

California court supports cover-up of prison brutality

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26 September 1998

In the latest government action covering up for sadistic brutality at California's maximum security Corcoran State Prison, Superior Court Judge Cecily Bond reversed discipline levied against a former associate warden and five other high-ranking officers who supervised the systematic beating of 36 black inmates as they disembarked from a bus in 1995. The grounds for the decision was a hair-splitting technicality regarding the sufficiency of the notices of misconduct. The judge said the exact rules that were violated had to be listed. The guards are due to be reinstated with back pay.

The incident was described in bone-chilling detail by a civilian worker in the prison commissary. Officers, wearing black gloves and tape over their name tags, performed half an hour of football-like warm-ups and cheers while awaiting the bus. While the prison administration watched, officers grabbed the shackled inmates off the bus one by one and ran them through a gauntlet of fists, batons and combat boots. Some suffered broken bones, and two dozen were forced to their knees and had their hair shorn.

The sergeant who directed the attack, Robert Dean, a member of a group of guards known as the Sharks for their reputation for attacking without warning, was promoted to lieutenant after the beating. When he appeared at a legislative hearing last July he refused to answer questions about the beating, citing his Fifth Amendment right against self incrimination.

State investigators claimed they were unable to get information about the beating because none of the guards would talk to them about it, and their supervisors said they could not follow the usual practice of disciplining recalcitrant guards for insubordination.

The beating incident was far from isolated. Over the

past decade there has been a reign of terror in Corcoran, a newer prison, notorious because it houses Charles Manson and Sirhan Sirhan.

Corcoran guards have deliberately placed hostile groups of inmates together in the prison yard and used the ensuing fracas to open fire. From 1989 to 1995, seven inmates were shot dead and 43 more were seriously wounded by guards during fights in the yard. In all but a few cases the inmates did not carry weapons or cause any injuries while brawling.

The most revolting incident involved Eddie Dillard, a small, frail inmate who got in trouble for kicking a female guard. A sergeant locked Dillard in the cell of Wayne Robertson, a 6-foot-3, 230-pound prison enforcer nicknamed the 'Booty Bandit.' Dillard was repeatedly raped, according to investigative reports and interviews.

The former corrections director, James H. Gomez, blamed the problems on California's exploding prison population, which includes a growing number of people sentenced to terms of 25 years to life for trivial theft offenses under the barbaric 'Three Strikes' law. 'The growth in the Department of Corrections was unmanageable,' Gomez said.



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