

LUCASVILLE: A DOCUDRAMA. ACT I, SCENE 1

This play can be presented in any large indoor space, such as a union hall or church basement. Hopefully there will be a stage at one end of the room. If there is no stage, part of the room should be marked off. In Act I, the stage represents indoor areas of the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility (SOCF), and the remainder of the space is the recreation yard, a large outdoor area. The audience should gradually come to feel that they are sitting in the yard, and therefore, inside the prison walls.

The "set" will have to depend on the imagination of each group showing the play. If spotlights are available, the room can be darkened and the spotlight can shift from one scene of activity to the next. If -- as we assume will be more typical -- no theater lighting is at hand, the house lights can be left on. The only props necessary in Scene 1 are a table and eight chairs. The table should be rectangular, with five chairs behind it (facing the audience), and three chairs in front.

A figure enters slowly from stage Left. He is a stocky white male in his early forties with dark hair. He is wearing a white jump suit, indicating that he is being held in segregation. He has ankle chains and walks in a shuffle. His hands are cuffed to a chain around his waist.

JOHN PEROTTI: Hello. My name is John Perotti. I have been in prison since the early 1980s. Presently I am in administrative segregation at Lucasville. I am a "jailhouse lawyer."

The Lucasville rebellion was the longest prison rebellion in United States history. Nine prisoners and one guard were killed. After the surrender, five prisoners were sentenced to death.

The uprising began at about 3 PM on April 11, 1993. It was Easter Sunday. Four hundred prisoners occupied L block. At the time I was in the prison library which is next to L block. As soon as the alarm sounded, the authorities closed the "crash gate" between L block and the library. There was no way I could get through. I have no first-hand knowledge of what happened in

L block during the eleven days from April 11 to April 21.

What I can tell you about is the long train of abuses that led up to the rebellion.¹

Lucasville was opened in 1972 to replace the Ohio State Penitentiary in Columbus, where there were riots in 1968. "Luke" was built to house 1,600 men, one to a cell. It soon became overcrowded and at one point the population was close to 2,300. Luke had the reputation of being one of the most violent prisons in the country. Most of the guard on prisoners brutality took place in J block, which housed the hole and death row prisoners.

(As Perotti continues to speak, figures behind him on the stage begin silently to perform the actions he describes: prisoners cutting off their pinky fingers; murders by guards; prisoners being chained to cell fixtures, subjected to chemical mace and tear gas, forced to sleep on cell floors, and brutally beaten. All prisoners are dressed in white jump suits, like

¹The following is based on John Perotti, "Lucasville: A Brief History," Prison Legal News (Dec. 1993), pp. 7-9. None of the following information was allowed into evidence at the trials of any of the five men sentenced to death after the rebellion. Counsel for Abdullah Siddique Hasan f.k.a. Carlos Sanders, one of the defendants, attempted to question Warden Tate about living conditions at Lucasville and the causes of the riot. He was cut short by Judge Fred Cartolano, who said: "This riot is only incidental. You are not going to drag in philosophical or sociological theory. There's no justification for murder during a riot." In the sentencing phase of his trial, the judge barred a prison expert from presenting evidence that conditions at Lucasville were "chaotic" before the uprising. After the jury was excused, the expert made an "offer of proof" that white and black prisoners were forced to share cells, causing racial tension; the administration of the prison was poor; and there was serious friction between employees. Lucasville was "ripe for a riot," Joseph Rowan, a correctional consultant from Minnesota, told Judge Cartolano, who responded: "Riots are not created by the prison. Riots are created by the inmates." Columbus Dispatch, Jan. 25, 1996 and Mar. 4, 1996.

Perotti. Guards should wear the Ninja Turtle gear of cell extraction teams: helmets with plastic shields, belts sagging with handcuffs, nightsticks, mace cannisters, and the like. The whole should be presented as a pantomime of terror and death.)

Thirteen prisoners, called the "Lucasville Thirteen," renounced their United States citizenship and demanded to be released to the Soviet Union. Many of these prisoners cut off their pinky fingers and mailed them to the United Nations and Department of Justice to prove that they were serious.

In 1983 twelve guards beat to death Jimmy Haynes, a mentally disturbed prisoner. While nurses stood watching, one guard jumped on Haynes' neck while another guard held a nightstick behind it.

All personal property was ordered confiscated from prisoners in Administrative Control. Prisoners resisted, so goon squads used tear gas and force to take their property. I was housed in J1 Super Max. There was standing water in this area for four months after guards used high pressure fire hoses on prisoners.

Tension was high and hostages were taken and held in the J1 Super Max until prisoners' grievances were aired over the radio. Then, and only then, did the federal courts stop their previous practice of summarily dismissing all prisoners' civil rights suits.

We organized a branch of the Industrial Workers of the World to demand minimum wage for prison labor. The courts rejected this demand. But Dan Rather did a special on Sixty Minutes about our effort.

Meanwhile guard on prisoner brutality increased. Two black

prisoners, Lincoln Carter and John Ingram, were alleged to have touched white nurses. They were beaten by guards and found dead in their cells in the hole the following day. No criminal charges were pressed against the guards.

I helped to prepare a 38 page petition to Amnesty International. The petition described instances in which prisoners were chained to cell fixtures, subjected to chemical mace and tear gas, forced to sleep on cell floors, and brutally beaten, all in violation of United Nations Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Prisoners. We were charged with "unauthorized group activity." The petition was confiscated as contraband.

In 1990 then-Governor Celeste ordered the State Highway Patrol to investigate Lucasville. As a result, a new warden was appointed named Arthur Tate.

Prisoners agree that King Arthur made conditions even more oppressive. There were more stabbings, beatings, and killings than before. Prisoners were required to march to chow, recreation, chapel, work, school, and commissary. Inmates that had been in a particular block for years were forced to move to other blocks. Tate's administration cut back the programs -- the college program, music and literary programs -- that prisoners used to do their time.

Then came the incident that every one recognizes as the "trigger."² Tate ordered all prisoners to submit to a form of

²See, for example, Correctional Institution Inspection Committee, Interim Report on the April 11, 1993 Riot at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, p. 2 (disturbance was

TB test that involved the injection of alcohol under the skin of a prisoner's forearm. Many members of the large Muslim population responded that the test would violate their religious beliefs. There was a face-to-face meeting on Monday, April 5.

(Perotti walks off stage L. As he does so, five prison administrators enter from stage R. They are dressed in dark pants and ties, and white, short-sleeved shirts with an emblem on the left sleeve and name tags on their chests. The administrators sit down, facing the audience. Three black prisoners enter from stage L. They seat themselves with their backs to the audience. They are dressed in the uniform of "general population": light blue, short-sleeved shirts and dark blue pants.)

WARDEN TATE:³ I am Warden Arthur Tate, Jr. This (pointing to each in turn) is Deputy Warden of Programs Roger E. Roddy; Deputy Warden Bill G. Seth; Captain Earl P. Kelly; and Chaplain Warren Lewis. Weren't passes sent out for five of you?

ABDULLAH SIDDIQUE HASAN (hereafter HASAN): Only three of us are able to honor our passes. Cornelius Barnes and Isaac Hughes are in segregation. I am Abdullah Siddique Hasan, whom you call Carlos Sanders. This (pointing to each) is Taymullah Abdul-Hakim, also known as Leroy Elmore; and Namir Abdul-Mateen, or James Were.

TATE: My staff has informed me that 159 inmates have

"triggered" by forced testing planned in response to inmates who refused to take TB skin test); Southern Ohio Correctional Facility: Disturbance Cause Committee Findings, p. 4 ("triggering mechanism" was decision to lock down SOCF to force testing).

³The following dramatization of the April 5 meeting is based on Taymullah Abdul Hakim (Leroy Elmore), "Lucasville -- An Inside View," Prison News Service (Jan.-Feb. 1994), p. 5, and on Abdullah Siddique Hasan, "Synopsis," contained in a letter to Staughton Lynd, Oct. 5, 1998.

refused to take the T.B. test. The largest group out of this 159 are Muslims. That is why I singled you out to send passes to.

The TB test is a health issue. It is mandatory that all prisoners be tested. There will be no exception or deviation from this rule.

I understand that the Muslims' objections to taking the test are religious, and based on a letter that you received from your leader in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Your concerns have been put forth to Central Office and they, in turn, have contacted various Muslims from the Ohio area. All the religious leaders stated that there was nothing religiously wrong with Muslim inmates taking the TB test.

Therefore, we will be testing all inmates. I expect the Muslims to cooperate. If I allow the Muslims to deviate from taking the test, then the Aryan Brotherhood and other groups will want to deviate from institutional policies. I cannot tolerate that in my prison.

Sanders, do you have anything to say?

HASAN: I have nothing to say. You have already said what is going to happen and I see no reason to waste my breath.

TATE: This is a meeting. I want to hear what you have to say.

HASAN: This is not a meeting where what we say makes a difference. It is a meeting where you are being a dictator, and have adopted a hardline approach. You are not being sensitive and understanding toward our leadership position on the test.

TATE: Elmore, what do you have to say?

TAYMULLAH: The test is unlawful for us to take. We have no intention of taking it, for we would be guilty of a sin. However, if someone forces us to take the test, we will be absolved of the sin.

CHAPLAIN LEWIS (smilingly): How much force would have to be applied in order for you to be absolved of the sin?

TAYMULLAH: This is not a joking matter. The bottom line is we are not going to take the test.

TATE: Elmore, what will you do if one of my officers grabs you and tries to give you the test?

TAYMULLAH: I can't say what I will do. We will have to worry about that when we cross that road. If I were to tell you, "If one of your officers puts his hands on me I will physically strike him," I know for a fact that you would put me in the hole before I could even leave this so-called meeting.⁴ Again, all I can tell you is that it's not permissible for us to take this test.

NAMIR: I do not trust the prison officials to test us. You have a reputation for using us as guinea pigs.

TATE: Mr. Roddy, when will you finish testing the inmates that are HIV positive?

RODDY: By Friday, April 9.

⁴Warden Tate testified at Hasan's trial that Hasan said: "You do what you have to do and I will do what I have to do." Hasan thinks that neither he or Taymullah said that. Perhaps Tate was paraphrasing the abovequoted words from Taymullah: "We will have to worry about that when we cross that road."

TATE: Then we will be ready to start testing you early next week. I hope you will change your minds.

(All rise and begin to exit. Their body language should reflect the fact that, as Hasan puts it, "the vibes were somewhat tense." As Hasan and Warden Tate are about to exit from stage L and stage R, respectively, they turn back toward each other.)

HASAN: We agree to submit to X-ray testing, sputum testing, or any other form of testing that does not violate our religious beliefs.

TATE: "I believe you realize that I have the utmost respect both for you personally and for your religious beliefs.

Your position relative to TB testing is, however, one that is not rational nor will it be accepted by me. Your options have been explained and I expect full compliance to my orders for all SOCF inmates to be tested. There will be no deviations to this order.

I trust you, as well as others who feel as you do, will comply with this policy. You are in no position to dictate to me how you perceive this should occur. I am certainly hoping there will be minimal difficulties associated with this process."⁵

(Both exit.)

This is the end of Scene I. If you have comments or suggestions, please send them to: Docudrama, George Skatzes Supporters, P.O. Box 1591, Marion, OH 44301-1591.

⁵Hasan's message to Warden Tate was actually an internal prison memo, or "kite." It was admitted as an exhibit in Hasan's trial and we are in process of obtaining it. The Warden's memo of April 8, responding to the kite, is attached to Disturbance Cause Committee Findings.