

Civil rights-era murders hard to solve

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) - The Florida Department of Law Enforcement sent its most aggressive agent to work on the case full time, armed with big stacks of files from the FBI and sheriff's investigators. Even with those resources, it took nearly two years to finally solve the 1951 murders of Black civil rights activists Harry T. and Harriette Moore, whose house was bombed by Ku Klux Klan members.

Although the case is finally solved, as officials announced Wednesday, it demonstrates how tough it can be to glean information from that bloody period across the South.

"I think that most of the major cases of the Civil Rights Era have been thoroughly investigated at this point. I don't expect many more cases to come up," said Mark Potok, director of the Intelligence Project, a hate-monitoring operation at the Southern Poverty Law Center. "These cases are really bedeviled by, in many cases, by a lack of evidence and witnesses who are either dead or no longer remember

details."

Harry Moore was the first NAACP official killed during the modern civil rights struggle.

Dennis Norred, a Florida law enforcement department investigator, joined by Frank Beisler, an investigator with the Attorney General's Office, inherited a case that had been taken up and abandoned at least three times before. A half-century before them, 78 FBI agents conducted a four-year probe across Florida, Alabama, Georgia and the Carolinas without producing a single murder charge.

Evidence had been lost or destroyed, and the state was no longer even certain where the Moores' house stood when the bomb went off under their bed.

"We were just running into stone walls everywhere we went," Beisler said. "But all the sudden, whoosh, it just came unglued for us."

On Wednesday, state officials said the crime was committed by Edward L. Spivey, Earl J. Brooklyn, Tillman H. Bevin and Joseph N. Cox. Spivey died in 1980; the others had all died within about



The 1951 murders of civil rights activists Harriette and Harry T. Moore are among cases that took years to solve.

a year of the bombing.

The initial breakthrough wasn't a new interview or tip, but a deathbed confession that Spivey had given to a sheriff's investigator. The investigator at the time per-

suaded the Brevard County state attorney to take the case to a grand jury, but before that happened, the prosecutor lost his election.

The outgoing prosecutor thought someone else was

picking up the case, Beisler said. That didn't happen until then-Gov. Lawton Chiles ordered the Florida department to reopen the case in 1991. However, that investigation centered on two other men. One allegedly confessed but then recanted, and the other, implicated by his wife, denied involvement and passed a polygraph test.

Then the case turned on Beisler's discovery of the Spivey confession, which hadn't been noted in the case file, and a call from an anonymous tipster who said Spivey also confessed to him.

"It verified what the other investigator had told us, just verified everything right down the line," Beisler said.

A similar convergence of factors led to the 2005 indictment of a former KKK leader in the 1964 "Mississippi Burning" case in which three civil rights workers were murdered. There was a new district attorney and Mississippi attorney general, persistent media coverage and advocacy groups urging a closer look.

In that case, Edgar Ray

Killen had been tried in 1967 on federal charges of violating the victims' civil rights, but the all-White jury deadlocked. Killen was convicted in 2005 of three counts of manslaughter using testimony read in court from several deceased witnesses.

But not all reopened cases close so neatly.

In June, a state attorney appointed to review the case of a Black woman killed during a Jacksonville race riot 42 years ago concluded that speedy trial constraints prevented new charges. Four men, all of whom still live in Florida, were originally indicted on murder charges, but the case was hampered by missing evidence and allegations of a racist police cover-up.

Lee Cody, a former Duval County Sheriff's detective who investigated the Jacksonville case in 1964, says he and a colleague even found the murder weapon.

"We bagged it, tagged it and ID'd it, placed it in the property room, booked it," Cody says today, "and nobody has seen it since the day we put it in there."

Tennessee hails school desegregation

CLINTON, Tenn. (AP) — Fifty years ago, Bobby Cain and 11 other Black students walked down a steep hill past hundreds of taunting, angry White people to Clinton High School.

Stepping inside, the group that became known as the "Clinton 12" made the public high school in this little mill town the first to be integrated by court order in the Old South on Aug. 27, 1956.

"It was very intimidating," said Cain, now 67 and

living in Nashville. "People were calling us names and things. But you had to kind of keep a stoic face and hopefully not show any fear.

"But inside," Cain said, "I was afraid."

It had only been nine months since Rosa Parks had refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Ala. It would be another year before President Eisenhower would send federal troops into Little Rock, Ark., to desegregate Central High over the

governor's objections.

Tennessee Gov. Frank Clement, too, would send troops into Clinton, but it was to uphold the law, not defy it, at a time when Blacks still couldn't eat at lunch counters with Whites and had to watch movies from theater balconies.

"Had we not stuck it out, had we not stayed, the whole South would have been put back a few years," said Gail Ann Upton, of Sweetwater, a 15-year-old junior in 1956.

The students and the city of Clinton, which today has fewer than 10,000 people and a Black population less than 3 percent, not only survived but now take pride in the story.

On Thursday, the city will premiere a 90-minute documentary titled "The Clinton 12" narrated by James Earl Jones. Two days later, civil rights pioneer Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., and Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., will mark the 50th anniversary by opening a museum devoted to the event in a former all-Black, two-room elementary school.

"We just felt like we have been a footnote in history" long enough, said city manager Steve Jones, 41, noting that Arkansas' "Little Rock Nine" were honored on a postage stamp in 2005 and received congressional medals in 1998 from President Clinton.

Before the integration, Black students had been bused to an all-Black school in Knoxville, 20 miles east. Four Black students were turned away when they tried to enroll at Clinton High as early as 1950, prompting a lawsuit by a group of citizens

that was later joined by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Federal Judge Robert Taylor rejected the suit in 1952, saying the education in Knoxville was as good or better than in Clinton. But Taylor reversed himself after the Supreme Court struck down the separate-but-equal foundation of Jim Crow segregation two years later in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In January 1956 he ordered Clinton High desegregated by that fall.

Rabble-rousers, segregationists and the national media — including CBS legend Edward R. Murrow — swept in as the Black students joined Clinton High's 800 White students, and the governor had to call in 600 national guardsmen to restore order.

"I want to tell you we were nervous," said Alfred Williams, now 68. "When this school integrated, you could see the hate in people."

Jones said the museum will tell two sides of the story — the White version, which tends to portray the Black-White tensions as more se-

vere outside school than inside, and the lesser-known Black version, which saw the struggle as more constant.

"When we were in class, the teachers were nice and everything was sort of smooth in there," Upton said. "But once we got in the hallways, things were pretty rough. They would step on my heels and make them bleed and pull my hair and that type of thing."

Cain said the pressures became so great he walked out of school one day.

"I just couldn't take it anymore," he said. "But my mother and father talked to me that night. They said, 'You have to go back. If you drop out, you have been defeated.' So I went back."

The unrest stemming from Taylor's order climaxed on a Sunday in October 1958, when the high school was rocked by three massive explosions.

No one was hurt, but the vandalism unified the community as parents, teachers and students — Black and White — worked together to fix up a building in nearby Oak Ridge as a temporary home for Clinton's integrated student body.

Player charged in hate crime

SEA ISLE CITY, N.J. — A University of Delaware lacrosse player has been charged in the baseball bat beating of a vacationing police officer at the New Jersey shore. Police are calling it a hate crime.

Three young men, all White, were charged in connection with Tuesday's beating of the Cheltenham, Pa., officer, who is Black.

Jarreau Francis, 25, was walking in Sea Isle City with two White colleagues at 3 a.m. when he was attacked. One or more suspects beat him in the head with the bat, made racial slurs and threatened him, police said.

"They didn't know he was an off-duty police officer. Just the fact that he was Black was the target of this whole incident here," Sea Isle Police Detective Jon Gansert told WCAU-TV.

A second officer was struck while trying to assist Francis.

The suspects ran but three men were arrested a short time later.

Vince J. Giordano, 21, of Moorestown; Keith Hoffman, 23, of Folcroft, Pa.; and Thomas Russo, 21, of Lansdowne, Pa., were each charged with aggravated assault, possession of a weapon and bias intimidation.

The three men were released after posting bail at the Cape May County Jail.

Giordano, who plays lacrosse for the University of Delaware, declined comment. The university was not immediately prepared to comment.

Officials at the county jail and in the court system did not know if the men had defense attorneys.

Francis was treated and released at a hospital.

Cheltenham police referred calls to authorities in Sea Isle City.