



Los Angeles Times

ORANGE COUNTY EDITION

OC WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2004 B9

Police Open Hate-Crime Investigation of Car Fire

The vehicle, owned by an African American resident, was previously vandalized at the Huntington Beach apartment complex.

By MAI TRAN
Times Staff Writer

Huntington Beach police launched a hate-crime investigation Tuesday after a sports car was set afire, three weeks after it was spray-painted with a racial slur.

The vehicle is owned by a 29-year-old African American man who moved into a Huntington

Beach apartment complex nine months ago, said police Lt. Corby Bright.

The car was fully engulfed when firefighters arrived about 1:20 a.m. Monday, Bright said.

Neighbors said they were awakened by an explosion, then banged on the apartment door of the vehicle's owner to alert him.

No one was injured in the fire.

The owner previously reported that his black car had been vandalized with white paint while he was out of town between March 6 and March 8, Bright said. The racial slur, which was painted across both sides of the



ROBERT LACHMAN *Los Angeles Times*
AFTERMATH: A dark area in the driveway at a Huntington Beach apartment complex was the scene of suspicious vehicle fire.

car, had not been removed and the car had not been driven since the vandalism, Bright said.

"He has had no problems with any of his neighbors," Bright said. "He has no idea who the suspect may be."

The incident prompted residents in the neighborhood's cluster of small apartments to sign a card offering sympathy to the victim and help in cleaning up damage from the blaze.

"We're shocked," said Glen Wallace, 47, a neighbor. "It makes you sick. It puts a knot in your stomach. We just want him to know that that's not what his neighbors think [of him]."

Though hate crimes dropped significantly in 2002, African Americans continue to be among the most frequent targets

of such incidents in Orange County over the last decade, said Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission.

In 2002, the latest figures available, African Americans were the only group to see a substantial increase in hate crimes, growing from 15 in 2001 to 24 in 2002, Kennedy said.

"The two hate crimes targeting an African American who recently moved into a Huntington Beach neighborhood are atrocious," Kennedy said.

On Tuesday, his organization sent flowers and a card to the victim.

"The good people of Huntington Beach and Orange County condemn these acts of hate," Kennedy said.