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Families' fears grow after latest cross burning

*FBI says it is
investigating*

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Tired of crime in Detroit, Sean Dean left for a home on a quiet suburban block. Like a growing number of African Americans, the 33-year-old sanitation worker saw his future outside the city where he was born and raised.

But Monday, he stood near what appeared to be evidence of another racially motivated attack directed against an African-American family in the suburbs. And he wondered: Am I welcome here?

That's a question several black suburbanites are asking after several attacks have raised concerns among prosecutors and civil rights activists. The latest attack was down the block from Dean's home. Early Sunday, someone burned a 6-

The crimes and punishment

Ethnic intimidation: A felony in Michigan punishable by up to two years in prison. The perpetrator must be found to have acted with a specific intent to harm, intimidate or harass someone based on his or her race, color, religion, gender or national origin.

Federal hate crime: A felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison. The Hate Crimes Act bans a crime against a person or property that is motivated by bias toward race, religion, ethnicity/national origin, disability, or sexual orientation.

Source: Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and U.S. Attorney's Office

foot cross on the Davis family's lawn in Dearborn Heights, police say.

"It's so archaic... someone is walking around with that mindset," said Gregory Davis, a con-

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HATE | Another cross burning raises concerns among residents and officials

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Signs of hate in metro Detroit

Prosecutors and civil rights activists say hate crime is on the rise.

struction worker who lives in the home with his wife, three kids and grandchildren. "I'm mad. ... I don't bother anybody."

Warren, Troy and Trenton have seen similar hate crimes over the past two months. On Monday, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy charged two Taylor men with ethnic intimidation in the cross burnings outside the home of a biracial family who live on a mostly white block in Trenton. FBI

Special Agent Dawn Clenney said Monday that the FBI is investigating both the Trenton and the Dearborn Heights cases to see if the families' civil rights have been violated.

Meanwhile, a state official says he believes there has been an increase in the number and severity of hate crimes in the area since May. Harold Core of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights says he won't know exact numbers for months — but from watching media reports, he says hate crimes appear to be on the rise.

He also says that until recently the most serious crimes he noticed were mostly minor, like graffiti. But the cross burnings seem to take the level of hate up a notch. He wonders if there might be an organized effort behind the recent incidents.

"These incidents make victims out of entire communities," Core said Monday. . . Moreover, he said, hate crimes divide and divert people from the task of rebuilding the region's struggling economy.

A weak economy can some-

1 Dearborn Heights: On Sunday, an African-American family discovered a cross burned into their lawn on McDonald Street.

2 Trenton: On July 3 and 4, a biracial family found crosses on their lawn. The family had moved into the neighborhood two weeks earlier.

3 Warren: In June, an African-American family's house was trashed and white-power slogans were scrawled on its walls.

4 Taylor: After three years of putting up with racial slurs, KKK graffiti and an arson attack, Reginald and Lori Doster, an African-American couple, say they plan to move out of their neighborhood in Taylor sometime this month.

5 Troy: In late June, employees of a group home in Troy discovered what appeared to be a noose hanging from a tree limb. Most of the staff at the home is African American.



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times contribute to upswings in hate crimes, said Shanna Smith, a national civil rights expert. In recent months, Michigan has posted one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

Smith, president of the National Fair Housing Alliance, said in an interview last month that when white people are financially unable to leave racially changing neighborhoods, some may lash out with hate. The alliance released a report in July that indicated some real estate agents in metro Detroit were steering black housing applicants away from mostly white neighborhoods, further

dividing a region that is already one of the most segregated in the United States.

"We're at war with ourselves," Dean said. "We shouldn't be at war with each other."

The tensions come at a time when black people are leaving Detroit in huge numbers. More than 50,000 residents have fled the mostly black city since 2000, according to U.S. Census figures. On the block where Dean and the Davis family live, three homes are occupied by black people on a block of about 25 homes, residents say. In Dearborn Heights, largely a bedroom community of De-

troit, the black population has increased from 277 residents in 1990 to 1,236 residents in 2000, a jump of 346%.

"We all just want to live in nice neighborhoods," said Dean while gazing Monday afternoon at the burnt lawn that has since been tilled and reseeded. "We don't want violence just like anyone else. I'm just glad it hasn't happened to me yet."

The grass was burned sometime early Sunday morning, according to the Davis family. Someone used an accelerant to light the grass on fire in the shape of a large cross. Dearborn Heights Police Det. Lt. Jeff Seipenko said there are no suspects at this time.

The crime comes after some other suburban hate crimes in recent months. In June, a black family had their Warren home trashed and vandalized with white power graffiti. And in Trenton, a black man and his white wife witnessed a cross burning outside their home July 4. According to Wayne County prosecutors, Kevin Mackin, 18, and Jason Wozniak, 28, both of Taylor, lit the cross. If convicted, they each face up to two years in prison.

"It boggles the mind that any one would even think about doing this, much less carry it out," said Worthy, the Wayne County prosecutor, on Monday. "This is a stark reminder that we still have a long way to go with race issues in this country. It's disheartening to see this type of behavior in 2005."

Despite the latest incident, Davis said he's not going anywhere.

"We are here and we are not leaving," said Davis as his grandchildren scampered around on the front porch. "I'm not backing down from anybody."

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