

FBI says racial bias leading hate crime

WASHINGTON (AP) — Racial bias prompted 60 percent of the nation's hate crimes in 1991, with blacks as the main target, the FBI said Monday in its first report on the issue.

The FBI said 4,558 hate crimes were reported, including 2,963 prompted by racial bias.

"It shows the need for stronger action on hate crimes," said Dayna Cunningham, an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Legislation is needed, but that "doesn't get at the real problem, which is profound ignorance and frustration," Cunningham said. "In the long run, making society more tolerant is both much more in keeping with our aspirational values as a country and our First Amendment concerns."

Religious bias accounted for about half of the remaining incidents; ethnic bias accounted for 9.5 percent and sexual-orientation bias 8.9 percent, almost all aimed at homosexuals.

The report stems from the Hate Crime Statistics Acts of 1990 requiring the FBI to compile the figures. Participation by law enforcement agencies is voluntary.

Only 2,771 law enforcement agencies took part, compared to the more than 16,000 that give the FBI information for its Uniform Crime Reports on such crimes as murder, aggravated assault and robbery.

"While these initial data are limited, they give us our first assessment of the nature of crimes motivated by bias in our society," FBI Director William S. Sessions said in a statement accompanying the preliminary report.

Racial bias caused 62.3 percent of hate crimes, or 2,963 incidents. Anti-black motivations were responsible for 35.5 percent, 1,689 occurrences, while anti-white feelings caused 18.7 percent, 888 incidents.

- Other categories:
- Religious bias: 19.3 percent, 917 incidents, with anti-Jewish motives responsible for 792.
- Ethnic bias: 9.5 percent, 450 incidents.
- Sexual-orientation bias: 8.9 percent, 425 incidents, almost all of them aimed at homosexuals.

"Hate crimes ... are a means of terrorizing entire communities because in a very real way, people who perpetrate hate crimes aren't looking for one person," said Martin Hiraga, director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's anti-violence project. "They're looking to vent their ire on whoever is most convenient."

The most prevalent hate-related crime was intimidation, which accounted for 33.9 percent, or 1,614 incidents. Vandalism occurred 1,301 times, 27.4 percent of the total, and there were 796 violent assaults and 773 aggravated assaults. Far less frequent were robbery, burglary, arson and larceny-theft. There also were 12 hate-crime-related murders and seven forcible rapes.

Only 32 states participated, and some that did gave limited data. New York had the most cooperating law enforcement agencies, 773 reporting 943 hate crimes. Only two California law enforcement agencies provided information, reporting just five incidents.

Congress criticizes department

WASHINGTON (AP) — A congressional report chastised the Justice Department on Monday for not seeking to indict individuals for environmental crimes at the Rocky Flats weapons plant in Colorado.

The report by a House investigations subcommittee said that senior Justice Department officials in Washington determined early in their investigation that they would not prosecute individuals at either the Energy Department or at Rockwell International, which operated the weapons facility for years.

Rockwell agreed as part of a plea bargain last June to pay \$18.5 million in fines because of illegal disposal of hazardous wastes and other violations of federal environmental laws. The company pleaded guilty to 10 criminal counts.

The weapons plant, which manufactured plutonium pits, or triggers, for nuclear warheads, had been widely criticized for years over its handling of hazardous, radioactive wastes. The plant now is being cleaned up.

Rep. Howard Wolpe, D-Mich., whose Science, Space and Technology investigations subcommittee investigated the plea bargain arrangement, said in a letter accompanying the panel's report that "numerous leads" about the Rocky Flats

case remain and the new Congress should pursue them.

"This report is not the final word on the Rocky Flats prosecution," said Wolpe. The report urged Congress to seek ways to grant immunity for members of the federal grand jury that heard the case so that they could testify before Congress.

Some of those jurors have been the subject of a separate Justice Department investigation on leaks from the jury. Wolpe said it would be "outrageous" if the government "prosecutes the grand jurors with more vigor than they demonstrated in prosecuting Rockwell...."

The House subcommittee report concluded that the plea bargain prevented the disclosure of unsafe conditions, crimes and activities at the Rocky Flats plant while it was managed by Rockwell. The prosecution involved violations between 1987 and 1989.

"By papering over the situation at Rocky Flats, the prosecutors forfeited the opportunity to focus national attention" on the activities not only at Rocky Flats, but at other weapons production plants under the Energy Department.

Environmental cleanup at the weapons plants in a dozen states may take decades and cost as much as \$200 billion, according to DOE and congress-

sional estimates.

Although the \$18.5 million fine paid by Rockwell is among the highest ever for environmental crimes, the report noted that the amount was less than Rockwell's profits during the years involved. The report said Rockwell also was immunized from further prosecution by other agencies and may seek reimbursement from the Energy Department for its legal fees.

"To date Rockwell has requested reimbursement from DOE — and the public — for \$7.9 million in attorney's fees and costs," said the report.

Members of the grand jury reportedly urged indictments of as many as five Rockwell employees and three DOE officials. But federal prosecutors refused to go along, arguing that the violations reflected a "culture" of environmental abuse that had been part of the federal weapons production program for decades.

"This is the white-collar equivalent of blaming an armed robbery on 'society' — not the individual holding the gun," Wolpe said.

The study said an inadequate investigation resulted from the decision by top justice officials in Washington not to pursue individual felony indictments.

FBI hunts for men who set man afire

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — The FBI joined the hunt Monday for three white men who allegedly abducted a black man, took him to a remote area, robbed him, then doused him with gasoline and set him ablaze.

The president of Tampa's NAACP chapter called the attack a "lynching by fire." Investigators said the attackers used racial epithets, but it wasn't immediately clear whether they were racially motivated.

Christopher Wilson, 31, suffered second- and third-degree burns over about 40 percent of his body during the assault New Year's morning. He was in serious but stable condition Monday at

Tampa General Hospital awaiting skin-grafting surgery set for Tuesday.

Federal agents entered the investigation under a recent federal law banning carjacking, since Wilson was abducted at gunpoint in his car, FBI agent Pete Wubbenhorst said. If agents determine the attack was racially motivated, they also would pursue a civil-rights case, he said.

Wilson's girlfriend, Joan Benoit, said he told her the men repeatedly called him "nigger" and made a remark she couldn't explain.

"They kept saying, 'We got one, and we've got another one to go,'" Benoit said.



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