Were you a Muslim prior to coming to Attica?

A No.

What attracted you to the Muslims when you came to Attica?

A What attracted me was the moral and the spiritual uplifting that I got from Islamic faith, which the correctional department, Department of Correctional Institutions could not give me.

You see, this is what I was looking for. I wanted something to take the place of my reason for being there. I needed something to supplement for my drug addiction. For doing--committing felonies, crimes. I needed something to take the place of this and they had no program there that I found that was qualified to give me this.

So consequently, when I came into the faith of Islam, this supplemented all that that I was looking for.

Q Brother Matthews, we've talked and the Commission has heard about the routines at Attica.

We have heard about the long hours that inmates spend in their cells. We have heard about the few hours they spend on the yard. We heard that they spend very little time together.
Q The Muslim's attracted you.
A Right.
Q You said that they gave you the orientation and the hope that you looked for.
A Right.
Q When do Muslim's have the opportunity to give you this orientation?
A Let me clarify that.

You used the word "they". It was one brother in particular that came to me. At this particular time he was the only brother in the whole institution that had this particular ideology of thought of El Islam. He seen me, right. I, in turn, tried to run from him because at that time I didn't think that I was ready to become a Muslim. I didn't think I was ready to embrace El Islam, but he convinced me otherwise and he made me understand and realize my need for El Islam, so I embraced it.

Now, after embracing, I found out that we came into quite a lot of obstacles. I had no place to worship and no place to pray. We had no place where he could congregate with our own brothers who believed in El Islam. We tried to get a place to pray, a place to worship. This particular brother went to Mr. Mancusci
and asked Mr. Mancusci if the followers of El Islam could have a particular place to pray.

He, in turn, told the brother that you already have some place. They at this time had some guys coming from UB and they were giving in— instructing the brothers in Orthodox Muslim.

Q And you weren't an Orthodox Muslim?
A Right.

Q You distinguish an Orthodox Muslim--
A I would like to say I am a Sunai (Phonetic) Moslem, who follows the teaching of the Prophet Ibin (Phonetic) Mohammed of Old.

Now, you have individuals or prisoners who say that they are Orthodox Muslims, right. You have individuals who say that they are Sunai Muslims. You have various thoughts but it all comes under one banner of El Islam.

Q The followers of Mohammed, the Muslims, the general population of Muslims follow Elijah Mohammed?
A Yes. There are a very great many at Attica.

Q Do they have a place of worship?
A They have meetings that I believe are held in the Mess Hall, right. But at one time they were denied this also. They were discriminated against greatly and they had to put in quite a few writs in order to have
what they have now.

Q The Orthodox Muslims at this point, you say, do not have a place to worship?
A Right. Like I said. The fellows that are coming in from UB, right, how should I say, are not ordained or Imans. Imans mean a spiritual guide or teacher.

Q They are coming from what school?
A They are students.
Q From what school?
A The University of Buffalo. They come in and they teach El Islam to the best of their ability, right. But now what we want, what the brothers in Attica wanted was someone who--from our group, right.

Q A black representative?
A A black representative.
Q These are white students?
A Yemen, Syria, from Arabia or from--
Q How often do they come into the institution?
A Once a week.
Q How long has this practice been permitted?
A This has been permitted maybe six or seven months now.
Q Are there any other preliminary doctrines to your faith which are not permitted to practice?
A Such as eating swine. This is forbidden, 171
pork, pig, the hog. This is forbidden to any devout
Muslim. I just got finished scanning this sheet here,
which is--

Q At this time, I would like to show the
Commission a menu which we received from the institution
and you have a copy of it in front of you, Mr. Matthews.
A Right.
Q I would like you to look at the top line. I
believe it is August 15.
A Right.
Q 1971?
A Right.
Q If we look at Sunday breakfast menu of
August 15, we will see you have Corn Flakes, milk,
fresh fruit and bread. Because of your faith, I under-
stand you are not permitted to eat certain meals.
Would you be able to eat that meal?
A Yes.
Q Now, we will look at the second meal of the
day which I believe is the heaviest meal, am I correct?
A Correct.
Q That is the heaviest meal of the day at Attica?
A Yes, it is.
Q Would you read down that menu, please?
Grilled ham steak with raisin sauce. Mashed potatoes, brown gravy, mustard. Parkerhouse rolls, Oleo, Lima beans, strawberry ice cream, bread and coffee.

Q At that meal, what would you eat from that meal?
A Strawberry ice cream. Possibly the Lima beans depending on what they were cooked in.

Q If they were cooked in pork, you could not eat it?
A No.

Q Do you generally eat lima beans?
A No, because I myself don't have a great taste for lima beans. Mashed potatoes with no trimmings. Just simply eat the mashed potatoes with some--with the oleo. I put the oleo on the mashed potatoes.

Q What about the grilled ham steak?
A That's definitely out.

Q You also would eat in that meal the mashed potatoes, possibly gravy--no gravy?
A No gravy at all because the gravy more or less came from the ham steak.

Q You would have the rolls?
A Right. I would.

Q And you would have the strawberry ice cream
and the bread?

A  Right. And I would drink the coffee.

Q  So then you would return to work in the
metal shop?

A  Right.

Q  And you would come back in the evening for
your third meal?

A  Right.

Q  If the camera would move over to the third
meal, we will ask Mr. Matthews what he would select
from that dinner?

A  That all depends if I was hungry but even in
that there is not too much to choose from. I would
drink the tea, take the pineapple jam back to my cell
and they could keep the French onion soup.

Q  The largest meal of the day at Attica is the
noon meal?

A  Right.

Q  And if you will look at--you have looked at
the menu. You have determined you would only eat
very little from that large meal.

A  That's right.

Q  How do you supplement your diet or do you
supplement it?

A  Yell, first of all, you learn how to fast.
You learn how to condition your body mentally and physically as in relation to food.

Now, you know that the meats in the institution, the great majority of them is pork. They tell you that they're going to have hamburger steaks that are strictly beef, you understand. But now, if you bit into it you find out that it is not only beef, it is bread and pork. The majority of it being bread. The next being pork. And very little beef. So now what you have to do is if it is not a chicken or if it is not a fishstick, you leave it alone.

Q. So on the average day at Attica, would you go to all three meals?

A. Right. Well, it is compulsory that you go to the morning meal and the noon meal. The evening meal is left up to your discretion. You can go or lay in your crib. On the weekends you can miss the morning meal and you can miss the evening meal but you cannot miss the noon meal. You have to go to the noon meal.

Q. Do you believe when you see the food prepared or food has been prepared for you and if it is listed that something is non-beef, that it is--or non-pork--that it is non-pork?

A. I have had prisoners, guys that work in the
mess hall say you can eat that, brother, that's good. Or this is all right, brother.

The majority of the guys, I should say some of the guys, right, if there happens to be a fellow believer of Mohammed who works in the mess hall. These guys, they really get down what's happening with their food business, right. So now they're going to make their brothers aware of what's happening with the menu.

So 9 times out of 10 if they tell you that you can eat it, it's permissible, but now, myself, understand, no one is going to help me to enter the gates of paradise. I have to do this myself. I have to use my own discretion. When I come across and I see something that I don't think is permissible, I don't fool with it. And 9 times out of 10 it's supposed to be beef hamburgers or beef hotdogs, they tell me brother, that's beef. I say that's cool, but I am not going to trust it anyway. I will simply have me some coffee or I will have me some vegetables and I will be through with it.

Q Do you receive any food packages from home?
A Right.

Q How often are you permitted to receive one?
A Once a month.

Q Are there any limits on the size of the pack-
There is a limitation on the packages. You get one package a month and on a holiday. The package cannot weigh but, I believe it is 25 pounds, I'm not at all sure. But it is so many pounds. Anything over, they send it back or they put it in the garbage or they eat it themselves.

Do you use the package or the foodstuffs in the package to supplement your diet since you don't eat much in the mess hall?

Definitely. Definitely. This is--a package coming from the street, coming in from home with loving care, the guys in the institution treasure this. This is a treasure.

You have just discussed the particular problems you are faced with that Muslims have. These things presently exist? Is the diet that you looked at dated August 15, 1971 substantially--

This is what's happening now. This is what's happening now.

You apparently haven't given up your intention to further your education?

No, I haven't given up even though I know that--I felt as though the correctional department or my superiors have shot me a curve. I'm not going to
lose faith. I'm going to see on my own to the best ability that I have to better myself.

Q At Attica that means--does it mean using the library?
A The library?
Q The library at Attica.
A Yes, you can use the library.
Q Are you satisfied with the listings of books in the library?
A Not really. The majority of the literature that I have I have sent away for. I sent on my own.
Q What kind of books did you recently send for?
A Well, the only books that I am interested in right now is books pertaining to El Islam, my religion. As far as a formal education, I just forgot that. As far as reading, writing and arithmetic to help me out in the street, I just cut that loose when they shoot that book up on me. I forgot about that.
Q As a result of the offer of the self-study course and then your subsequent involvement with the Muslim experience, you have abandoned the institutional approach to education?
A Right.
Q Have you had occasion to use the medical
facilities at Attica?

A Yes. Right.

Q Would you tell us about some of your experiences up there?

A I was trying to explain a case, my particular case, to a one Dr. Williams. When I was in the service, when I was in the service I got what is known as a permanent strain. Afterwards when I got out of the service I went to a urologist so he told me there was no operation that they could perform. It wasn't a hernia. The best that he could do was to give me some pain pills to kill the pain and give me a special apparatus to wear.

Q This was a doctor on the street?

A This is a doctor, a urologist, a specialist, he gave me a special apparatus to wear. To hold myself intact. At times I may be sitting down and it comes on me. Severe pain. It's hard for me to walk. Very uncomfortable. I can't work. I am not supposed to work but I do work. So now, this particular day I went over to see Mr. Williams, Doc Williams in order to find out if I could possibly get a jock strap to wear.

So now I was trying to explain to him my conditions and how it came about. I also tried to
explain to him that this happened to me prior to coming to Attica. It didn't happen to me in Attica. It happened to me when I was in the service. I ran out to him what the specialist, the urologist told me. I then told him about me being in Japan and lifting heavy objects and what not.

So after the end of the conversation he was doing something like this, so he said, I tell you what you do. He said why don't you write to Japan for help.

So I then turned around and gave him a piece of my mind which he quickly told the police to lock me up.

Q: Were you locked up?
A: Oh, yes, definitely. Definitely.

Q: Are you now doing anything about your condition?
A: In reference to that--

Q: In reference to Attica medical facilities?
A: I had written up a writ and I was going to present this to the proper authorities but during the riot it was lost so at this particular stage I haven't anything in reference to this effect.

Another instance I would like to--

Q: On that first instance when you went to the doctor at Attica, you asked for medication or some aid
for your condition?

A  Right.

Q  You were told to call Japan.

A  I was told to write to Japan for help.

Q  Or write to Japan. You then mouthed off?

A  Most definitely.

Q  Then they locked you up?

A  Yes, sir.

Q  Were you locked up because you responded to the doctor?

A  Yes.

Q  And did you then go before the disciplinary committee?

A  Right. I went before the disciplinary committee. They told me I was wrong and the doctor was right. So I think I got maybe, I believe this particular time seven days, five days. I can't remember.

Q  And nothing was done about your condition?

A  About my what?

Q  Your condition at that time?

A  Oh, no, that was it.

Q  You had occasion to use the medical facilities, which you find to be inadequate and the library which you have almost abandoned?

A  Right.
Q  The diet doesn't meet your needs either?
A  No.
Q  How do you manage to psychologically survive?
A  Well, through my present program which is studying El Islam.

This is how I manage to survive. I manage to get down to the core and to the nature of my particular case. I manage to understand and read out and rationalize what brought me to Attica. After doing this I started working on this. And at present this is what I'm doing. I'm trying to reorientate myself, I'm trying to do a 360 degree turn around.

Q  You said in the beginning when you came to Attica or you prepared yourself to come to Attica, you anticipated tremendous hostility, you anticipated just the kind of harm visited upon you which you heard that took place in these institutions. You came to Attica and you found out that a lot of these things are true.
A  Right.
Q  Prior to coming to Attica, you had some experience with the Black Panther Party?
A  Right.
Q  You had some experience with some other
political experience?

A Right.

Q Now at Attica you are involved with Muslims. Have you found that the Muslims or the Black Panthers or the Young Lords or SDS group if they exist, do you find any of these groups receive different kinds of treatment from officers at Attica?

A Most definitely. The average officer believes that these various organizations and groups are a threat to them. Physically, mentally, maybe morally, I don't know.

But they definitely feel as though the brothers are a threat when in actuality what the brothers are trying to do, they are trying to find themselves. They are trying to find an adequate program in order to give them a meaningful understanding as to why they exist.

Now, the institution has no type of program. So a man has to find his own program and these are what the brothers are trying to do. They are trying to find their own program. They are trying to find it themselves on their own because nobody is giving them any help from the correctional department.

Q You said, you just said that the officers find the brothers to be a threat to them.
A Right

Q You said that the officers find the brothers to be a threat. You said further that the brothers are in fact really getting themselves together.

A Right. The brothers don't care nothing about the officers. They are not there to intimidate officers. They are not there to try to make it hard for the guards. They are there trying to better themselves. They could care less about intimidation of the officers. You see what I mean?

Q I do.

You mentioned that these groups receive a different kind of treatment. I mentioned in that group a group like SDS. Basically that's a white organization. We have learned through interviews that many inmates, many other white inmates who may be sympathetic to black groups, how are they treated by officers?

A Well, the white inmate who are sympathetic to the blacks are treated by the officers on a very low scale.

Q What do you mean by that?

A When I say low scale, that they take a dim view of a white prisoner being cordial to a black prisoner. Let's face it, it's that inferiority and superiority. White over black. Racism versus black brothers,
Puerto Ricans. Simple as that. And when they see a white prisoner fraternizing or getting chummy with a black inmate, they don't dig it. They don't like it. They try to crush it.

Q What measures are used to crush that?

A They might bring the white guy off to a side and shoot a question upon his belt as to why you hang out with the niggers. How come every time I see you walk in the yard with Joe Blow. Why don't you stay with your own kind. Don't they stink. Things like this.

Q This is what the officers say to the white inmates?

A Right.

Q Do officers say anything different or anything similar to black inmates who hang out with white inmates?

A Very seldom. You see, you got a thing where now the young brothers, brothers as a whole and prisoners throughout New York State, they are a different breed than ten years ago. They are a little different than the guys was back in the Al Capone days. The brothers now are becoming aware of themselves. They are waking up. They are understanding what's going on in relationship to black and white. They are beginning to find out what makes the world go round. And they are
not taking any crap from anybody. And they are standing under and they are letting the establishment guards and everybody else realize this. What they are--the message they are trying to get across is, if you treat me like a man, I will respect you as a man.

But if you treat me other than that, this is the only thing that you will receive in return.

Q  You feel that your manhood is being threatened at Attica?

A  Most definitely. Most definitely. Manhood at Attica is intimidated 24 hours a day, 265 days a year.

Q  You have been there well over 365 days.

A  A year this month.

Q  I am sorry, almost 365 days?

A  Right.

Q  You were sentenced to five to ten years.

A  Right.

Q  Do you feel that you could tolerate that kind of intimidation for five to ten years?

A  Well, you don't feel as though you can tolerate it. You know that it is wrong but you know that you only have a certain amount of say so. You can only do but so much so what you have to learn how to do is roll with the punches.
Q  Do you think that over a period of time that this attitude will change?

Do you think that perhaps next year that there will be a different view?

A  You see, what has to happen is that a whole complete system of awareness between Correction Department and inmates, this has to be all turned around and reorientated because at the present, the way they have it at the present, five years from now, ten years from now, 20, 30 years from now, it is not going to be any different.

It is going to be the same. It is not going to be any different.

Q  We talked a lot about political groups. Special reactions of officers to white inmates and black inmates. You are a fairly young man. And you must have a need for recreation. Is there anything at the institution that you participate in?

A  As far as recreation goes, you have handball. Basketball at present. That's all. Before the riot you had weights in the yard, you can run in the yard. Chess, checkers, card playing. But all of this was done in the yard.

Now, the yard during the week days is approximately 45 minutes from Monday to Friday. Saturday and
Sunday you get two changes to go to the yard. Once in the morning, once in the afternoon. You might spend 45 minutes in the morning in the yard on a Saturday or Sunday and in the afternoon, evening, you might spend an hour to an hour and a half in the yard.

On Saturdays and Sundays. During the week it's 45 minutes. Within the period of a day you have to get all your recreation in in 45 minutes. The majority of the time you have an hour. You take your 45 minutes but you get about 30.

If the brother you want to see, he is on another company, you understand, you talk to him for 15 minutes. If you want to get your recreation off, you get your recreation off with the other 15 minutes.

Then it is time to come back in and go to your home.

Q You talked a lot about grievances you have with regard to your experience at Attica. Do you have a--if you have a grievance, to whom do you communicate it, how do you challenge it?

A Well, you have a grievance. You drop a tab to the PK. You are supposed to go in the chain of command. From the Sergeant to the Lieutenant, from the lieutenant to the captain, from the captain to the colonel. From the colonel to the assistant deputy warden.
From the assistant deputy warden to the big man, the chief head of state; that's how you are supposed to go.

Nine times out of ten when you want to see the big man, you wind up seeing the lieutenant, PK. Because they are, they used to be the principal runners of the institution. And this is who you talk to, right. If you had a grievance, they will tell you something like, I will see what I can do about it. You might get something done, you might not. Nine times out of ten what he does is move you.

Q What do you mean move you?

A Well, whatever your grievance was, maybe you didn't like the way the particular officer treated you. You got a grievance against a particular officer. And you bring it up. During the outcome of it you are moved maybe to another block. They sent me, get rid of you.

Q They move you to another block?

A They move you to another block.

Q Based upon what you said about the officers, the general administration of Attica, the particulars, the diet, the library, the recreation, the relationship of black inmates, white inmates fostered by you, say the administration or officers, it seems to me that the
black inmates have grievances. What happens if a black inmate sends a grievance in?

A When a black inmate has a grievance, if it is one which constitutes legal action, court action, right, well, his best bet is to take it to the courts. The Court of Appeals. Because inside the correctional facility, there is no alleviation or there is no--no redress.

Q No redress?

A There is no justification at all so what you have to do is write you a writ. You have to write a writ to the Court of Appeals. This is where you get any action, if any. This is where you will get it at. Because you are not going to get none coming from the correctional institution. You are not going to get any there. Forget about that. That's out.

Q Do you write letters, Brother Matthews?

A Right.

Q How often do you manage to write letters?

A Seeing that I'm not married, no fiance, no girlfriend, I write to the only loveable person I know in the world, and that's my mother.

Q Do you receive any literature?

A Yes, I do.

Q From anyone other than your mother?
Well, I might receive a letter or two from a particular organization. A lawyer's organization that I have written to or pertaining to a legal matter or maybe to a book store but other than personal correspondence, nobody but my mom.

Q You have talked about your--you were given five to ten years at Attica.

A Yes.

Q When you arrived at Attica and after spending almost a year in that population, surely you talked to other inmates who were convicted of a similar crime?

A Right.

Q Who may be doing less time than you are?

A Right.

Q How do you react to this?

A Well, quite naturally, this makes me wonder about the juridical system in the State of New York, right. I think when I got sentenced for my five to ten, third degree burglary, it was my first felony offense. I had been busted previously before but all charges, I thought, were misdemeanors. So this, as far as I am aware of the fact, this is just--this is my first felony bust.

So now when I receive the max, and had I went to court and had a jury trial, I couldn't have