



Florida Men Sentenced for Assault and Cross Burning Aimed at Intimidating an Interracial Couple Living Next Door

Today, United States District Judge Mary S. Scriven of the Middle District of Florida sentenced Thomas Herris Sigler, III, 46, and William A. Dennis, 56, to serve 33 and 21 months incarceration, respectively. Sigler and Dennis both pled guilty to civil rights violations for their roles in attacking and intimidating an interracial couple in Port Richey, Florida. A third co-defendant, Pascual Carlos Pietri also pled guilty to the same charge and was sentenced to 37 months imprisonment on March 23, 2016. All three of the co-defendant's sentences are to be followed by three years of supervised release. A fourth co-conspirator is now deceased.

According to the evidence presented in court proceedings and documents, in September 2012 an interracial couple moved in next door to Sigler and Dennis. Sigler and Dennis began regularly harassing the African-American male neighbor shortly after the couple moved in with racial slurs and derogatory statements. Then in mid-October 2012, Sigler physically attacked the African-American neighbor, while Dennis looked on and prevented another neighbor from intervening.

On Halloween night, Sigler and Dennis attended a party at the home of the fourth co-conspirator. The men made a plan to intimidate the couple into moving from their residence by burning a cross in their front yard. Using wood and tools from the fourth co-conspirator, Sigler and Dennis constructed a wooden cross, and Dennis poured gasoline on the cross. Dennis and Pietri carried the cross to the victims' front yard, leaned it against their mailbox, and Dennis instructed Pietri set the cross on fire, which he did.

"The victims were attacked and threatened in their own neighborhood and home because of their race," said John M. Gore, Acting Assistant Attorney for Civil Rights. "Such violence and intimidation has no place in our society, the Justice Department is committed to protecting the rights of all citizens, and will continue to vigorously prosecute individuals who commit such atrocious acts of hate."

"Acts of intimidation and violence perpetrated against people because of their race, ethnicity, color, or creed are reprehensible," said Acting U.S. Attorney Stephen Muldrow. "Individuals and families should have the right to live wherever they choose, without fear. Acts of hatred such as this simply cannot be tolerated and we will investigate and prosecute those who commit these crimes."

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Josephine W. Thomas and Simon A. Gaugush of the Middle District of Florida and Trial Attorney William E. Nolan of the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section.

Source:

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