

# A Black Sheriff Looks At His New Job

## A Pro Wants To Cooperate With Suburbs

By Dennis L. Pajot

The painting of Christ as a black man graces the office of the first black sheriff of Wayne County, William C. Lucas.

An attorney's shingle rests in his drawer.

A boychold in New York's teeming Harlem burns in his soul.

A career as a teacher, deputy U.S. district attorney, FBI narcotics and vice buster and first black undersheriff here bolsters his confidence.

A sense of purpose, to bridge the gap between urban blacks and suburban whites, whets his appetite for a first fling at politics.

"I'VE GOT TO RUN for public votes for the first time in my life. I don't even know what a political organization is... I've got to get out there... Suddenly it will be difficult for a black man to win."

Many people have tried to use that as a reason I should accept a job in Detroit and not try to win in the outcounty area. If I was to buy that, to accept defeatism, then I wouldn't be long in any job.

"If I was to back off, to think that I couldn't win based on skin color alone, if I bought it, I wouldn't be the man I'm trying to be -- the fighter."

Tumbling out complex sentences like a professor, this 41-year-old professional policeman was the man taking pains to be understood. Occasionally he'd blurt a blunt sentence, a street word, a punctuating gesture.

For more than a half hour he answered questions in an exclusive Observer Newspapers interview while seated at his desk, poised, forthright, volunteering much, rambling quite often.

Operating a jail designed to house 1,200 persons but usually loaded with 1,500 -- 100 of whom sleep on mattresses on the floor -- has been the number one problem for the sheriff in recent years, Lucas said.

It has taken attentions away from other public service functions. He said he appointed his first undersheriff, Loren Pittman, in hopes of putting "a great deal more emphasis on the outcounty services." Pittman was chief of police in suburban River Rouge for most of the past decade.

"WE'RE GOING to be overhauling, looking very closely at our services. We're going to see how we can improve, what the needs are. We're going to look, really, at what our future association is going to be with that area, said the new Wayne County sheriff.

I'm not interested in taking over anybody. I'm not interested in being the big cheese to anybody," he added. "All we want to do is be in on a cooperative thing."

Just about any service a local community wants, it can have by asking the local county supervisor to get authorization from the county board, his boss, said Lucas. "We think we can give substantial services at a substantial savings."

Among these services are, in addition to jailing at the downtown facility, crime scene searches by trained teams, polygraph operators, handwriting experts and possibly one or more crime labs.

To alleviate problems encountered by out-county police departments now in transporting prisoners from their areas to the downtown jail and back, he has two suggestions.

One is to request county board money for his department to maintain female guards at the road patrol garage holding jail in Wayne. The other is for the state to build a new jail at Elioise. He has already recommended the latter.

We have no problems in rapport with the out-county now, but I want to redouble my efforts. That's where the future of this department lies, in supportive services. If we do our job right, every local department in this county will need us," he said.

SHERIFF LUCAS has already announced that he considers narcotics a top challenge to his department. He's hinted at plan to meet the challenge head on, but wouldn't give specifics.

Having six children of his own, he knows the threat. His background gives him more than a common knowledge of this and other street vice.

After graduating with honors from Fordham University Law School in his native New York, he became a teacher, a city welfare investigator and then a city police patrolman.

He rose quickly to detective rank and served on the vice squad. From there he became an investigator with the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and an assistant U.S. district attorney. Then he joined the FBI.

His reputation with the FBI gained notice of former Wayne County Sheriff Roman S. Gribbs, now mayor of Detroit, who made Lucas the first black undersheriff of Wayne County in June 1968.

Gribbs won election as Detroit mayor in November and within a month Lucas had gained broad endorsements particularly from within the Democratic party organization, to take over the top spot until the November 1970 elections.



SHERIFF WILLIAM LUCAS tries to be a fighter and a pro -- and now he will be a politician.

HOW DOES IT feel to be sheriff of the third largest county in the United States (pop. 2.7 million)?

"It's a great honor, a great challenge," said Lucas. "I'm a person who always thrives on a challenge; the potential is so great. Law enforcement is so overwhelmingly needed."

"Take the narcotics problem, for instance. I've worked undercover on it for five years. I've got special expertise. I'll have a chance to bring this and an understanding of the minority views of the field of law enforcement."

"Many people are not aware that the people who suffer most from crime are minority groups. They're most directly involved. Some 78% of the crime is committed upon minority groups."

"However, over the years a gulf has developed... Minority groups have felt they have not gotten response from law enforcement agencies."

Distrust has been built up.

"A fellow such as myself, who has come from the ranks, who has come from a minority, who has lived all of his life in a minority situation..."

"My life has been law enforcement. I'm completely aware of every strata of law enforcement. I've worked with the men in the field and know them very well."

"I can offer the idea to all citizens that I know the job by experience and that I understand the problems."

"Because I'm representing a minority group at a policy making level, not a token level, not a showcase level... I'm able to influence other law enforcement agencies in this county."

### HOW?

Just by example. I don't really have a plan. Everybody is looking for a guide. If I can set this department up as a professional, fair department -- where the law is enforced fairly, firmly but humanely -- if I can do that, it will be an example for everyone else in this county.

"All the police in the county want to do it that way, because it is to the benefit of every body. But I have the ability to understand many of the nuances. It gives me a better opportunity than many."

"I can go out and they can look at this black face and they know I'm there, that I'm the man."

"I can be a great example for young men who say they've always shied away from law enforcement careers. Well, finally here's a black guy whose made it in law enforcement."

"Whites can see that not all blacks are law violators."

### More To Maxi Than Long Coat

They may have laughed at the maxis last season -- and some manufacturers may have grumped at stock that didn't sell -- but this season is the year of the long coat.

Our advice: Do it. If you're woman enough to wear it. The maxi-coat is a perfect example of a fashion that can overwhelm women who don't have the bearing for it. Height is important, so are posture and accessories.

Never wear regular stockings with a maxi -- textured and opaque look much better; shoes with a chunky look and slightly higher heels go well, as do boots. Slacks and miniskirts go underneath.

"So you see, I can have an influence on both blacks and whites. The fact that my skin is black is the only thing that makes me different."

### WHAT DO YOU attribute your rise to?

"I grew up on the streets of Harlem. I had an idea of what I wanted out of life. I received guidance at a time when I needed it most. I know right from wrong. I admire strength. I admire justice. I'm an attorney. I know what's good in life and I want what's good and what's right."

"I think I have been able to find self-expression and self-improvement -- which have been my goals -- within the framework of society."

Leaning forward now, he said, "I've found all the frustrations -- some of the damndest frustrations and pettiness you've ever seen in human beings. I don't think you'll ever truly encounter stupidity in the form of prejudice and discrimination until you're a person that's trying and happen to belong to a minority."

"As such, you're always running across those people whom you're competing against, and they will use the advantages they've got."

"To counter that, I've had the great opportunity of running into many others who are not carrying that load in their bag, so I was able to look at the obstructionists as foolish, to see that they were fighting a losing battle."

"They were trying to hold back something that couldn't be held back. They couldn't win. There's nothing like fighting a guy whom you know if you keep fighting long enough has got to give, because he's got sand under his feet."

He recalled, "I became a good athlete because I never gave up. I came down to the wire neck and neck with guys and I knew they were going to give, because I damned sure wasn't going to -- They would fall because there's something in every one of us that has to be tested."

"Our whole damned society is in chaos because people who have tendencies are falling right now, when put to a test."

### WHAT ABOUT POLITICALLY? How did you get on the political trail?

"A fluke of luck. There's nothing political about me. Best qualification I could offer is competence. I'm confident the people of Wayne County are going to elect or not elect a sheriff on the basis of his ability to perform."

### Benefits Automatic

Social Security beneficiaries need not apply for the 15% benefit increase just signed into law by President Nixon. "Everyone of the 25 million men, women and children now on the benefit rolls will receive the increase automatically," says Robert M. Ball, commissioner of social security.

"The first regular check in the new amount," Ball said, "will arrive April 2, the usual day for delivery of benefit checks covering payments for the month of March." A separate check in the amount of the benefit increase for the months of January and February will reach beneficiaries later in April, probably during the week of April 20.

About one out of every eight Americans is now receiving a Social Security check each month, Ball said. As of the end of December, these monthly payments totaled \$2.2 billion and the monthly total will go up to \$2.65 billion to more than \$2.5 billion as the 15% benefit increase becomes effective.

The average retirement benefit of \$100 a month will rise to \$116 per month, a couple 65 or older receiving the average couple's benefit of \$170, will have their benefit increased to \$196.

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