OPEN LETTER TO THE PEOPLE

First of all, I want to thank those who were responsible for the beautiful support we found upon our arrival at the Warsaw Court House. I want all of you to know that only your presence there makes us strong, and you are what makes it possible for us to struggle on.

I find it very difficult to transmit my thoughts and feelings. Because I don't know just where to start with words, I think I'll just forget about the side, front, the top or the bottom here & just rap to you naturally. Because what-ever angle we look at it, our situation now, we're confronted with the same fight.

The most significant thing about the fight at this point is YOU the concerned people/all sisters & brothers of New York State/Amerika/The World. Because if they legally Lynch us in their racist court today, they'll be coming for you in the morning.

Having had some experience with constant struggle in this country's court system, we hope all of you realize that we cannot lose our spirit in dealing with these problems. We all are confronted with the same, and it's not necessary to throw up both hands and allow the professional victimizers to gamble twice with our lives in their racist clutches of injustice.

You the people must not allow them to proceed with their beastly acts; for they do not have that right. Only you the people, the true power of any country, have the right to make decisions dealing with such. For you, each and every one of you sister(s) & brother(s) are on trial with the brothers of Attika. We all--no matter what color you are--are prisoners here in America when it comes to the court system, whether you know anything about the prison system or not.

I realize that the many deaths that occurred behind the ugly grey walls of Attica on September 13, 1971, may have come as a surprise to many of you. But as one of the survivors of that bloody Monday, I know that many of us welcomed death after having lived as animals in the cages. Because we've faced the racist functionaries of Nixon, Rockefeller & Oswald in the blood of the people. And we know that our cries reached our ears and farther.

Now is the time for all of you, sister(s) & brother(s) to come forward and take our hand in united defense as we face the new battle that started with that first indictment at the Warsaw Court House in December 1972. So we ask you our beloved sister(s) & brother(s) to unite with all of us in our new cries of the people's battle for a people's victory.

So it's from this viewpoint that I've attempted to transmit my thoughts to you all, on behalf of all the brothers of Attika & it is in this spirit that I hope you, my/our beloved sisters & brothers will receive it. We wish you to take a deeper look into our case & then act collectively in true support to defend and liberate us all from these clutches of double jeopardy.

ALL POWER AND SUPREME LOVE TO YOU THE PEOPLE FROM THE BROTHERS OF ATTICA

UNYIELDINGLY YOURS,

JOMO SEKOU ONOWALE

Auburn Prison
"Special Housing Unit"
January 2, 1973
With this article, we hope to share with you some of our experience during the last three weeks at the Wyoming County Courthouse in Warsaw, where the 37 sealed indictments, charging 60 prisoners and former prisoners with "crimes" allegedly committed during the Attica Rebellion of Sept. 9-13, 1971, were being opened.

The experience of our personal experience is not meant to single out any brother as being more important than any other. All sixty of the Attica Brothers and their families and comrades who have come through this latest vicious attack with us are in our thoughts. We believe that one of the reasons that so many brothers have been indicted is that the state officials, in trying to find scapegoats for the blood on their hands, want to make it impossible for us to come to know these brothers as individuals. They are afraid to have these men known as people instead of numbers, afraid that we will know the depth of human spirit we keep in cages, afraid we will see who the real criminals are. And they have reason to be afraid...

Chuck Pernasalice was the first brother to enter the courtroom. I knew he had worked around the New Times, but I hadn't ever seen him before, and I was shocked when he hopped in, with his freak flag hair hanging high, dressed in jeans with flower patches. We could have met on M Street. In fact, we should have...

People from Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo came to support the brothers at the courthouse in Warsaw, New York.

We drove 250 miles to the Wyoming County Courthouse on the morning of December 18, to find out whether our brother Jomo was among those named in the 37 indictments which the Grand Jury had handed down 3 days before. There was no way to find out beforehand. All we knew was that Jomo, along with about 100 others, had been kept in segregation at Attica for months, having been singled out because of their political awareness as "targets" of the grand jury investigation.

We also knew that a Syracuse rainbow brother, Chuck Pernasalice, had been picked up on the 15th at his house in Camillus where he had been told to wait for a visit from his parole officer. He was brought out of his house by seven creeps who tied him up with his guitar strap and dragged him to the jail in Buffalo to wait for arraignment on one of the indictments.

When we arrived at the courthouse, we learned that Jomo was there, so we knew that he was among those who had been indicted. We were tense as we went into the courtroom. Although the arraignments were scheduled to begin at 10 am, there was still no sign of progress as noon approached. It turned out that the Prosecutor had been delayed by the state's Attorney General, who had appeared to protest for the brothers who had been awakened at dawn, shackled and dragged to the courtroom to wait to hear what "crimes" they supposedly committed, the state's Attorney apologized only to the judge and a lawyer for the delay.

All during the wait from 10:00 until 3:30, I thought of how painful it must be to his handcuffs and leg irons, locked in the small rooms adjoining the courthouse, not knowing what will happen next. But what I didn't realize is that for these brothers this cruel and barbaric treatment is a daily fact of life. It was the brothers themselves who taught me in that courtroom to stand up to the state and to fight. We came there to support them, but it was they who gave us the strength to sit through that ordeal.

By 3:30, there were about 12 brothers locked up in various rooms around the courthouse, some, like Chuck Pernasalice, had been brought in off the street, since they had been released from prison since the Rebellion. Others were brought in convoys from the state prisons they've been shuffling through since the war.

Members of the Prosecutor's staff, left and center, trying to pass as "representatives of the people". Judge Carmine Ball is on the right.
nothing, but continued to try to indict Bilello on indictment #5. The people in the courtroom cheered as Bilello asked the judge whether he could recognize him as a human being, and if he cared whether or not he was another human being. The judge told us all to be quiet.

The brothers were definitely not taking these indictments quietly. A large black man came in, looking like a drill sergeant. He said his name was Black, which sounded logical, and he sat right down and started telling the judge about Blackey and about his rights, and that the indictments had been completely fabricated by the State and that he was a human being and should not be chained while in court. The judge suppressed an answer when Big Black asked whether he had any human decency in him, and suggested that the judge might be some sort of Grand Dragon and should be investigated about his association with the Ku Klux Klan. (After two weeks of watching these indictments open, the suggestion did not seem to be mere rhetoric.) When Big Black was finally given his copy of indictment #5, he tore it up and was led out of the courtroom.

When Chris Reed entered the courtroom, he appeared to be very shy. But when this young black brother spoke up, it was to ask the judge whether the police who shot his leg off during the assault on Attica was in court to be indicted. He asked if the man who had shoved tear gas in his face after the Rebellion was in the court. He wanted to know where the prison officials were, and we were wondering the same thing ourselves. The Prosecutor, however, like a broken record, read him indictment #5.

When they read four indictments to brother Babu (Nilton Jones) it was hard for us to believe that anything was real. This brother was charged with everything from attempted murder and kidnapping to assault, coercion and unlawful imprisonment. (If we hadn't seen Babu standing there, we would have been sure that was Nelson Rockefeller's indictments.) It became obvious then that the state must figure that by loading people down with all this garbage that they'll be able to break them, force them into dealin' and coppin' out--in other words, force the brothers into being just like the honkies they rightfully rebelled against in the first place.
GREETINGS BROTHERS & SISTERS,  
Again under conditions which produce injustice and enslavement. And in which we are forced to function as less than human beings; kidnapped, chained and led like sacrificial animals before the puppet judge of our inhuman oppressors, to start the holiday season.
Again we find all the beautiful and enlightened sisters and brothers en masse in the courthouse to lend moral support.
Also that you were thinking of us with gifts for the holidays. We thank you. Peace, power and love. We will remain strong in the struggle.

BIG BLACK  
(Frank Smith)

RAINBOW SISTER  
Yes, Attika means "Fight Back", and our heart has become Attika fighting back all forces but love. We gave our last answer in blood to the question of our freedoms.
Someday the sadness of my eyes will not show the reflection of our tortured soul--for it's almost over now except the cry of my love for us. Your tears are for those sick people who fastened the handcuffs to my/our wrists, the shackles around my/our legs, the chain around my/our body and transported me/us to this place and turned me/us over to a sick keeper. But your tears alone will show our pain in a way the whole world of sick functionaries will feel and realize the unbreakable, undiminishing powers of who we are. In your tears they realize that they are the guilty ones, the conspirators who have violated our rights of supreme love.

JOMO

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE,  
...I realize now that in my young life I have not met too many real people and now I know there are more people dedicated to the cause, and if I should receive a raw deal from this I will not grow weak, but much stronger because I'll know that you and others care about me and all the brothers and sisters in the same situation. I'm still young and inexperienced, but I feel that before I die I will have the strength and love to lead my people and all oppressed people to a life of pure happiness...If any of you brothers or sisters have the time, I would recommend reading the book "Black Elk Speaks" by John G. Neihardt, and maybe you'll understand how I think...

CHIEF  
(John Hill)

BELoved BROTHERS & SISTERS,  
...Your presence--just to know that you are there, thinking not of what you can do, but doing what you can, knowing that the struggle is for all hands.
It is our realization that black and white must achieve a substantial unity in order to bring about fundamental structural changes in American society. It is absolutely necessary that we reach and maintain a significant level of solidarity in our political and social struggle against this monstrous system.
Historically we have been ignorantly divided along racial lines...In so being we have paid a huge price; riding on waves of self-defeating convictions. Consequently we have entrenched ourselves and the world struggle in stagnation. This the world must know by your glaring example--that the people's struggle is not a struggle based on race, but rather a struggle based on humanity and justice for all people...
We will know the taste, by your support, of a "people's victory" in its truest and purest form--All Power! With Peace, Love and Happiness! --from the Attica Bro. who, by your love and dedication, has grown stronger and more determined,
In revolutionary love and spirit

SHANGO  
(Bernard Strobie)

DEar COMRADES  
...Through the development of mankind (if we call it that) many inevitably will be tormented and will be sacrificed in order to let others live & enjoy life to its ultimate, within reasonable guidelines.
But then we can only say that the dialectical process of human relationships can only be achieved in its highest form through struggle.
I'm not speaking of struggling for the mere act of being involved; it's about struggle for the act of survival. We know that what happened at Attica can happen again (and in our communities too) and the people do not recognize it for what it really is and do not develop the consciousness to deal with it...

In struggle,
BROTHER DALOU  
(Mariano Gonzalez)

The Viva Puer: Rico Libre!
The state's attack on the brothers who suffered the massacre on Attica Prison on September 13, 1971, which ended the rebellion there, has been accelerated during the last 3 weeks, as 60 of the brothers have been indicted for many crimes ranging from promoting prison contraband to murder. These charges were contained in 37 sealed indictments handed down Dec. 15—and this may only be the first batch! So far, none of the prison staff or state police has been indicted for as much as assault.

State Attack #1

On the morning of September 9, 1971, the prisoners exercised their right to rebel against intolerable oppression—by seizing control of an institution that was exercised in 1776 against the British overlords. In D Yard, the 1,280 prisoners developed a powerful unity of all races and religious groupings. For four days they controlled their own lives, sharing what they had, providing medical treatment for all who needed it. As an example to the prison authorities, they treated their hostages with humanity, fed them well, gave them double mattresses and guarded them from attack. Above all else, they overcame the racism that is the prison's (and society's) most effective tool for dividing and controlling the population. The negotiators at the table were Black, White & Latino, and the clear demands they raised called for humane treatment for all, and an end to racist attacks.

On the morning of September 13, without warning or clear ultimatum, the state mounted a massive lethal attack on the prison population. The assault force of prison guards and State Police had been stirred up to a pitch of rage over a wide area, and hunting rifles equipped with flat-nosed dum-dum bullets designed to blow a foot-wide hole in the human body. Thirty-nine shotguns and buckshot to give scattered fire over a wide area, and hunting rifles were armed with shotgun and buckshot to give scattered fire over a wide area, and hunting rifles were equipped with flat-nosed dum-dum bullets designed to blow a foot-wide hole in the human body. Thirty-nine people, including 10 of the prisoners in their struggle to basic human rights, men whose solidarity and determination made them a continual threat to the state; an attempt to discourage any further action by prisoners to change their conditions.

The state is attempting to force all of the people who have been working with and supporting the prisoners to divert all their time, energy and money into long, expensive trials, by carefully avoiding charging the prisoners with crimes that people usually identify with political trials, such as conspiracy, rioting, etc., the state is hoping that we will all understand the political nature of these charges. They are also hoping that heavy charges like murder and kidnapping will have the same effect they tried to achieve with the lies they told the world on Sept. 13—turning the weight of public opinion against the prisoners' struggle, and inducing the people to ignore the fact that 30 people, including 10 of the prison staff, were killed by the state police and prison guards.

State Attack #2

What we are now seeing in these indictments and the coming trials of the Attica Brothers is the final desperate attempt by the state to shield those State Officials who are criminally responsible for the mass murder of Sept. 13, from being brought to justice; an attempt to punish those politically men who had the respect of the prisoners in their struggle to basic human rights, men whose solidarity and determination made them a continual threat to the state; an attempt to discourage any further action by prisoners to change their conditions.

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The Whitewash

The Wyoming County Grand Jury that handed down these indictments is one of the many blackjackets put in the whole history or the use of Grand Juries as a tool of political repression. Its members are drawn from the community around Attica; they are all white, largely elderly (only one is under 30), and unanimously indicted against prisoners. When the jury was questioned by the judge and the D.A. for possible partiality, twelve of its members stated publicly openly that they had friends who work as guards in the prison or as State Troopers, and five had friends who were hostages in the yard. The foreman of the jury, Raymond Becker, runs the school bus outfit in Attica and claims many friends among the prison guards. The only "evidence" this "impartial" jury has heard in its year of duty has been presented by Deputy Attorney General Robert Fisher, the man appointed by Rockefeller to investigate and prosecute all crimes committed at Attica. As a State official himself and as an attorney who has defended the State Officials involved at Attica in court, Fisher stated he could not impartially investigate the crimes of State Officials, and requested a special agency be appointed for that purpose. This, of course, has not been done.

NO ONE IS SERIOUSLY INVESTIGATING OR PROSECUTING THE MEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRIMARY VIOLENCE AT ATTICA, THE MASS MURDERS AND TURMOIL OF SEPTEMBER 13. Fisher and his agents have according to spent the past year investigating the violent crimes of just the state. They have bought their testimony from prisoners by offers of pardon or parole, or by threats of indictment for those who refuse to testify as directed by the D.A. We know of several prisoners who were offered parole, and those who refused to testify. We know of one prisoner who has testified several times and been granted an executive pardon by Governor Rockefeller. Every indication points to the use of these Indictments as a general policy of buying testimony. This use of the courts to legitimize the most barbarous acts of the state is a common ruse to silence us.

We Demand

WE DEMAND that the indictments against the Attica Brothers be so dismissed. WE DEMAND that the State Officials responsible for the conditions that led to the revolt and the mass murder that ended it, be brought to justice. WE DEMAND that the 28 just demands of the Attica Brothers be implemented immediately under the supervision of concerned members of the community. (Based on statements of the Attica Defense Committee of Buffalo.)