



Department of Justice

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MEMBER OF ARYAN BROTHERHOOD SENTENCED TO 450 MONTHS IN PRISON IN CONNECTION WITH HATE CRIME INVOLVING CHURCH ARSON AND ATTEMPTED MURDER OF DISABLED AFRICAN-AMERICAN IN TEXAS

WASHINGTON – Steven Scott Cantrell, 26, of Crane, Texas, was sentenced today for hate crime charges stemming from a series of racially-motivated arsons in December 2010, including the arson of a historic African-American church as part of an effort to murder a disabled African-American man, the Justice Department announced today.

Cantrell was sentenced to 450 months in prison by U.S. District Judge Robert A. Junell in Midland, Texas, after pleading guilty to damaging religious property and interfering with housing rights in violation of federal hate crime laws. Cantrell was also ordered to pay \$550,780 in restitution to the victims.

Cantrell admitted that on Dec. 28, 2010, he set fire to Faith in Christ Church, a predominantly African-American church, as part of an effort to murder a disabled African-American man who he saw passing by the church in his wheelchair. Cantrell admitted that he started the fire intending to kill the disabled African-American man whom he believed lived at a shelter within the church. The man was not hurt. Cantrell ransacked the church, wrote a series of threatening and racist messages in large letters across the wall of the church next to the pastor's office, and "tagged" the church with references to the Aryan Brotherhood.

The arson of Faith in Christ Church was part of a series of racially-motivated arsons that Cantrell perpetrated that day in his attempt to gain status with the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas. In addition to the church, Cantrell admitted that he set fire to the house of another man in the community because he believed that man to be Jewish and because he sought to injure, intimidate or interfere with that man's right to rent or occupy that house. Cantrell also admitted to setting fire to Craig's Gym in violation of federal arson laws. At his plea hearing, Cantrell acknowledged that he set fire to Craig's Gym because he believed the owners served Mexican-Americans and African-American patrons and because the gym was owned by a Caucasian man married to a woman of Mexican descent. Cantrell added that he felt "disrespected" by a Caucasian man marrying a woman of Mexican descent because he believed "the white race needed to be kept pure."

"Today's sentence reflects the vile nature of this defendant's actions. Every person, regardless of race, national origin, religion or disability, should have the opportunity to live without fear of threat or harm," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil

Rights Division. “The department will continue to vigorously prosecute those that commit heinous acts like this one.”

“When hatred and bigotry are expressed through acts of violence and destruction, this office will use every resource available to ensure that those responsible are found, prosecuted and punished,” stated U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Texas Robert Pitman. “There is simply no room in a civilized society for the kind of conduct Cantrell engaged in.”

“Today’s sentencing represents the FBI’s commitment to prosecuting individuals responsible for committing these types of crimes,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge Mark Morgan of the El Paso, Texas, office. “The FBI will continue to aggressively investigate federal violations of this nature and prosecute those responsible to the full extent of the law. Through the cooperative efforts of the state, local and federal agencies, FBI Midland successfully completed its investigation.”

This case was jointly investigated by the FBI; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Crane Police Department; and the Texas Department of Insurance. The case was prosecuted by Trial Attorney Victor Boutros from the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney John Klassen for the Western District of Texas, with the cooperation of the district attorney for the 109th Judicial District of the state of Texas.

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