

## Moorish Science Religion used as guise for Lorton sex, drug ring: FBI arrests 29 members of `sect'.(A)

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Author:

[Lacharite, Gretchen](#)

The FBI arrested 29 self-proclaimed members of a religious sect yesterday for smuggling drugs into the District's maximum-security prison in Lorton and providing women for sexual encounters that were videotaped for sale to other inmates.

Another nine members of the sect are being sought as a result of a grand jury indictment that charges 36 women and two men with conspiracy and possession with intent to distribute 175 grams of cocaine.

Those named on arrest warrants are supposedly members of the Moorish Science Temple of America - an Islamic sect with a "substantial membership among the inmates at Lorton," authorities said yesterday.

If convicted, all face 20-year prison sentences and \$1,000 fines. They will be arraigned Oct. 7 in U.S. District Court.

The FBI began investigating the Moorish Temple's activities a year ago, said William C. Megary, acting assistant director of the FBI's Washington field office. Some of the drug sales date back to March of 1995.

All 38 indicted persons signed the Lorton visitors log as members of the temple. It is unclear whether they are actually sect members, however.

Dubbed Operation Underhand, the federal probe discovered sect members were smuggling drugs into the maximum-security facility under the guise of attending religious services at the prison, said Helen F. Fahey, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia.

"The [federal grand jury] indictment charges that these visitors used the cloak of religious visits to conceal their drug-smuggling activities," she said.

Guards were unable to detect packages of cocaine smuggled into the prison in the underwear and body cavities of arriving "worshippers" because religious visitors are not subject to intense searches and patdowns for fear of violating religious freedom and the threat of lawsuits, said Margaret A. Moore, director of the District's Department of Corrections.

"We have a group of individuals who claimed to be religious volunteers," Mrs. Moore said. "They have certain constitutional rights."

Although corrections officers posted outside the prison conference room used by the temple could look into the room through a small window, their vision was blocked by partitions inmates had constructed, she said.

"The outcome of Operation Underhand represents efforts of the D.C. Department of Corrections to clean up the District of Columbia's prison system," Mrs. Moore said.

Apart from the drug indictments, **Nathaniel Pleasant Bey** and Karima Cook were also charged with transporting women to the prison to have sex with inmates for money.

Miss Cook "represented to Lorton officials that the women were entering the facility for a religious service, thus gaining permission for an unsupervised, private visit to enable the acts of prostitution," according to an affidavit filed by federal prosecutors in U.S. District Court in Alexandria.

On Jan. 31, Miss Cook and three women - identified as Yolanda Hawkins, Vanessa Wedlock, and Bazzello Smith, arrived at the prison from Baltimore and went to the prison conference room, where they met three inmates.

Each women took turns having sexual intercourse and performing oral sex on each inmate behind a partition. Meanwhile, an inmate recorded the encounters on videotape, court records show. As part of the drug-smuggling scheme, the visitors would identify themselves as members of the Moorish Temple, and under prison policy would be allowed to visit during non-visiting hours for religious meetings.

During Operation Underhand, before going to the prison the visitors would stop at an office building on Franconia Road in Springfield. There, an undercover federal agent would give them quarter-ounce bags of cocaine and a \$300 payment for smuggling it into the prison.

The women, who would wear Islamic headdresses typically worn by females in the Moorish Temple, would tell guards they were at the prison for a religious meeting and would hand-deliver the cocaine to an inmate.

Mrs. Moore said prison officials have begun cracking down on volunteer and religious visits. She said there are 2,500 people participating the prison's program, but guards did not check to confirm a visitor's affiliation to any group.

"The volunteer and religious program is one of the weaknesses of our system," she said yesterday.

No new volunteers will be allowed into the prison program and each of the system's current volunteers will undergo criminal background checks and be issued photo-identification cards.

Modifications to the visitor and chapel areas will also be made, Mrs. Moore said.

The maximum-security facility is a walled, high-security building with inmates locked in individual cells in several cell blocks. They are imprisoned for serious crimes and serious disciplinary infractions, officials said.

Law enforcement authorities in the District, Baltimore, Arlington and Alexandria assisted the FBI in yesterday's arrests.

The cases will be prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Robert C. Chestnut, Thomas G. Connolly, Kathleen M. Kahoe, Ledora Knight, Timothy J. Shea, Robert A. Spencer and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark D. Greenberg.

Accused in the indictment are Anthony Hendrix, Alice Faulkner, Natiya Renee McGee (a k a Valerie McGee), Helena Smith, Doris Gregory, Annette Poindexter, Tangula Williams, Samantha Myers (a k a Sirina Keitt), Tiowana Temoney, Shalounda Felder,

Angelique Marshall, Andrea Royal, Crystal Crudup, Debra Myers, Lashell Harley, Cynthia Fisher and Aleise Joshua (a k a Aleise Shuler).

Also, Denise Champion, Dorethea Thomas, Maxine Edwards, Angela Green, Betty Alexander, Alfreda Graves, Diane Wright, Tijuana Washington, Laurana Coffee, Janice Dawkins, Geraldine Smith, Laverne Hines, Hilda Malone, Wendell Johnson, Jequida Bell, Jackie Smith, Yolanda Hawkins, Bazzello Smith (a k a Bazzelle Smith), Nathaniel Pleasant Bey (a k a Elihu N. Pleasant - Bey), Karima Cook (a k a Karima Pleasant - Bey) and Vanessa Morgan (a k a Vanessa Wedlock).