



*New York State Archives*

**New York State Division of State Police Seized Attica Inmate Documents 22421**

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## Overview of the Records

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<b>Repository:</b>	New York State Archives
<b>Summary:</b>	This series consists of paper records that were gathered as evidence by the Division of State Police in the aftermath of the Attica Correctional Facility uprising of September 9-13, 1971. State Police personnel tagged the documents as evidence for the investigation and eventual prosecution of acts considered to be criminal. Most of the documents had been in the possession of inmates prior to the retaking of the facility by state authorities.
<b>Creator:</b>	New York (State). Division of State Police. Troop A, Batavia
<b>Title:</b>	Seized Attica inmate documents
<b>Quantity:</b>	10 cubic feet
<b>Inclusive Date:</b>	1968-1971
<b>Series:</b>	22421

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## Arrangement

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Unarranged.

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## Administrative History

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The Attica prison riot of September 9-13, 1971, is an important event in New York State corrections history. The riot was not a "bolt out of the blue." Inmates of Attica considered conditions at the prison to be intolerable. Black inmates comprised a bare majority of the facility's over 2,000 inmates in 1971, and many of them were sympathetic toward the "black power" and Black Muslim movements. Commissioner of Correctional Services Russell B. Oswald favored reforms in the corrections system but had not succeeded in getting legislative approval. A group of Attica inmates presented a list of demands in July 1971, and tensions increased in August after a black prisoner at San Quentin prison in California was killed while trying to escape. Several incidents of friction involving Attica inmates and guards occurred in

early September. A large number of inmates seized control of the prison on September 9, and they later retreated to the 'D' cell block and yard.

Negotiations between inmates in 'D' yard and Commissioner Oswald, with an impromptu committee of civilian observers acting as intermediaries, ended on September 11, after an injured prison guard died. Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller refused to go to Attica, but he authorized the State Police and National Guard to retake the prison. A massive assault on September 13 left 42 persons dead and many more wounded, including inmates and prison employees who were held hostage. After policemen and soldiers retook the facility, all persons in 'D' block and yard were stripped and searched. In addition, all cells were cleared of personal belongings, including documents. Some of the materials in 'D' yard and in cells were tagged by State Police as evidence, including the documents that comprise this series.

State Police personnel tagged the documents as evidence for the investigation and eventual prosecution of acts considered to be criminal. Over sixty indictments of inmates were handed down in December 1972, but no prosecutions ever occurred. Governor Hugh Carey declared a general amnesty in 1976, citing the lack of substantive evidence.

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## Scope and Content Note

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This series consists of paper records that were gathered as evidence by the Division of State Police in the aftermath of the Attica prison riot of September 9-13, 1971. Most of the documents had been in the possession of inmates prior to the retaking of the facility by state authorities. Documents include minutes of 'D' block "Nation of Islam" monthly meetings; notes on Islamic precepts and scientific information; inmates' notes, correspondence, and court papers discussing their incarceration and attempts to obtain release from prison; personal letters to inmates from family members; an inmate newsletter; a list of inmate demands, dated July 1971; a few photographs, presumably of inmates' families; and news clippings.

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## Use of Records

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### Access Restrictions

Portions of this series are restricted to protect personal privacy and attorney-client privilege.

Most of the material in this series suffered severe water damage prior to seizure. Access to materials in boxes 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 is restricted until the records receive conservation treatment.

### **Use Restrictions**

Records in this series may be protected by U.S. Copyright. Consult with archivist to obtain more information.

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## **Administrative Information**

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### **Custodial History**

Since the documents in this series were originally selected by the Division of State Police for evidential purposes, they are not necessarily representative of all inmates' activities and interests. The documents are a small portion of a much larger quantity of materials, including clothing and other objects, that were seized and subsequently stored at the State Police Troop A headquarters in Batavia, New York.

These records were transferred to the custody of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision in July 2014. They were transferred back to the State Archives in August 2019.

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## **Access Terms**

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- Legal documents
- Attica (N.Y.)
- Correctional institutions--New York (State)
- Riots--New York (State)--Attica
- African American prisoners--New York (State)
- Prison riots--New York (State)--Attica
- Correspondence
- New York (State)
- Investigating
- Prisoners--New York (State)
- New York State Police
- Attica Correctional Facility