

The Sun

Writing a wrong

Hate crimes: Judge's `essay' sentence might teach a lesson in humanity.

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THE LAWYER for Cory Lee Lafon says his client did not understand the meaning of the racial epithets he spray-painted on four Howard County schools.

If that is true, maybe a written assignment from a judge will give him a clue as to why his actions were so deplorable.

The judge ordered Cory, 18, to research and write a 500-word essay on how the community is enriched by racial and cultural diversity, among other requirements of his sentence.

This lesson should be obvious to any 18-year-old American who understands that it took various groups of races and ethnic groups to build this country over hundreds of years.

But in his ignorance, Cory, who lives in Elkridge, sought to degrade people who don't share his racial background by spray-painting racial epithets and devil-worship signs across the schools. In doing so, he degraded himself and scarred the school community. Nothing worthwhile can come from such acts of hate -- only people as mindless can be swayed by them.

Unfortunately, others lurk in darkness. In 1995, the most recent year for which statistics are available, Maryland recorded 546 hate crimes. These include Baltimore County, 198; Anne Arundel County, 38; Carroll County, 4; Howard County and Harford County, 20; Prince George's County, 53, and the most populous jurisdiction, Montgomery County, 138.

These include cowardly acts intended to hurt, intimidate or harass members of specific ethnic and religious groups.

Cory pleaded ignorance, insisting that he did not know what he was doing and claiming in court, "I am not a racist person at all."

He had told police he and a former McDonald's co-worker, William Francis Holderman, 20, wanted to get revenge on an assistant principal at Howard High, one of the schools they vandalized.

Howard Circuit Court Judge Diane O. Leasure, a former schoolteacher, ordered Cory to write an essay and imposed a suspended sentence, probation and community service.

"There's no question these types of actions have an effect on the community at large," she noted.

Perhaps the exercise of writing an essay will teach Cory an elementary lesson in humanity he should have learned long ago.

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