

Death and politics at attica



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Name: Tutor: Course: Date: Death and Politics at Attica The documentary Death and Politics of Attica is a 60-minute long documentary that sheds light on the criminal injustice that took place during the 1971 Attica prison riot. In September 1971, the inmates in Attica penitentiary revolted against the prison system suggesting that the relevant authorities had kept them under substandard conditions and that their basic human rights had been neglected. The subsequent events in the next four days led to a bloody conclusion with the death of ten hostages and thirty-nine prisoners. To date, there are still questions being raised about what took place.

The classical theory can be employed in the analysis of this documentary. The Classical School of thought suggests a humanistic approach on how criminal justice systems should be constructed (Franklin 22). The Classical train of thought suggests that the laws chief purpose is to deter criminal behavior. It proposes that the government is created by citizens to protect their natural rights, which include life and liberty. This government also exists as a contract that governs the relationship between those governing and those who are governed. Therefore, if a citizen is to be subjected to punishment it is to serve the sole purpose is to prevent future crimes while at the same time preserving the social contract. In this documentary, we are shown vivid scenes that portray the harsh conditions subjected to the inmates at Attica prison.

One such scene reveals the fact that the inmates were only given one roll of toilet paper to use in a period of one month. It also shows the records that prove that, in reality, the prison was operating at over forty percent above its stated capacity. This scene proved that indeed the government had crossed

the line as far as the social contract was concerned. This infringement of the social contract is hugely credited in the documentary for igniting the revolt. The Classical theory is in agreement with documentary because it specifies that citizens are only willing to give up part of their natural rights, as opposed to basic rights (Franklin 21).

Another, theme that can be analyzed using the classical theory is the political aspect of the documentary. The classical theory suggests that, in a world of free will, people have a tendency of making decisions inclined towards self-interest and pleasure. This fact is captured in the documentary when the David Marshall, the creator of the film says, “ There were decisions being made for other people’s personal goals, and they were willing to sacrifice pawns in the chess game to their political end (Franklin 18).” In saying this, he was referring to Rockefeller and his role in the bloody conclusion of the four-day standoff between the inmates, the government and the law enforcement. Another theory that can be used in the analysis of this documentary is the subcultures theory.

This theory suggests that any society is always composed of different social classes with conflicting values (Franklin 91). In this documentary, a scene shows that prior to the riot, there was racial tension between the white prison officials and the predominantly black and Puerto Rican prison population. It further explains that this racial tension had a massive impact on the riots that exploded at Attica.

The subcultures theory is in alignment with this claim because it suggests that the difference in values between dominant culture, which in this case is

the all-white prison officials, and the lower class culture, which in this case is the predominantly black and Puerto Rican prison population, often brings the lower culture into conflict with the dominant culture. Work Cited Franklin P and Marilyn D. McShane. Criminology Theory. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson publishing co, 2009. Print.