

Racial Bias Fuels Increase In Hate Crimes

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WASHINGTON - Hate crime incidents rose nearly 8 percent last year, the FBI reported Monday, as civil rights advocates take to the streets to protest what they call official indifference to intimidation and attacks against blacks and other minorities.

Police across the nation reported 7,722 criminal incidents in 2006 targeting victims or property as a result of bias against a race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnic or national origin, or physical or mental disability. That was up 7.8 percent from 7,163 incidents reported in 2005.

There were 216 hate crimes reported in Florida.

More than half the incidents across the nation were motivated by racial prejudice.

Although the noose incidents and beatings among students at a Jena, La., high school occurred in the last half of 2006, they were not included in the report. About 12,600 of the nation's more than 17,000 local, county, state and federal police agencies participated in the hate crime reporting program in 2006 and neither Jena nor LaSalle Parish, in which the town is located, were among the agencies reporting.

The FBI report does not break out the number of noose incidents but the two most frequent hate crimes in 2006 were property damage or vandalism, at 2,911 offenses, and intimidation, at 2,046 offenses. There were three slayings, six rapes, 860 aggravated assaults, 1,447 simple assaults and 41 arsons. Other offenses included robbery, burglary, larceny, and vehicle theft.

The 7,722 hate crime incidents involved 9,080 specific criminal offenses, including 5,449 against individuals, 3,593 against property and 38 classified as against society at large. A single incident can be aimed at both people and property.

Since the FBI began collecting hate crime data in 1991, the most frequent motivation has been racial bias, accounting for 51.8 percent of incidents in 2006, down from the 54.7 in 2005.

Also in 2006, religious bias was blamed for 18.9 percent of the incidents; sexual orientation bias for 15.5 percent, and ethnic or national origin for 12.7 percent.