Interview with **Herbert X. Blyden**
Date: December 22, 1988
Interviewer: Sam Pollard
Camera Rolls: 2074-2077
Sound Rolls: 234-235
Team: B

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s***. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #2074]
[sound roll #234]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

Camera roll twenty, seventy-four. Sound two, three, four. Oh-two, oh-two time code.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer:

Tell me when.

Camera crew member #1:

Just a second. Any time.

00:00:26:00

Interviewer:

Brother Herb, would you tell me about the conditions, what the conditions were like in Attica?

00:00:32:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Well, the conditions in Attica at the time of the uprising was such that the majority of the inmates, of whom there were over two thousand, got concerned with the one shower per week, one roll of toilet paper per month, the tampering of the mail. And I say tampering in terms of excising portions of a magazine or letters from home. The salary or wages per day in the metal plant was like eighty cents. And the overall harassment by the guards of the inmates, most of whom were from the metropolitan areas of New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse. The guards for the most part were from rural Attica, the village in Wyoming County, County. And they were unpaid. Grossly unpaid. Seven thousand, six thousand or seven thousand dollars a year. So, naturally they couldn't relate to urban type inmate that were brought to, to Attica. And as a result, that created a lot of conflict between the rural and urban guards and inmates. And that's the gist of the problem that we had.

00:01:47:00

Interviewer:

What were some of the things that were raising the consciousness of the brothers before the uprising?

00:01:53:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

For the most part, the consciousness of the brothers in Attica, their level was raised once they had gotten into their writings of Malcolm X, the uprising in Watts, and definitely the Soledad Brothers' struggle. And that in turn affected conditions in the Tombs, prison in New York City in 1970. So, from '67 through '70, there was this uprising throughout America's prisons from west coast to east coast to the South. You know, with Folsom and all the rest of the other prisons thrown in. And what we found in Attica in 1971 was the influx of prisoners from other outlying New York State institutions confined in Attica themselves. There was the Young Lords, the Panthers, the Five Percenters, the Weathermen, the Muslims. And for the most part, all these diverse groups—and the Five-Percenters as, as—I'm sorry.

00:02:55:00

Interviewer:

Let's start it again.

Herbert X. Blyden:

Yeah. 'Cause I wanna make sure I give you those groups.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

00:02:59:00

Herbert X. Blyden: Because it's important.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Camera crew member #2:

Yes.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Camera crew member #1:

Still rolling. Cut?

00:03:03:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut.

[cut]

00:03:03:00

Camera crew member #2:

Speed. Marking.

[slate]

Interviewer:

Tell me when.

Camera crew member #2:

Sound.

Interviewer:

00:03:08

Brother Herb, so let's—tell me what was raising the consciousness of the brothers in Attica around that time?

00:03:15:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Well, for the most part, most of the brothers in the institution in 1971 was raised by the uprisings throughout America from '67, '68, '69. They split, I think, in the, the party, west coast and east coast faction of the Panthers. The Malcolm's teaching, the diverse militant groups that was set up, the Weatherman, the Young Lords, the Five Percenters, and of course the Nation of Islam's contingent. All of these elements had their consciousness level raised relative to the well being of their folk as they saw it. So, that to confine two thousand men in this small setting in one institution with that type of a consciousness level raisin-raised would, I think, was what I think created the conditions for the rebellion in Attica in 1971.

00:04:14:00

Interviewer:

Sorta describe for me if you could the day of the, the rebellion, the day of the takeover. Where you were?

00:04:24:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

In 1971 when the uprising occurred, we had two-thirds of the men working in their shops—industry, making cabinets, chairs, lockers, et cetera. But I think in all fairness to the viewing audience I should say that the evening before, there was an altercation, and an inmate was dragged out of his cell in A block. And the officials at that time were told that if anything happened to that inmate the next day when the inmates were let out there would be some reprisals. And as a result of them not taking that statement seriously, there was a spontaneous uprising in A block, which filtered out over to the re-remainder of the prison.

00:05:16:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop a second. We're gonna—

[cut]

00:05:18:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:05:21:00

Interviewer:

So, if you could describe where you were the day of the rebellion and how you ended up in, in D yard.

00:05:27:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

At about eight o'clock on the morning of the 9th of September, I was in the metal shop in B block. And there was a lot of running around and milling around by inmates. And the guards started to run around as if they didn't know what was happening. 'Cause evidently they didn't have contingency plans for some emergency. It occurred to me that indeed there was an emergency. I left the metal plant with a group of inmates, and we proceeded through B block where we met inmates coming from other blocks and correction officers following those inmates. We went out into D yard, and the inmates closed the door behind them. And the guards at that point stopped coming because there were twelve hundred and some odd inmates confined in that yard at that point.

00:06:25:00

Interviewer:

What was the atmosphere like in the yard the first few minutes of the take, of the rebellion?

00:06:29:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

For the most part right after entering D yard, the milling about and the confusion of these diverse groups from four prison blocks created what you would call pandemonium. ***Because you had forty or fifty correction officers who no longer it appeared had control of the institution. So, order had to be made out of this disorder. And at that point, the Muslim contingent in the yard—I think there were thirty-five Muslim brothers—saw to it that there was no further injuries to the, the hostages***—at that point they were called hostages which were correction officers.

00:07:14:00

Interviewer:

What was your role in the, in the yard at the time? Describe how you got selected as a—one of the leaders.

00:07:19:00

Interviewer:

As a result of the Tombs uprising in 1970 and my 72 count indictment for the Tombs uprising, a lot of the inmates from the Weather faction, the Muslim, the Young Lords, and the Panthers, and the Five Percenters suggested that there be a 15-member committee set up to negotiate with the outside officials. And I was selected unanimously by the group to chair the inmate negotiating team.

00:07:51:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut a second.

[cut]

00:07:54:00

Camera crew member #2:

Rolling and speed.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:08:00:00

Interviewer:

Before the rebellion, you had sent some demands to Commissioner Oswald. And he had responded with a tape recorded message. How did you feel when you got that?

00:08:10:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Well, after we sent the 28 demands to Commissioner Oswald, he came to the prison, and he sat with five inmates. Not five signatories to the demands. Only one of the five was in the group that he sat with. He in turn spoke not to the demands but to correcting such things as the toilet paper issue and the soap issue. But we, we made requests for 28 specific demands relative to adequate salary for a hard day's work in the metal plants, and he didn't even address those. And once he played the tape over the inmate earphone [sic], the institution it seemed, you know, to a man was booing. And that should have been, I think, the sign that there were grave concerns about the sincerity of Commissioner Oswald. And no one really looked at that.

00:09:12:00

Interviewer:

Let’s, let’s cut a second. I thought it was—

[cut]

00:09:13:00

Camera crew member #2:

Holding and speed.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:09:21:00

Interviewer:

OK, Brother Herb, would you describe for me what, how the inmates observed George Jackson's death and then—

Camera crew member #2:

[sneezes]

Interviewer:

—how you felt that date, and what you saw?

Herbert X. Blyden:

What was interesting was the reaction, I think, of the majority of Attica's population—

Interviewer:

Excuse me. Could you say, what was your reaction, what was interesting to the interesting of George Jackson's death.

Herbert X. Blyden:

Right. Sorry.

Interviewer:

Go ahead.

00:09:43:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

When George Jackson died, we heard it on the radio. And you know, we had the prison grapevine. The very next morning, it was interesting because everyone was locked into their cells when we heard the news, so no one had time to actually say, Tomorrow morning at breakfast, we will go in with black shoe strings as arm bands in mourning and do not partake of breakfast. And literally every man in Attica walked into the mess hall the next morning for breakfast with a black armband and did not eat breakfast. And that was out of respect and mourning for George Jackson. It affected us immensely.

00:10:25:00

Interviewer:

And now what was your personal feelings? You personally.

00:10:29:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Personally, ***I don't know that I can describe in words how it affected me because George was in effect my mentor.*** I have loved the brother, you know. I have been fortunate to actually meet Mrs. Georgia. And at that time, one of his very best friends was Angela, and I had met Angela Davis. And I love little baby brother Jonathan. So, it affected me as if, you know, indeed someone from my, like my family had died. And I didn't know that the emotional affect that it would have on the rest of the inmates was in effect basically the same as it had on me. So, George touched all of us very deeply.

00:11:14:00

Interviewer:

OK. OK, let's cut.

[cut]

[camera roll #2075]

00:11:16:00

Camera crew member #1:

New camera roll, twenty seventy-five. Time code oh-two, oh-three.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:11:25:00

Interviewer:

OK. Brother Herb, if you could tell, you know, tell me how you felt when you heard George's, heard about George Jackson's death.

00:11:34:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

When I heard about George Jackson's death, it impacted on me in such a way that it had a devastating affect really. To this very day, it effects me.

00:11:44:00

Interviewer:

Nah, you can't put to this very day—

Herbert X. Blyden:

But it's the truth.

Interviewer:

You gotta keep it in the—

Herbert X. Blyden:

Oh. [laughs]

Interviewer:

You gotta keep it in the past.

Herbert X. Blyden:

See, that's—

00:11:50:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut. Cut.

[cut]

00:11:51:00

Camera crew member #2:

Rolling. And speed. Mark.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK. Anytime.

00:11:58:00

Interviewer:

Yeah, how did you react when you heard personally? How did you react personally when you heard about George Jackson's death, Brother Herb?

Herbert X. Blyden:

Well, with anger.

Interviewer:

When I heard about George Jackson—

00:12:08:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Because of the, George Jackson's death. You know, the anger had built up in me to the point where I was ready to explode myself. But after having considered the turmoil, and the trials, and tribulation that this strong brother had gone through only to be murdered in the manner in which he was murdered, I said, Well, if he can endure and still be able to reach out even in death as he had, we could take it from that point and proceed to try to bring some other diverse elements together. But at first, my reaction was, you know, an eye for an eye, much as the *Bible* had spoken of. But I maintained my calm for the most part. But George, I think his overall demeanor affected me to the point where I was able to carry on and help to bring some people, some people together to deal with some issues.

00:13:07:00

Interviewer:
Can you just give it to me one more time? 'Cause I sort of jumped on top of your question—

Camera crew member #2:

[clears throat]

Interviewer:

—your answer. How did you react to George's death?

00:13:16:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

George Jackson's death, I think, created anger, frustration, and it, for a moment wanted me to actually lash out at something or someone. Preferably to society and those forces that be [car horn] that had taken his life from us. But in realizing that the brother had not died in vain, and he would have wanted us to continue with the work that he had tried to do from behind the prison walls, we maintained our cool, and I maintained mine and tried to continue to struggle to bring the forces together and move on for a betterment of society from within the walls and from without the walls.

00:14:11:00

Interviewer:

OK. Cut. Let’s cut a second.

Camera crew member #2:

Cut? OK.

[cut]

00:14:15:00

Camera crew member #2:

Speed. Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer:

Tell me when.

Camera crew member #2:

Yeah, when.

00:14:22:00

Interviewer:

So, what was it about George, I mean that, that you remembered as you thought about his death?

00:14:29:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

George Jackson's death, I think, impacted on me in such a way that even Mar—Doctor King's death did not impact on me. Because while Doctor King strived for something from a religious perspective, George Jackson came from something which had an inner and yet an outer—***I remember his going to court in shackles, and the brother would stand erect. You know, proud Black man that he was. And they had not broken his spirit, and these are the things that Doctor King and Malcolm talked about. The breaking down of, of the Black man's spirit.*** I remember his in-cell program with the exercise and the push ups. And then when he comes out, it would be like he was in another world while he was still in the confines of, of the belly of the monster. So, I think what I had to do at that point was to show that we can be strong even during trials and tribulations, much as George was strong to the death. So, as a result of them taking George away from us, it made us that much stronger, I think.

00:15:48:00

Interviewer:

Good. Good.

Camera crew member #2:

Let's cut.

[cut]

00:15:50:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:15:54:00

Interviewer:

We really wanna, I wanna ask you again. And I want to try to get some, some more feelings out of you. What it was like when you first went to the D yard the first day of the takeover, of the uprising. What was it like in there among the inmates? How did you feel being among all these, the twelve hundred, twelve hundred and something men?

Camera crew member #2:

What did you see?

Interviewer:

What did you see?

00:16:12:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

The first day of the uprising out in D yard with twelve hundred, eighty and some odd men running around, whipping people—I'm talking about literally physically assaulting people who had not seen because of the diverse laws they have got in Attica about blocks. You have got four different prisons in one. And finally they, the, they contacted someone who they hadn't seen for some time. We had a, another group running around, and the prison hospital was overtaken. So, they now had access to drugs, so the drug element was there. And we would have OD'd had we not [claps] stopped them from abusing drugs. We had younger inmates. That was one of the concerns we had raised. And some of the older inmates who had been incarcerated for fifteen or twenty years were actually physically abusing the younger inmates. I'm talking about raping these younger kids. So, that had to be stopped. And for the most part, the pandemonium had to be stopped. And that's where, you know, in looking at this mad house, we had to put an end to it by bringing the Muslim piece into play and setting up the negotiating team with clearer heads. ***But the general chaos was such that even I was taken aback.*** I was amazed at how serious a situation that was. And was it not taken into hand, put in check right away, a great deal of harm could have occurred.

00:17:51:00

Interviewer:

OK.

Camera crew member #1:

[coughs]

Interviewer:

Let's cut a second.

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

[cut]

00:17:56:00

Camera crew member #2:

Speed. Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:17:59:00

Interviewer:

OK, Brother Herb. Amnesty seemed to be one the main issues among the inmates. I mean, why was it important to you specifically?

00:18:08:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Amnesty was very important among the inmates in D yard if only because with the death of Quinn, the six hundred inmates of the twelve hundred who were doing life sentence at that time was facing the electric chair because of the law in the book at the time. The follow up question to amnesty was, was then transferred to a non-imperialist country. If we, we could not get amnesty, we just wanted to leave. And some of us who were granted amnesty by then Mayor Lindsay in New York City for the Tombs uprising understood full well what it meant to not be charged with a crime after a paper amnesty was granted. We were charged with a crime in New York City because we were not given amnesty in writing. So, we wanted the alternative to an amnesty in writing granted by the governor and transferred to a non-imperialist country, but it was very, very important. Because we, we had six hundred men who were facing the electric chair at that point.

00:19:14:00

Interviewer:

Why was it important to you specifically? I mean, what did you feel when, when, with this, dealing with this issue of amnesty?

00:19:20:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Personally I didn't opt for amnesty, I wanted transfer to a non-imperialist country. Because I had had experience the Tombs. And I knew that amnesty on its face meant no more than the emancipation of slaves during Linco-Lincoln's days. Just mere, mere words by the White man.

00:19:41:00

Interviewer:

OK. Let's, let's cut a second.

[cut]

00:19:44:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:19:47:00

Interviewer:

This is directed right to you personally. How did you feel about this issue of amnesty in terms of you?

00:19:52:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

In terms of me and amnesty in 1971 in Attica, I did not relate to the terminology. So much so that we included in the five final demands a, a clause that specifically addressed itself to transfer to a non-imperialist country because having been brought up in America, realizing its laws mean nothing, the man's word mean nothing, having had the experience only a year prior in the Tombs uprising where Mayor Lindsay granted amnesty, we knew full well that the fork town would stick us. So, amnesty per se meant nothing. I wanted out.

00:20:43:00

Interviewer:

All right, let's cut.

[cut]

00:20:45:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:20:49:00

Interviewer:

OK, Brother Herb, the, the inmates and, and you, and the inmates had found out about the, the death of William Quinn. What was the reaction to Quinn's death from you and the reaction of the other inmates?

00:21:02:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Upon finding out that William Quinn had died, the correction officer, there were approximately six hundred inmates who if—were affected immensely because they were doing life sentences. And at, at that time, the death of a correction officer by an inmate in any of the state prisons could place that inmate in an electric chair. So, that solidified the position of those inmates who for whatever reason may not have wanted to be a part of the, the uprising. And that now made a hard core element in the yard for whatever demands were

put forth for amnesty from prosecution for the death of Mr. Quinn. So, what you had now is six hundred quote unquote hardened criminals dealing with the situation in the yard instead of 1,281 just inmates out in the yard. That position solidified for those men once deaths, the death of Quinn was known, made known.

00:22:09:00

Interviewer:

OK. Did you tell, what did you tell the inmates about what, what was gonna happen in that yard?

00:22:15:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

I told the inmates at that point that there will be a turkey shoot. It was interesting because there was a turkey shoot on the morning of the 13th—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

00:22:27:00

Interviewer:

Yeah—

Herbert X. Blyden:

—of September.

Interviewer:

—we, yeah, we know that. I just want you tell me—

Camera crew member #2:

Roll out.

Interviewer:

—OK—

Camera crew member #1:

OK, that's roll out [inaudible]

Interviewer:

—[laughs]

00:22:37:00

Interviewer:

I don't want you to jump ahead.

Camera crew member #1:

—going to twenty—

[cut]

[camera roll #2076]

00:22:39:00

[slate]

Male:

OK [inaudible] OK.

00:22:47:00

Interviewer:

Brother Herb, tell me what you told those brothers, the brothers after you heard about Quinn's death.

00:22:53:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Upon hearing of the demise of William Quinn, the correction officer, we realized how serious a situation it was for the six hundred plus inmates who were doing a life sentence. Because based on the existing law at the time, the death of an inmate, the death of a correction officer at the hands of an inmate made you eligible, if you will, for the

electric chair. So, that solidified the position of the inmates in the yard who were doing sen, a life sentences. I upon hearing of the death of Quinn took to the podium, and I formed a—

00:23:28:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut a second. I, I want you to do it like—

[cut]

00:23:30:00

Camera crew member #2:

Speed. Marker.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK. Medium, right?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:23:37:00

Interviewer:

What did you tell those guys after, you know, you all heard about the death of Quinn?

00:23:42:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Well, once we found out that William Quinn had died, the correction officer, it behooved me to then tell these brothers, you know, that straight up they're in trouble. And the six hundred plus inmates who were out in the yard, you know, upon hearing what I was saying to them, the death, the death of Quinn, this solidified their position, and now it became the key element in the yard. And I informed them that, you know, all hell is going to break

loose because now a correction officer is dead, and their position was then come on with it. And I think as a result of us looking at Quinn's demise and the solidification of their position, you know, we had that cadre of solid fighting force that we need to stay in the yard for additional time.

00:24:38:00

Interviewer:

Yeah, let's stop a second.

[cut]

00:24:40:00

Camera crew member #2:

Rolling and speed. Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:24:45:00

Interviewer:

OK. What did you tell these brothers after they heard, after y'all heard about Quinn's death?

00:24:49:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

As a result of receiving word that William Quinn, the correction officer, had died, the information was conveyed by me to the inmates in the yard. And the six hundred plus lifers gathered around. And I'll never, you know, forget their reaction once I told them, You niggers gonna die. I said, All you brothers are gonna be slaughtered in this yard. And, you know, they were like, Well, come on with it. But the position was excellent because it then created a solid core for us to be able to deal with the madness we had to deal with, with the negotiating and, you know—but we told them straight up these were serious times and that they were going to die.

00:25:40:00

Interviewer:

OK.

Herbert X. Blyden:

Somebody may want to book a time to die—

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible]

[cut]

00:25:43:00

Camera crew member #2:

Rolling and mark it. And speed. And mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

Good.

Camera crew member #1:

[clears throat]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:25:50:00

Interviewer:

Brother Herb, if you can just go back to that, that Monday, what happened that morning? What you saw, what you felt as the state troopers came in and correction officers came in to retake the yard.

00:26:03:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Monday, September 13th, 1971 was indeed a blue Monday. It was a cloudy overcast day, and we remember clearly addressing the crowd and apprising them of the urgency of the situation at hand and to a man with one exception. Everybody decided to stay in the yard. I'll never forget this one White guy came up to me and said, I don't want to be out here. And I told him, Then stand behind me. And he was the only one of 1,281 men who said they didn't want to be in the yard on September 13th. Fifteen minutes after that man said that, the helicopters came over and asked us to surrender, place our hands on our heads. We will not be hurt. And some of the men started to do that. Only to hear tear gas, pepper gas, shotguns, rifles. And it was a-again pandemonium broke out because some of them were indeed surrendering. And the chaos that was created as a result of this mass shooting into the yard, I think, to this—to me created the pandemonium that led to the massacre in the yard.

00:27:35:00

Interviewer:

Let’s cut.

Herbert X. Blyden:

Yeah, I—see I can't—

[cut]

00:27:37:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:27:42:00

Interviewer:

OK. OK, Brother Herb, I want you to go back to that, that morning, that Monday morning, and describe what happened, you know, before the assault and then the assault on the yard when they, they took it over.

00:27:53:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Well, we had the regular morning meeting September 13th, 1971 in the yard. We call it blue Monday. It was a rainy overcast damp, just a weird day. Like one of those days you see in London with the fog, right? And the helicopters came over right after our regular morning rap session of the, the inmates in the yard. And they announced a surrender order.

00:28:19:00

Interviewer:

I wanna stop for a second. Let's try a pick up again—I want you to tell me a story—

[cut]

00:28:22:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:28:27:00

Interviewer:

OK, once again, Brother Herb, if you could describe that early morning before the assault and then the assault itself.

00:28:33:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

OK, September 13th, 1971 stands out. It was a blue Monday. [pause] Storm clouds on the horizon, fog, hazy. It looked like one of those London city movies that you look at, you know. And we had our regular morning briefing, the 1,281 inmates and myself. As the chair, I had addressed them from standing on top of a platform they had put there. And we were told, or they were told by me after the committee had instructed me to tell them to make up their mind whether they wanted to end the uprising now and go back to their cells or stay out in the yard. And 1,280 of 1,281 men in D yard decided they would stay. And I remember

this one White guy in the audience said he wanted to be in his cell. He was standing in the middle of the yard, and for a moment it appeared that they would engulf him with their anger. And I hollered, No, don't touch him. Let him come up here. And he took his time, and he came up to where I was. And I asked him to stand behind me. And he had more courage seriously than any one of us in the yard. But he stayed there until fifteen minutes later the helicopters started to drop the tear gas. And the wanton shooting began by the guards who were on the towers. And this is, all the while, they're saying to us, Put your hands on your head. You will not be harmed. Surrender to the nearest officer. They were shooting all the while. And the pandemonium that broke out as a result of the dropping of the tear gas, and the CM gas, and the shooting with the 270's and the 12-gauge shotguns, I think, created mass hysteria and additional injury to untold hundreds of men in D yard.

00:30:47:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut. You just ran out?

Camera crew member #1:

Yeah. I'm running out now.

[cut]

[sound roll #235]

00:30:51:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:30:55:00

Interviewer:

OK. The yard has been taken, retaken. What happened to you when the state troopers and the guards came in there, Brother Herb?

00:31:03:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

When the state troopers and the guards came in to immediately take the inmates now out of the yard to their cells, ***we were made to strip, lay in the mud face down, and crawl to a guard ten to twenty feet away from the guard that had you stripped. At that point, that guard would mark an X with white chalk on the back of select inmates who were then removed from the mud physically by two additional guards, placed in a line to run a gauntlet of correction officers to be beaten all the way to another cell block*** for housing. You ran over glass and bottle, or whatever you had because you were stripped naked with your hands on your head, and you were beaten with the batons all the way to the cells. In the trek to the cell, we could see some of the other brothers laying there, getting their X placed on them or just singled out for special treatment as they called it. I remember L.D. Barkley was one. He was still alive and well when we left the yard, and there was no additional shooting wantonly—as it turned out, he was selected, I guess, for murder. How do you deal with that without—

00:32:33:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut.

Herbert X. Blyden:

You see, you see what I'm saying? You—

[cut]

00:32:35:00

Camera crew member #1:

Camera roll twenty, seventy-seven. Timecode oh-two, oh-five. Continuation of s-sound roll two, three, five.

Camera crew member #2:

Marking.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK, Sam.

00:32:47:00

Interviewer:

Brother Herb, I want you tell me again what happened after that yard was retaken with the state troopers and the guards. What did they do to, to, to you and the other inmates?

00:32:56:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

When the state troopers and the guards came in upon the immediate retaking of the yard, September 13th, certain inmates were singled out for special treatment. The majority of those for special treatment were X'd on the back with chalk. The ones that were made to lie in the mud naked. I think there were fifteen or twenty from the immediate negotiating of which, of whom I was one. We were then removed to run a gauntlet to A block housing unit, which is the box. That's what they call it, the box, where you're segregated from the rest of the population. But then proceeding along the gauntlet route, we saw several of the other brothers who were still a-alive singled out for special treatment who never did show up in our housing unit. Upon entering the cells where they had selected for us, we were made to stay in those cells in the nude with no running water. And for three days, we were constantly abused, physically slapped around. Not truncheon beatings, not like the gauntlet. But the guards would open the cells at random. Two and three of them would go into the cells at night and punch a guy around, or slap him around, or kick him around. And for three days, they would bring the food up to your cells, cereal, milk, cornflakes, coffee, and tell you straight up that, I wouldn't eat this if I was you. We did whatever in it. You know? So, for three days, the men were not eating in those cells. Even though there were food readily available. The guards would in some cases physically spit in the foods and show you he spitting in it. And then pass it through the bars to you. So, those of us who knew how to fast, I guess, had to fast for three days.

00:34:53:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut.

[cut]

00:34:55:00

Camera crew member #2:

Speed.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:34:59:00

Interviewer:

OK. The impact that Angela Davis had on you, Brother Herb, and—when you were in Attica and in the Tombs in '70, '71.

00:35:06:00

Herbert X. Blyden:

Angela Davis had an impact on me that was immense because back in those days,
we didn't have it seemed too many strong Black women speaking out to some of the issues of the day. And Angela Davis' voice, I think, was one of the most profound voice for change at that time. And I admired her immensely, and she affected me greatly.

00:35:33:00

Interviewer:

Cut. How—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:35:36:00