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OFF THE SCREEN

A FILM POLEMIC FROM AN EX-DEB

Cinda Firestone, 25, is a new filmmaker with unlikely credits: she is a scion of the tire-and-rubber fortune, an alumna of Jacqueline Kennedy's finishing school (Miss Porter's), of Sarah Lawrence College, and of the Detroit city jail. Although her privileged background is not much different from Patricia Hearst's, young Cinda Firestone has known for years precisely

where her political sympathies lay. She is a pragmatic radical, with some sense of humor and perspective about it—and now, a sense of genuine accomplishment. Cinda has produced *Attica*, a polemical but acclaimed documentary of the New York prison uprising which, when state troopers moved in, took the lives of 32 inmates and 11 of their guard hostages.

New York Times reviewer Vincent Canby described the 80-minute compendium of footage from the riot and subsequent inquest as "an exceptionally moving, outraged recollection of that terrible event." It has already been honored at two foreign film festivals and is a hot new property on the campus movie circuit.

It was during her own college career that Cinda careened from the Philadelphia debutante cotillion to the SDS. After graduation she worked for the radical Liberation News Service (a hassle during coverage of a United Auto Workers strike got her jailed in Detroit for five days), and then she eased her way into the medium most persuasive to her contemporaries—film. While interviewing Emile de Antonio, who had produced the documentary *Point of Order* on the Army-McCarthy hearings, she overheard him telling a phone caller he needed an assistant. She volunteered for the job herself.

Her apprenticeship had barely begun when the events of Attica impelled her into her own production. "I was really learning how to make a movie," she says. The project was facilitated by a friend from a TV network who slipped her in to use the company's film editing equipment after hours. Her mother, whom Cinda describes in the argot of her age as "slightly to the right of Louis XV," financed the \$40,000 film solely to keep her daughter out of debt.

"I refuse to feel guilty about my class background," says Cinda, though she will donate the film's first-year revenues to the Attica Defense Fund. "But I get really bugged by white middle-class intellectuals who think they can



'Attica' documents the rebel inmates' takeover of the prison yard, the skin searches after the police attack and, for some—death.



Cinda's politics did not preclude her making the Philadelphia deb circuit in 1967.



In 1970 Cinda blustered out of a Detroit court, above, after paying a \$50 fine for trespass while covering a strike. At right, she sits below a poster for her film.

dictate the way the revolution is going to go." Because Cinda doesn't think "we're ready for armed struggle yet," she's content to make her statement as a filmmaker. Her second documentary will be on the plight of the aged.

A somewhat ascetic "loner" since she left the collective she shared with fellow members of the Liberation News Service, Cinda now lives with three cats and a mutt on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Her apartment is spacious but inelegant and has been robbed several times. She does not smoke and drinks wine only rarely. Cinda's diversions are mainly browses through art museums, walks in Central Park, occasional evenings of dancing at discotheques, and a fascination with tarot cards diminished of late by their so far fallacious prediction that this would be a bad year for her.

ALFRED EISENSTADT

