

# Weekender

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## PRISON RIOT

By PHIL WELLS

### Could it happen again?

The 1970s were memorable years for the nation's prisons. The death penalty was reinstated in two states and James Earl Ray, the accused murderer of Martin Luther King, led the list of many escapees.

But riots within the huge, protective walls of America's prisons in the '70s probably stand out the most in American minds.

Prisoners killed guards, guards killed prisoners and prisoners killed prisoners, leaving the nation shocked and frightened by such violence and outbreaks of inhumanity. And as the 1980s approached, America was asking, "Will it happen again?"

Just two months into 1980, the nation was left in shock again. In what was called by many people the worst prison riot since the one at Attica prison in New York in 1971, inmates at the New Mexico State Penitentiary acted like savage animals and stunned not only those outside the prison, but many of those inside.

At New Mexico in February, 33 inmates were killed and the prison was almost destroyed.

The trouble started when a guard attempted to confiscate some raisinjack, a homemade liquor, from two inmates. When he entered their cell, the inmates jumped him, grabbed his keys and rushed to a control room where they opened every electrically controlled gate in the prison. The next 36 hours were chaos.

Inmates quickly overpowered the 22 guards and cut all telephone lines into the prison. Then they set the prison on fire and went after the prison informants in protective isolation in cellblock 4. The inmates burned informants and other inmates with torches, stabbed them, raped them, hung them and cut one man's head off with a shovel. The inmates burned four men so badly that their race could not be determined.

After 1½ days, 700 inmates had surrendered and 84 law enforcement officers, armed with shotguns, pistols and rifles, peacefully overtook the other inmates inside. Damage to the prison totaled \$40 million-\$50 million and 33 persons were killed.

One of the inmates' major complaints was severe overcrowding in the prison. The population at the New Mexico prison was 42 percent above the prison's normal capacity, what it was designed to hold; 1,136 inmates were living in space designed for 800.

Another prison riot "is always a possibility anywhere in the nation," said Sam Garrison, warden of North Carolina's Central Prison in Raleigh.



And just as overpopulation was a major problem in New Mexico and is throughout the nation, it is a sore spot in North Carolina also.

"Overcrowding is a problem in the state (North Carolina). But it's like inflation; you learn to live with it," said W.L. Kautzky, North Carolina's assistant director of prisons.

North Carolina's 80 prison units house approximately 14,800 inmates, 36 percent more than the state's normal capacity of

See PRISONS on page 4

### Inside

Justice for none?  
... See page 3

Staying healthy and wealthy  
... See page 3

The house that Billy built  
... See page 6

And the winner is (?)  
... See page 7