



## U.S. Department of Justice

### *United States Attorney Eastern District of Arkansas*

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### **THREE ARKANSAS MEN INDICTED FOR BURNING CROSS TO INTIMIDATE AFRICAN-AMERICAN**

**LITTLE ROCK** – Jane W. Duke, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, announced today the indictment of James Bradley Branscum, age 22, of Salado, Arkansas; Tony Branscum, age 24, also of Salado, Arkansas; and Curtis Coffee, age 18, of Batesville, Arkansas. The three men were indicted by a federal grand jury on charges related to their roles in burning a cross in the yard of an African-American resident of Salado on August 28, 2010.

“As a civilized society, we simply cannot tolerate such blatant acts of hatred and intimidation,” Duke stated. She added, “Burning a cross in the yard of an African-American is one of the most offensive and threatening gestures imaginable. The history of violence associated with such an image loudly screams at the victim, without the offender having to say a word. This joint investigation demonstrates how seriously all levels and branches of law enforcement consider these acts of prejudice, intolerance, and intimidation.”

In the three-count indictment, James Branscum, Tony Branscum, and Coffee were each charged with conspiring to interfere with the housing rights of another individual. In addition, each was charged with one count of interfering with the housing rights of another individual and with one count of using fire in the commission of a felony. If convicted, the three face a maximum punishment of 30 years imprisonment and a \$750,000 fine.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Independence County Sheriff’s Office. The case will be prosecuted by Trial Attorney Cindy Chung from the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice and Assistant United States Attorney John Ray White from the United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Arkansas.

Independence County Sheriff Alan R. Cockrill commended the detectives of the Independence County Sheriff’s Office who put many hours of hard work into this case. Cockrill went on to say, “I would also like to thank the Federal Bureau of Investigation for their

assistance. Without our two agencies working together on this case, it would have been much more difficult and time-consuming to have solved.”

The charges set forth in an indictment are merely allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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