisons [and] replacing them with a new, younger, less savvy group of prisoners” was a common practice, he explained.⁸²

Under the strategy of diversification, prison wardens continued to preside over their institutional fiefdoms but received guidance from centrally located carceral planners, who increasingly had advanced degrees and counterinsurgency expertise. For example, in 1971 DOCS recruited Dr. Robert H. Fosen, a Cornell-trained psychologist, to head its new Division of Research, Planning, and Evaluation. Prior to joining DOCS, Fosen was acting chief of the research division of the California Department of Corrections and then director of the Urban Development Research Program for the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a social and behavioral science think tank that regularly contracted with the Advanced Research Projects Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other mainstays of the national security state.⁸³

Sostre believed the administration's "bribes" could not disguise the reality that the "oppressive mentality" and the asymmetries of power that had led to the rebellion remained intact. Moreover, he argued that the potential benefits of each humanizing reform were immediately neutralized by repressive counter-reforms. Oswald removed the screens but replaced them with three-foot tables, "so actually you're further away than you were from your loved ones on the screen," Sostre explained in an interview.⁷⁴ Making a similar point, another captive explained that after Attica, they were allowed to spend more time in the yard, but that security protocols were changed so that jogging and exercising were only permitted on an individual basis and gatherings of more than six at a time were criminalized.⁷⁵ Roger Champen clarified the lie of humanization in 1973, when he noted that changes had come to the system, yet "there was no change you could point to and say, 'wow, that's better.'"⁷⁶

The state's Multi-Year Master Plan all but explicitly names humanization as a psychological operation. It notes that the process cannot be measured by objective standards, but rather is intended to produce a subjective impact on captives' minds: "Recognition on the part of the offender that he is being treated with at least some regard for his dignity, though his liberty is curtailed, will go a long way in setting the stage for real treatment."⁷⁷ This clarifies Sostre's conceptualization of these reforms as "bribes." They were attempts to induce the desired behavior through ultimately frivolous institutional reconfigurations. Although analysts have tended to frame the post-Attica reforms as Attica's "wins," they can in some ways be seen as wins for the state, insofar as they helped stabilize the system and extend its life. As the following section shows, "humanization" is best understood as a process of strategically uneven development, implemented as a behavior-control technique intended to enhance state power.

DIVERSIFICATION

DOCS actualized expansion and humanization as methods of hidden warfare through the strategy of diversification. "The diversification of programs and facilities," notes the Master Plan, "is a response to the reality of diversity within the offender population. The aim of diversification is to turn the differences among the offenders to social advantage by creating a more effective correctional experience."⁷⁸ Although pitched as "the ultimate means of achieving a humane correctional

It was this revolutionary overthrow of the system, and not its incremental reconfiguration, that Sostre desired: “We, the new politically aware prisoner, will soon galvanize the revolutionary struggle in America to its new phase that will hasten the overthrow of your exploitative racist society, recover the product of our stolen slave labor which you now enjoy, and obtain revolutionary justice for all oppressed people.”⁷⁰

As part of the attempt to undermine revolutionary struggle, humanization involved the dissemination of propaganda. In Attica’s immediate aftermath, DOCS aggressively publicized that they were altruistically improving prison conditions. For example, on the one-year anniversary of the rebellion, the *New York Times* published a story claiming that “Attica Prisoners Have Gained Most Points Made in Rebellion.”⁷¹ The article credits DOCS with implementing “expanded amenities” in the form of more access to personal hygiene products, law libraries, and better food. It fails to mention that in mid-July of 1972, just two months earlier, three-fourths of Attica’s population had exposed themselves to intense repression by going on strike. The rebels issued a communiqué entitled “Message from the Monster: Attica,” which dismissed the “show-case reforms” as subterfuge. “The atmosphere, attitude, and conditions that caused the biggest and bloodiest one day massacre in over a hundred years . . . are back again (twice fold),” wrote Charles “Rabb” Parker, an Auburn rebel and organizer of a formation called the Peoples Party. “I hesitate to use the word ‘back’ because they never left. They were just suppressed under the fear of death,” he continued parenthetically. Rabb was suggesting that the autonomous zones created by militant action—rebellion, hostage-taking, and the threat of assassination—had thus far proven the only means by which Attica’s oppressive atmosphere was substantially ameliorated.⁷²

Echoing Rabb’s notion of “showcase reforms,” Sostre impugned humanization as a “smokescreen” designed to sway public attitudes and conceal the administration’s new control strategy. Speaking directly to Rockefeller, Oswald, and other the planners of this hidden war, he wrote:

Listen, pig, are you really that naïve to believe you can fool and pacify us with nightly bribes of ten-cent candy bars and cookie snacks while caging us like animals . . . by removing the wire screen from the visiting room but replacing it with the three foot wide table thrust between our mothers, wives, children and loved ones to maintain your inhuman separation; by changing the color of our uniforms from gray to green (and those of our jailers), while exploiting our slave labor for pennies a day. . . . After Attica?! Well dream on, pig, until the next rude awakening overtakes you.⁷³

source. “For the first time in American history a labor union has induced a state government to institute major reforms in its penal and correctional system,” announced an article in *82 Review*, the union’s periodical. After Attica, guards threatened an illegal strike unless Oswald acceded to their expansionist demands: higher salaries, a larger labor force, more professional training, more security equipment, and the development of “a special institution for incorrigible inmates.” However, included in these demands were “improvements in the provision of inmate needs such as adequate clothing, shoes, toilet articles and shower facilities.”⁶⁴

Council 82’s demand to humanize the system was not an expression of solidarity between the keepers and the kept. Rather, it was an attempt to avert another confrontation in which they might again be taken hostage and/or killed. As historian Rebecca Hill has shown, many within the notoriously reactionary organization felt that “the common enemy is the boss and the inmate.”⁶⁵ They understood the power of these reforms to assuage some of the hostility and rage welling within and between the captives, improving their own working conditions as a downstream benefit. Conceding to their demands, Oswald attached specific dollar amounts to key reform areas. He pledged \$2,134,000 for a new “clothing ration” that would improve “wearability, appearance, and comfort” of the captives’ uniforms, while earmarking \$689,000 to develop a “nutritious diet” plan.⁶⁶

On the other hand, as I have already shown, imprisoned radicals, rebels, and revolutionaries voiced opposition to humanization. People like Sostre were committed to nurturing rebellion and had therefore come to view brutal prison conditions as politically productive. He and others believed “prisons were the solitary confinement of the ghetto,” and that carceral racism and violence were unmediated forms of the oppression that colonized populations experienced daily in the world beyond prison walls.⁶⁷ Committed to ending that world and creating a new one, Sostre saw this unmediated violence as a pedagogical tool that aided his ability to politicize and organize captives.⁶⁸ He theorized that by incarcerating ever more people within their “dehumanizing cages” and targeting them with “racist-oriented technology,” carceral planners were inadvertently spreading the dynamics they aimed to contain. According to Sostre, they were transforming prisons into “revolutionary training camps,” accelerating the “cross-fertilization” of political ideologies, and helping to produce “fully-hardened revolutionary cadres” that would “effect the overthrow of your racist-capitalist system.”⁶⁹

working-class communities whose survival depended upon the prison's continued existence. Expansion worked hand in glove with another strategy of hidden warfare: the campaign to "humanize" the prisons.

HUMANIZATION

Critical prison studies research has shown how carceral planners couch expansionist and punitive imperatives in terms of care and progressivism as means of legitimating their rule.⁶¹ My analysis extends this conversation by showing that what DOCS called "humanization" was and remains a key rhetoric of reformist counterinsurgency. On its face, humanization invokes a process of relieving oppressive conditions, assumptively through a range of modifications, such as new privileges and programs, better clothing and food, improvements to the physical environment, responsiveness to diversity, and so on. DOCS planners put the term into circulation after Attica forced them to reckon with the violence and racism permeating their prisons. However, as I will show, imprisoned intellectuals, radicals, and rebels conceptualized humanization as either a contradiction or an outright lie, arguing that not only did they leave the system's fundamental inhumanity intact, they were consciously designed to forestall resistance.

Russell G. Oswald assumed leadership of DOCS on January 1, 1971, in the middle of the protracted guerrilla war in Auburn. Three weeks later he sent a harried memo to the governor, complaining that his staff was under constant harassment by "black and white panthers who are bent on the utter destruction of the physical facilities and the correctional 'system'" and that "there are obvious signs of communication with supporters on the outside."⁶² In a desperate effort to stabilize the system, he issued a series of memos and directives. He relaxed correspondence and reading-material censorship protocols, ordered the screens removed from prison visiting rooms, announced that showers should be allowed once per day in all facilities, called for the institution of "community-based and community-oriented programming," and placed formal limits on the use of force and gas against captives.⁶³ Although these humanizing reforms are typically attributed to Attica, they were announced amid the Auburn struggle and reaffirmed during Attica, further demonstrating the importance of the "Long Attica" framework.

Immediately after Rockefeller's massacre, Oswald received intense pressure to actualize these reforms from Council 82, the local representing New York State's law enforcement employees—a seemingly unlikely

the necessary levels of custody and security to safeguard the public, staff and inmates *and maintains the economic integrity and stability in communities and surrounding areas where these facilities have long been a positive factor for employment and economic stability.*"⁵⁵ Of the fourteen New York State prisons opened between 1973 and 1979, seven were located in largely white, rural, deindustrializing communities. This dynamic intensified between 1982 and 2000, during which almost all of the thirty-two new prisons were sited upstate. Research has demonstrated that during the 1980s and 1990s, prisons were pitched as de facto jobs programs for unskilled labor, helping to harden white attitudes in favor of the perpetual criminalization and punishment of Black and Latinx populations.⁵⁶ As we can see, however, an earlier version of this dynamic emerged directly after Attica, helping to solidify support for prison development among populations who otherwise might have demanded other ways of making a living.

"All this money that they use is designed to kill," noted Sostre, commenting on DOCS's budget, which ballooned from \$215,554 in fiscal year 1969–70 to more than \$8 million in 1973–74.⁵⁷ "It looks like they're getting ready to fight a war."⁵⁸ Indeed, days after the massacre, Rockefeller drew \$800,000 from the State Emergency Fund to provide DOCS with additional firearms, gas guns, metal detectors, over four thousand gas masks, three thousand helmets, nearly seven hundred sets of face shields and goggles, and new gun towers overlooking Attica's yards.⁵⁹ Following the lead of California's prison system, DOCS also developed what they called Correctional Employees Response Teams (CERTs), a prison-based version of police SWAT teams. Equipped with bulletproof vests, riot shields, gas grenades, shotguns, and other martial equipment, these units were designed to rapidly respond to emergencies and, according to DOCS, to suppress "disturbances" using a variety of martial tactics including "carefully controlled offensive strategies."⁶⁰

Despite its apolitical public face as a fiscally responsible means of modernizing the carceral system and relieving tension, post-Attica prison expansion operated simultaneously as political, economic, and psychological warfare. Expansion sought to disperse the population across a wide geographic area, to increase the number of walls dividing captives and eliminate the potential for rebellion. At the same time, it enhanced the prison's repressive capacity such that if rebellion were to emerge, prisoncrats would be prepared to crush it internally, preferably with minimal scrutiny from the outside. Finally, the economic aspect of expansion strengthened support for prison development among rural, white,

1953, New York's captive laborers had been remunerated with resources drawn from the Correctional Industry Fund, which accumulated revenues generated from selling the products of their labor. After the passage of the law, state taxpayers started footing the bill for the captives' meager wages, freeing up revenue generated by prison labor to service the PBC's debt. However, according to an annual report from Auburn's Prison Industry Program, one of the most productive such programs in the system, the sale of license plates, highway signs, tobacco, and furniture—all of which, by law, had to be sold to other state agencies—generated revenue barely exceeding \$1 million in 1969.⁵⁰ If all twelve of the state's major adult prisons pulled in similar numbers—a very big if—their combined revenue would amount to a mere fraction of the Dormitory Authority's debt cap. Thus, the reformed use of the Correctional Industry Fund was an act of propaganda designed to suggest that the impending carceral boom would be financed through fiscally responsible means, when in fact it was to be financed through an undemocratic process that would expand the state's debt.⁵¹

This massive expansion of carceral capacity was not inevitable. Prison abolition and decarceration were powerful political tendencies during the 1970s, not only among political radicals but within mainstream discourse as well.⁵² Rockefeller circumvented a public referendum on an expansion bond issue because he knew its approval was not a foregone conclusion. While diverse constituencies were increasingly concerned about “rising crime,” the use of public funds to intensify policing, criminalization, and incarceration had not yet become “common sense” solutions.⁵³ In 1981, for example, voters rejected Governor Mario Cuomo's \$500 million bond issue to fund prison expansion. As geographer Jack Norton has shown, this same “shell game” of laundering tax revenue and public debt through opaque PBC bureaucracies was used to circumvent the will of the voters, facilitating the transformation of much of Upstate New York into a penal colony during the final decades of the twentieth century.⁵⁴

Prison expansion sought to pacify populations on both sides of prison walls. Not only did carceral planners promise that renovated, modernized, and expanded infrastructure would forestall prison rebellion and protect civilization from the scourge of crime, they presented prisons as a form of economic security for residents of the communities where prisons were located. In the 1973 Master Plan, DOCS Commissioner Russell G. Oswald describes economic development as part of the agency's post-Attica expansion strategy: “[The plan] . . . provides

while cultivating an emotional state that was conducive to order, prison expansion was indispensable to counterinsurgency.

This counterinsurgent rationale for expansion has remained central to carceral state development across decades. As a law enforcement union representative told the state legislature in 1985: “Without expansion the entire system is at risk. Without expansion there is increased tension between inmates. Without expansion more inmates who should be classified as being in maximum facilities will be in medium and so on down the line. Without expansion the discipline system breaks down, as we have inadequate numbers of special housing units. As discipline breaks down, so does our control of the system. As you are aware, when control of the system is compromised the potential for a riot or other disturbances are markedly increased.”⁴⁷ This discourse is notable not only for how tension, breakdowns in discipline, and rebellion are attributed mechanistically to prison infrastructure, but also for how it forecloses the possibility that tension might be lessened by reducing the total captive population through “upstream” interventions such as public investment in education and social services, decriminalization, or arrest diversion. Expansion is a reformist imperative that accepts the permanence of the prison as a given and sees its progression as the only viable option.

The Select Committee’s recommendation that “immediate and intensive efforts” be made to expand prison capacity afforded Rockefeller the legislative support he needed to execute his reformist counterinsurgency. In May of 1972, he signed a law that enabled prison expansion to be financed via bond issues while at the same time circumventing the need for voter approval, which normally preceded the accumulation of public debt. Applying a method he used to construct the Empire State Plaza in Albany during the 1960s, Rockefeller built new prisons and renovated existing ones using the “Public Benefit Corporation” (PBC), an entity designed to provide flexible access to state power and capital while partially avoiding both government regulation and the risks of the market.⁴⁸ The 1972 law empowered a PBC called the State Dormitory Authority to issue up to \$50 million in debt to finance prison construction and renovation (a cap that was later lifted). It then gave another PBC, the Health and Mental Hygiene Facilities Improvement Corporation, responsibility for planning, designing, acquiring, and constructing prisons.⁴⁹

Under the plan, DOCS would continue to run the new prisons, but the Mental Hygiene Facilities Improvement Corporation would hold the titles, at least until DOCS paid off the debt. On its face, the law included a mechanism for balancing the books: prison labor. Since

more than 71,000.³⁹ The growth of this punitive infrastructure mirrored similar developments nationwide. The total US state and federal captive population exploded by 500 percent between 1971 and 2010.⁴⁰ As I will show, Attica was a pivotal moment that gave rise to this unprecedented expansion.

Published in 1970, the American Correctional Association's anti-riot manual provides the basis for understanding prison expansion, modernization, and proliferation as psychological warfare. "Antiquated facilities which are large, drab, overcrowded, and isolated from the community are conducive to the development of frustration and anger," they wrote, while "small, well-designed institutions with individual cells are much more effective in reducing disturbances and tension within the institution."⁴¹ Prison expansion, they claimed, reduced overcrowding. This, of course, is a pernicious myth, given that expanded capacity seems almost inevitably to become inadequate soon after it is made available.⁴² Less crowded prisons were said to relieve "tension," "frustration," and "anger," thereby preventing spontaneous rebellions from emerging, while "planned disturbances" could be "neutralized" by removing and isolating "intelligent" and "revolutionary" individuals from the general population, a move requiring flexible carceral capacity.⁴³ Citing the ACA document, the Select Committee's second report noted that "one of the most desirable and effective methods available is for the system to have a multiplicity of facilities for the difficult agitators. Having alternate facilities provides a means for the inmate to re-establish himself and remove his negative influence in regard to his original peer group."⁴⁴

State actors had been aware of their "need" for more prisons since the beginning of the Revolt. Readers may recall that in the wake of the jail rebellion, the state system was forced to absorb three thousand captives who had been under the city's control. This shift transformed the composition of the prisons, resulting in Auburn having what one administrator called "a critical mass of revolutionaries."⁴⁵ Given that these revolutionaries were blamed for the ensuing rebellion in Auburn, it is unsurprising that one of the key ideas guiding the 1973 Multi-Year Master Plan, which laid out the system's capital requirements through 1978, was the need to avoid "critical masses in all facilities." "Smaller, more manageable numbers in the living, eating, working, and recreation areas will decrease the risk of widespread disturbances, while the prospects of a more humane scale are increased," the plan stated.⁴⁶ By creating new infrastructure to more effectively isolate revolutionaries,

the “revolutionary tactics of militants” and, while testifying about Attica, drew an explicit connection between methods employed by Black revolutionaries in the United States and those in Latin America: “One of the most recent and widely used techniques of modern day revolutionaries has been the taking of political hostages and using the threat to kill them as blackmail to achieve unconditional demands and to gain wide public attention to further their revolutionary ends.”³³ By suggesting that US prisons were beset with the same political forces that were destabilizing Western imperialism abroad, Rockefeller implicitly justified the massacre and offered a rationale for ongoing counterinsurgency measures. Stressing the existential nature of the threat, he told members of his inner circle, “There was more at stake [in Attica] even than saving lives. There was the whole rule of law to consider. The whole fabric of our society, in fact.”³⁴

Explorations of Rockefeller’s role in forging the carceral state have largely focused on the so-called Rockefeller Drug Laws.³⁵ Ratified in 1973, they restricted plea bargaining opportunities and imposed “mandatory minimum” sentences for a range of drug offenses.³⁶ As the 1970s and 1980s wore on and racial criminalization became a key mode of governance, similar laws were replicated throughout the nation, increasing prison populations by prolonging sentence lengths.³⁷ This intensification of what Nixon, after consulting with Rockefeller, had termed “the war on drugs” is an important aspect of how the United States became the world’s foremost jailer.³⁸ However, in lieu of rehashing this well-worn historical ground, I focus on how Black prison rebellion was also a key driver of prison expansion and how prison expansion fits into a broader framework of counterinsurgency as hidden war.

Expansion is the *sine qua non* of prison reform, insofar as reforms rarely if ever entail a diminution of the state’s capacity to capture and punish targeted populations. When Attica erupted on September 9, 1971, New York State managed a population of 12,500 incarcerated people distributed across twelve major prisons. Auburn, the oldest structure in its network, had opened more than a century and a half earlier, while Green Haven, the newest, opened in 1949.

In the decades after the massacre, the state embarked upon a rapacious experiment with the criminalization and incarceration of targeted populations, namely economically dispossessed Black and Latinx communities, women of color, queer and trans people, and undocumented immigrants. By the year 2000, the peak of its physical carceral capacity, New York boasted seventy-one prisons and a captive population of

John N. Mitchell laid out the general approach in the prison context. Although the Attica rebellion was perhaps the largest and most dynamic prison rebellion to date, congressional researchers had identified at least seventeen other rebellions in 1971 alone.²⁹ Like Rockefeller, Hoover, and Ichord, Mitchell believed these eruptions were the work of a “militant hard core among the inmates.” To his audience of prisoncrats from across the United States he explained, “If you change the conditions under which the greater majority of them function, you won’t have these problems on the massive scales that you have had in a couple of these institutions.”³⁰ Changing the conditions involved four strategies of hidden war: expansion, humanization, diversification, and program-mification.

EXPANSION

While no individual is singularly responsible for directing the reformist counterinsurgency, Governor Rockefeller was among its key architects. Although rarely described as such, this heir to the Standard Oil dynasty was a seasoned administrator of hidden warfare. He and his brother David—a former US Army intelligence officer in Algeria and president of Chase Manhattan Bank—were mentored by John and Allen Dulles, who, as the respective heads of the State Department and the CIA during the 1950s, shaped US foreign policy during the height of the Cold War.³¹ Prior to becoming the chief executive of the Empire State, Rockefeller used his post as president of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to fight what Frances Stono Saunders calls the Cultural Cold War. In collaboration with the CIA, MoMA elevated “abstract expressionism,” an artistic movement favored by Cold War strategists because it allegedly promoted anticommunist values like free enterprise and American exceptionalism. Rockefeller also headed the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, a massive intelligence gathering and propaganda disseminating operation in Latin America, and chaired the Planning Coordinating Group, which used psychological and political warfare techniques to destabilize communist governments. His use of these techniques was consistent with the formative role played by the Rockefeller Foundation in developing the science of propaganda in service of US empire during World War II.³²

Rockefeller’s Cold War outlook informed his approach to the Long Attica Revolt and shaped his understanding of Black rebellion as a threat to Western civilization. He maintained that Attica was caused by

It would have been reckless for Little to elaborate on the revolutionary underpinnings of the Attica rebellion within this context of intensifying repression. “It seems as though you might be trying to bait me into [admitting] that I am advocating the overthrow of the government, or something like that . . . but I am no fool,” he replied.²⁴ Little knew state actors were looking for any excuse to further criminalize and pathologize the rebels, which made it tactically necessary for him to de-emphasize Attica’s revolutionary politics. Such concealment and obfuscation are central to the conduct of revolutionary warfare. Unfortunately, most scholars and analysts have overlooked this point, taking its outward focus on formal demands at face value. In doing so, they have unwittingly reinforced the reformist counterinsurgency project.

The approaches represented by Garrigia and Little are not necessarily antagonistic. Rather, they existed in productive tension within the PSC, an explicitly abolitionist formation launched by “free world” organizers in support of the Auburn rebels. The same tension existed within individual organizers as well. Throughout the 1960s, Martin Sostre and others launched several successful lawsuits that legally compelled prison authorities to ameliorate dehumanizing conditions.²⁵ And yet these conditions endured. In “The New Prisoner,” an acerbic essay published in 1973, Sostre asserts that Auburn and Attica represented “decades of painful exhaustion of all peaceful means of obtaining redress, of the impossibility of obtaining justice within the ‘legal’ framework of an oppressive racist society which was founded on the most heinous injustices: murder, robbery, slavery.”²⁶ For Sostre, the fact that what he called the “Attica Reform Demands” were aimed at many of the conditions that his successful litigation should have already resolved demonstrated that captives had no choice but to rebel, seize hostages, and adopt a more revolutionary posture.²⁷ Sostre saw value in reform and abolition demands, particularly when they were grounded in a revolutionary critique of the social order.

“As the [insurgent] campaign develops, a split is likely to open between the organizers and their followers, and the more successful the campaign the wider will be the split, because the greater the number of concessions granted by the government, the less have the participants to gain from seeing it overthrown,” writes counterinsurgency specialist Frank Kitson.²⁸ In what follows I show how carceral planners followed Kitson’s playbook, co-opting ameliorative demands in order to exacerbate the split within the prison movement. As the keynote speaker for the 1971 National Conference on Corrections, US Attorney General

analytics, which trace criminality to biological, psychological, or cultural defects believed to be internal to those who transgress the law. To the contrary, Little contended that the structure of society is defective, that social life is afflicted by capitalism and white supremacy. In his view, if the committee were truly interested in eliminating violence and crime, they would attack these systems of power, for they produce what Little called a “dog eat dog society,” a society that requires crime and prisons.¹⁸

In a 1973 address to the Fraternal Order of Police, Democratic congressman Richard H. Ichord described an ongoing investigation by the House Internal Security Committee (HISC), of which he was chairman, in the following way: “Our committee has also been conducting a wide-ranging inquiry into the exploitation of prison conditions and unrest by revolutionary groups and organizations in an effort to recruit from behind prison walls and with the aim of tearing down the administration of the penal system as a prelude to destroying the institutions and form of our entire government.”¹⁹ Little’s unapologetically abolitionist demand for the overturning of the political-economic structure of society is more compatible with this often dismissed theory than it is with liberal reformist analytics that focus on prisoners’ rights. As I have already shown, many of the Revolt’s combatants, engineers, and elected spokesmen saw themselves as the tip of a revolutionary spear and engaged in anticarceral insurgency with capacious ambitions in mind.

Recognizing the implications of Little’s testimony, the vice chairman of the Select Committee asked Little if his political analysis was shared by others. “When the problems at Attica arose, were the people at the proper front of that particular movement fighting for the things that you mentioned before in your testimony? The complete change and not interested in the superficial change that perhaps might have been recommended in a report like this?” he asked.²⁰ Little neither confirmed nor denied the Revolt’s revolutionary impulse. Although he and a few others were now outside the prison walls, they remained targets of carceral state repression. Jury selection in the long-delayed trial of six men criminally charged for their role in the Auburn rebellion had just commenced, and the state’s criminal investigation of the Attica rebels was developing rapidly.²¹ Moreover, in one of his last public statements before his sudden death, J. Edgar Hoover raised the specter of an “unholy alliance” between “black hardened criminal prison inmates” and “black revolutionary extremists.”²² With the help of HISC, Hoover’s secret program to “neutralize” these imprisoned revolutionaries would soon evolve into the Prison Activists Surveillance Program.²³

co-optation.¹² To co-opt, argues sociologist Robert L. Allen, is “to assimilate militant leaders and militant rhetoric while subtly transforming the militants’ program for social change into a program which in essence buttresses the status quo.”¹³ As overarching logics of the reformist counterinsurgency, psychological warfare and co-optation intentionally muddled distinctions between victories and defeats. In the words of the US Army’s *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, “Skillful counterinsurgents can deal a significant blow to an insurgency by appropriating its cause.”¹⁴

Testifying directly after Garrigia, Joseph Little exposed the imperialist logic undergirding the Select Committee’s proposals. Discharged from Attica’s hellish walls just ten days earlier, Little excoriated reform and rehabilitation as modes of domination and lambasted the gathering as a “farce.” Its so-called experts, Little noted, were regurgitating “the same old bullshit” that prison reformers had been spouting for over a century. Although he could produce “a long dissertation” on the brutalities of prison, however, he was not among the growing chorus of people demanding ameliorative reforms. “Everybody wants to get on the political bandwagon. Everybody is down with penitentiary reform. Let us make the penitentiary like the Holiday Inn. I’m not for no penitentiary reform. I am for abolishing the whole concept of penitentiary reform.”¹⁵ Long before abolition was in vogue, Little articulated an abolitionist critique, voicing principled opposition to ameliorative reforms based on an understanding that they would extend the prison’s life. His analysis anticipated and radicalized French theorist Michel Foucault’s oft-cited observation that prison reform is a constituent element of the prison itself.¹⁶ Not only did Little diagnose the centrality of reform to the prison’s core functioning, he asserted a demand for the abolition of reform, which is to say the abolition of the prison itself. As dutifully captured by the court stenographer’s remarkable transcript, Little’s statements elicited applause from the audience.

Little then denounced “rehabilitation” as propaganda, a disguised attempt to “pacify the inmates,” “make them docile citizens,” “train them to be like robots,” and mold them according to white, ruling-class values. “Am I to be rehabilitated to be like who? To be like the racist guards, the racist administrators who are running this country? To be like Rockefeller? Or the Mellons or any other ruling class? Am I to be like you gentlemen sitting there? Just what constitutes rehabilitation? There is nothing wrong with me. What needs to be rehabilitated is the society we live in.”¹⁷ His interrogatory critique inverted standard criminological

Committee's chairman, multiple scheduled speakers ceded their time, allowing the PSC to testify.

While the first two speakers described the shocking forms of sexual racism they endured in Auburn and Attica, Carmen Garrigia discussed the subtle and mundane forms of abuse the system inflicted on her whole family. She explained that her husband, James Walker—also a survivor of the Auburn and Attica rebellions—should have been standing by her side, but that, on multiple occasions, his expected release date had been pushed back due to infractions accrued in connection with the rebellions. She further explained that prisoncrats were heavily censoring letters between her husband and their daughter and that because DOCS had few Spanish-language translators, weeks often passed before their letters were delivered. Garrigia outlined the significant costs associated with the eight-hour bus trip from New York City to Attica and inveighed against the invasive searches she endured before and after each visit, explaining how she and her husband tried to maintain some semblance of intimacy by poking their fingers through the wire screen that separated them during visits. She was incensed by the arbitrary restrictions on the kinds of items she was allowed to leave with her husband during these visits. “You can’t send honey in,” she explained. “They are not allowing toothpaste in there, no fruit juices. How are they supposed to supplement their diet?”¹⁰

Garrigia's efforts to keep her family whole, maintain an emotional connection with her husband, and introduce items of care that might momentarily sweeten his existence highlight the key role that outside communities, especially women, played in ensuring the survival of those inside. Speaking from her position as caretaker of the family, her testimony challenged the Select Committee's vague language on reforming the prison “atmosphere.” Instead, she called for the immediate amelioration of specific material conditions and policies that circumscribed the humanity, dignity, and collective survival of targeted communities. Rebels articulated this category of demand throughout the Long Attica Revolt, from the Tombs rebels, who demanded “as human beings, the dignity and justice that is due to us by right of our birth,” to the Auburn demand for Black Studies programs, to “The Fifteen Practical Proposals” the Attica rebels authored after being told that their “Immediate Demands” were unrealistic.¹¹

Although achieving “wins” among this class of demands is critical to the long-term sustainability of movements unfolding under conditions of genocide, their pragmatism rendered them vulnerable to

This internal tension and its implications were on full display during a public hearing of the New York State Select Committee on Correctional Institutions and Programs. Governor Nelson Rockefeller had launched this committee in the weeks after the massacre, a shrewd political move to generate bipartisan support for his prison reform agenda. This panel of so-called experts—lawyers, political elites, and prisoncrats—triangulated the security requirements of the state with carefully selected rebel demands, proposing an array of reforms to “modernize” the prison system “even in light of the State’s current serious fiscal situation.”⁵ Among them were the construction of new prisons, especially at the minimum and medium security levels; improvements to visitation policies, medical care, and the overall institutional “atmosphere”; the implementation of new rehabilitative programs; and the development of “classification capability for determining the types of programs and security needs of the individuals under custody.”⁶ On February 11, 1972, survivors of the Auburn and Attica rebellions, as well as their family members and supporters, all of whom were organized under the banner of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee (PSC), traveled to downtown Manhattan to force their critiques of these proposals into the public record.⁷ Their continued defiance in the face of state power demonstrates that the Long Attica Revolt survived the massacre. However, it also revealed the movement’s ideological and tactical heterogeneity, a condition that state actors sought to exploit.

The PSC’s bold intervention violated the protocols of courtroom decorum. On the heels of a lengthy testimony claiming that the Nation of Islam was not a legitimate religion, Tom Soto, who had been in Attica during the rebellion as an outside observer, interjected from the audience:

At this time I would like to state now behind me are Lawrence Killebrew, who was shot three times in Attica, who was marked with an X on his back and I have on my left Sharean of the Auburn 6 who was also in Attica during the rebellion who was gassed at one time for seventeen hours, has been beaten in courtrooms while in chains and shackles and handcuffs, and we also have Carmen Garrigia, the wife of a relative in Attica who was also abused and brutalized. . . . I believe that they should be the next ones to testify.⁸

Soto’s brazen introduction of people directly targeted by carceral violence ruptured the progressive facade of the Select Committee, which “was set up as a result of Attica,” according to internal documents, but managed to avoid referencing the rebellion or the massacre in its initial report.⁹ After a heated argument between Soto and the Select

Detailed in this chapter is an inherent tension within the prison movement between pragmatic/ameliorative and revolutionary/abolitionist demands. This tension is a crucial part of why the reformist counterinsurgency was so effective. As I will document, carceral planners exploited the tension, cynically co-opting the ameliorative demands in order to marginalize more radical aspirations for social transformation. Building on this, this chapter will analyze four strategies of reformist counterinsurgency: “expansion,” “humanization,” “diversification,” and “programmification.” I show that key actors within the state penal hierarchy shaped how the reforms were conceptualized and implemented, arguing that while they were promoted as concessions, their true aim was far more sinister. Through these interlocking reforms, carceral planners sought to disaggregate the captive population, to distribute it across an expanding and diversifying carceral network, and to foster an environment that was less conducive to rebellion, one where new “rehabilitative” programs could take root and flourish with active support from communities on both sides of prison walls. These moves had profound effects. They isolated organizers, demobilized revolutionary organizing, and stabilized the carceral system in a moment of profound crisis. By tracing the inception, implementation, and reception of these carceral innovations, I provide a framework for conceptualizing prisons of today as institutionalized counterinsurgency.

UNPACKING THE CONTRADICTION

Although a central argument of this book is that the Long Attica Revolt articulated an revolutionary abolitionist vision that is irreducible to demands for prison reform, it is also true that throughout the Revolt, incarcerated people and their loved ones enunciated and struggled over pragmatic demands to ameliorate violent prison conditions. The tension between the urgent need to secure reforms to enable the captives’ immediate survival as human beings and the equally urgent project of abolishing broader systems of oppression is a central contradiction of the prison movement and the broader Black liberation struggle. While ameliorating harm provides essential relief for those enduring it, such relief can have a stabilizing effect on the predatory systems that generate harm in the first place.⁴ At the same time, as I have shown throughout this book, those who engage in militant attacks against the system inexorably face the wrath of the state, often resulting in a painful existence and a premature death.

introduction, by 1970 state actors increasingly deployed carceral institutions as a means of quelling Black urban rebellion. However, this strategy generated unintended consequences: it gave rise to the Long Attica Revolt.

The intensifying struggle behind the walls made clear that existing techniques of carceral domination—geographically incapacitating populations, fomenting interracial hostility, quarantining “ringleaders,” and naked violence—were no longer sufficient to maintain order. Although these overtly repressive measures would remain central in the post-Attica context, they were augmented with a constellation of “modernized,” “progressive,” and “gentle” techniques, which sought to produce “compliant” and “rehabilitated” subjects in ways that were not immediately recognized as coercive. This new strategy constituted a second layer of domestic war, one that targeted restive incarcerated populations in order to maintain power beyond the prison walls.

While the primary aims of this reformist counterinsurgency were to reassert dominance over the captive population and to isolate radicals, it had auxiliary targets as well. Planners of this campaign used reform to regain legitimacy with prison guards, who had learned through the assault force’s killing of their coworkers that their lives were worth little more than those of the prisoners. The reforms were also designed to solicit publics beyond the walls, a large fraction of whom had grown increasingly critical of prisons and developed sympathy, if not solidarity with, the prison movement. Thus, the post-Attica reforms marked a turning point in which prisoncrats began looking beyond the prison, embarking on new efforts to project carceral power and ideology outward.

This chapter demystifies prison reform as a modality of psychological warfare. Also known as psychological operations, or psyops, the US Army defines this modality as “the planned use of propaganda and other measures to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behavior of hostile, neutral, or friendly groups in such a way as to support the achievement of national objectives.”² Through the tactical deployment of propaganda and “other measures”—military, political, economic, social, cultural, and so on—planners of this hidden war sought to degrade the rebels’ will to struggle while fostering support for their regime among neutral and friendly populations. They sought to incarcerate the horizon of their political aspirations, replace emotions and affects of rebellion with those of compliance, foster investment in the prison’s legitimacy, and convince populations that they were not at war. “To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill,” wrote Sun Tzu more than two millennia ago.³

Hidden War

Four Strategies of Reformist Counterinsurgency

The massacre that occurred in Attica Prison on September 13, 1971, was only the inaugural moment in a multifaceted campaign of prison pacification. The planners and administrators of this campaign strategically co-opted the demands of the prison movement and redeployed them in ways that strengthened their ability to dominate people on both sides of prison walls. Through shrewdly constructed discourses of reform, they created new and improved prisons, bolstered security protocols, augmented their labor force, and legitimized their power, all while appearing to bow to radical demands. As planned, these putatively benign dispensations exploited a key contradiction within the prison movement, ultimately cleaving support from the movement's radical edge while nurturing its accommodationist tendency. Thus, contrary to how they are popularly understood, I conceptualize the post-Attica reforms not as a break with the violence of the massacre but its extension, albeit in a barely perceptible form.

A growing body of scholarship unearths the logics of war that undergird assumptively benevolent domestic reforms. From the education programs of the Reconstruction era to the Community Action Programs of the Johnson administration, scholars have shown that state efforts to pacify populations—to achieve peace without justice—involve the *calibration* of violence with inducements and solicitations.¹ These discussions typically conceptualize the prison as a manifestation of the hard, violent, and repressive side of this dynamic, and indeed it is. As I argued in the

"THE TENSION BETWEEN THE URGENT NEED TO SECURE REFORMS TO ENABLE THE CAPTIVES' IMMEDIATE SURVIVAL AS HUMAN BEINGS AND THE EQUALLY URGENT PROJECT OF ABOLISHING BROADER SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION IS A CENTRAL CONTRADICTION OF THE PRISON MOVEMENT AND THE BROADER BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLE. WHILE AMELIORATING HARM PROVIDES ESSENTIAL RELIEF FOR THOSE ENDURING IT, SUCH RELIEF CAN HAVE A STABILIZING EFFECT ON THE PREDATORY SYSTEMS THAT GENERATE HARM IN THE FIRST PLACE"

CHAPTER 5 OF *TIP OF THE SPEAR: BLACK RADICALISM, PRISON REPRESSION, AND THE LONG ATTICA REVOLT* BY ORISANMI BURTON