

CALIFORNIA

Attack on family in Compton latest incident in wave of anti-black violence

By SAM QUINONES, RICHARD WINTON AND JOE MOZINGO

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The trouble began soon after they arrived.

The black family—a mother, three teenage children and a 10-year-old boy—moved into a little yellow home in Compton over Christmas vacation.

When a friend came to visit, four men in a black SUV pulled up and called him a “nigger,” saying black people were barred from the neighborhood, according to Los Angeles County sheriff’s deputies. They jumped out, drew a gun on him and beat him with metal pipes.

It was just the beginning of what detectives said was a campaign by a Latino street gang to force an African American family to leave.

The attacks on the family are the latest in a series of violent incidents in which Latino gangs targeted blacks in parts of greater Los Angeles over the last decade.

Compton, with a population of about 97,000, was predominantly black for many years. It is now 65% Latino and 33% black, according to the 2010 U.S. census. But it’s not only historically black areas that have been targeted.

Federal authorities have alleged in several indictments in the last decade that the Mexican Mafia prison gang has ordered street gangs under its control to attack African Americans. Leaders of the Azusa 13 gang were sentenced to lengthy prison terms earlier this month for leading a policy of attacking African American residents and expelling them from the town.

Similar attacks have taken place in Harbor Gateway, Highland Park, Pacoima, San Bernardino, Canoga Park and Wilmington, among other places. In the Compton case, sheriff’s officials say the gang appears to have been acting on its own initiative.

Sheriff’s detectives said Friday they had arrested Jeffrey Aguilar, 19, of Gardena and Efren Marquez, 21, of Rialto, both alleged members of the Compton Varrrio 155 gang, and are continuing to look for more assailants.

“This family has no gang ties whatsoever,” Sheriff’s Lt. Richard Westin said. “They are complete innocent victims here.”

The 19-year-old family friend managed to break free that first day and run into the house, where the children were the only ones at home.

The attackers left, but a half-hour later a crowd of as many as 20 people stood on the lawn yelling threats and epithets. A beer bottle crashed through the living room window as the youngsters watched in horror.

“They were scared if they called the sheriff they’d be killed,” Westin said. “So they called their mom, who called the Sheriff’s Department.”

The gang members were gone by the time deputies arrived, but they kept coming back, almost daily, driving by slowly until they got someone’s attention, then yelling racial insults and telling them to leave. The mother sent the children to live with relatives and is now packing up to leave herself.

“This gang has always made it clear they have a racial hatred for black people,” said Westin, who has worked in the area for more than two decades. “They justify in their own sick minds because of their rivalry with the Compton black gangs. They repeatedly used racial epithets, they use racial hatred graffiti and they tag up the black church a lot.”

At the home on 153rd Street on Friday, the rain-drenched street was empty and quiet. But the gang’s presence was clear.

Its tags marked several long walls, stop signs, curbs and school crossing signs — often with the nicknames of individual gang members included.

Crews remove the graffiti almost every morning.

Down the street, the Greater Holy Faith Missionary Baptist Church — a remnant from the time when Compton was almost all black — is often tagged, most recently, just below the cross.

Neighbors say its pastors come on Sundays and no longer live in the area.

“This is a typical American family,” said Sheriff’s Capt. Mike Parker. “It is tragic that it can happen in America, let alone L.A. County. We are not going to tolerate it.”

Sheriff’s detectives have searched 11 locations in Compton, Gardena and Rialto and are hoping to make more arrests.

Aguilar is accused of beating the family friend with the pipes and Marquez is accused of waving a gun in his face.

Deputies also arrested a juvenile gang member who fought with one of them during a search and tried to grab the officer’s pistol.

Compton Councilwoman Yvonne Arceneaux said she was deeply troubled by the incident.

“I’m floored,” she said. “That’s blatant to tell a family you can’t live in this area because you are black. That’s just shocking.”

Two decades ago, when Arceneaux joined the Compton City Council, she said that older blacks occupied the well-maintained, small homes in the neighborhood. But as they died or moved away, Latinos moved in.

Although she noted cultural differences between blacks and Latinos, she said she thought they were minor.

Arceneaux said she plans to reach out to the family and get the City Council involved.

“We need to address these issues,” she said. “Because if they continue to fester like this, then it can spread to the whole city.”

Latino gang attacks on African Americans have occurred periodically since the 1990s in Compton.

Johnathan Quevedo, a security guard and college student, said he was shot and wounded by four Latino gang members in 2007.

Quevedo, who has African American features he inherited from his Panamanian mother, said he was walking to the Metro to take a train to his job at the downtown Marriott Hotel one morning when four Latino youths with shaved heads jumped from an SUV and ran at him. One shot him in the head, and Quevedo spent the next year recuperating.

“They didn’t know who I was. I didn’t know who they were,” Quevedo said. “I got shot because of my skin color, because I’m a black male.”

sam.quinones@latimes.com

richard.winton@latimes.com

joe.mozingo@latimes.com

Times Staff Writer Angel Jennings contributed to this report.

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