



Department of Justice

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THREE SENTENCED FOR INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIL RIGHTS CONSPIRACY AND COVER-UP IN CONNECTION WITH CROSS-BURNING IN ATHENS, LOUISIANA

WASHINGTON –Jeremy Matthew Moro, 33 and Joshua James Moro, 23, have been sentenced by U.S. District Judge Donald E. Walter following their January 2011, guilty pleas to conspiring to violate the civil rights of an interracial couple by burning a cross near their home in Athens, La., in October 2008. Sonya Marie Hart, 31, was sentenced today following her January 2011, guilty plea to withholding information from the FBI regarding the defendants' attempt to cover-up the cross-burning. The Moros' cousin, Daniel Danforth, was previously convicted by a federal jury for organizing, carrying out, and attempting to cover up the same cross-burning.

Jeremy Moro was sentenced to 12 months and one day in prison followed by three years of supervised release; Joshua Moro was sentenced to 12 months and one day in prison followed by three years of supervised release; Sonya Hart was sentenced to three years of supervised probation. The defendants' co-conspirator, Daniel Danforth, was previously sentenced to 48 months in prison for his role in the cross-burning and attempted cover-up.

During their guilty pleas in January 2011, Joshua and Jeremy Moro admitted that in October 2008, they and Danforth agreed to build, erect and burn a cross near the home of another cousin, her African American boyfriend (now husband), her 11-year-old son, and their grandmother who was believed to approve of the cousin's interracial relationship. Joshua Moro admitted that he offered Danforth diesel fuel to use to burn the cross and that, later that evening, he sent a text message to see if Danforth and Jeremy Moro still needed the diesel to burn the cross. Jeremy Moro admitted that he helped Danforth find an accelerant, transport the cross to an area near the victims' homes, and that he watched Danforth light the cross on fire because Danforth was upset about the presence of the African American man living with their cousin. Hart admitted that she affirmatively withheld information from the FBI in connection with the investigation into the cross-burning and attempted cover-up.

Evidence during Danforth's trial in January 2010 showed that in the days following the cross-burning, Danforth, Jeremy Moro, and Sonya Hart agreed to remove the burned cross when they learned that the FBI was going to investigate the matter. With Jeremy Moro's and Hart's assistance, Danforth removed the cross, disassembled it and hid it in the woods. The evidence also showed that Joshua Moro, Jeremy Moro and Sonya Hart lied to the FBI and a federal grand jury during the investigation into the cross-burning.

“The defendants used an unmistakable symbol of hate to threaten a member of their own family simply because of her boyfriend’s race,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “Incidents of this kind have no place in this country, and they are a reminder of the civil rights challenges we still face in 2011.”

“Cross burnings have historically been symbols of intense hatred of others based on their race. There is no place in our communities for this kind of activity,” said Stephanie A. Finley, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Louisiana. “ Everyone should feel comfortable to live in their communities without fear of violence because they are different or because of their race. Every citizen has this right. We hope that these sentences send a message that these kinds of acts are serious and have serious consequences.”

This case was investigated by the FBI. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary J. Mudrick for the Western District of Louisiana and Trial Attorney Erin Aslan from the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division.

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