

The Sun

**Vandal ordered to write essay on value of diverse society
Teen-ager pleaded guilty to hate crime**

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An 18-year-old Elkridge man who admitted participating in a vandalism spree that included spray-painting racial and obscene epithets on four county schools was ordered yesterday to learn about the value of a multicultural society.

Howard Circuit Judge Diane O. Leasure ordered Cory Lee Lafon to research and write an essay of at least 500 words on how the community is enriched by cultural and racial diversity.

"There's no question these type of actions have an effect on the community at large," Leasure told Lafon in Howard County Circuit Court yesterday, referring to the racial and devil-worshiping signs scrawled across Howard High School, Ellicott Mills Middle School, Worthington Middle School and Mount Hebron High School.

Lafon, wearing a gray suit and a white shirt, pleaded guilty to a hate-bias crime, malicious destruction and second-degree burglary.

Leasure also gave him a five-year suspended sentence and four years of probation, and ordered him to perform 100 hours of community service and pay about \$9,000 in restitution.

Lafon, who said he was drinking beer during the incidents, told Leasure yesterday that he did not know why he did what he did.

"I am extremely sorry for the things I did," Lafon said. "I am not a racist person at all."

Lafon told police he did not spray-paint the racial epithets but that he did paint the anarchist and satanic signs, said Tucker, reading from a statement of facts.

According to that statement, Lafon told police he first became involved in the vandalism when he told a co-worker at a McDonald's outlet on Route 108 in Harper's Choice village that he was having trouble with Howard High's assistant principal, Steven Wallis.

According to the statement of facts, the co-worker, William Francis Holderman, came up with the idea to spray-paint the schools to get revenge on Wallis. Holderman 20, is charged with 21 counts of vandalism and hate-bias crimes. A trial date for Holderman, who was suspended by Wallis five years ago, has not been set.

A third person, a juvenile, also was involved in the vandalism and is expected to plead guilty next week, Tucker said.

Clarke Ahlers, Lafon's attorney, told Leasure he believed that Lafon did not fully understand the meaning of the symbols that were spray-painted on the schools.

"I've explained to him that I grew up next to people who survived concentration camps," Ahlers said. "It's a shame, the further we get away from World War II, I don't think the young people have a full appreciation of how hateful that is."

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