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Michigan man ordered to study history of Hinduism after hate crime conviction

by Religion News Service

BAY CITY, Mich. -- A man who assaulted two men because he thought they were Muslims and was then ordered to write a report on the cultural contributions of Islam has a new assignment -- to write a report on the history of Hinduism.

Bay County Circuit Judge Joseph K. Sheeran on Monday sentenced Delane D. Bell, 26, to two years of probation, with the condition that he pen a 10-page report on Hinduism, the world's third-largest religion.

Last March, Bell pleaded no contest to a two-year felony count of ethnic intimidation, stemming from an incident that occurred Nov. 26. At that time, Bell was standing outside a bar when he yelled "jihad" and "Osama bin Laden" at two men of Indian descent. He then punched one of the men and struck the other's car.

When Bell entered his plea, Sheeran ordered him to write a 10-page report on "the greatest accomplishments of Muslims."

"Well, do you have another report in you?" Sheeran asked an orange-jumpsuit-clad Bell on Monday.

"If I have to do it, I'll do it," Bell replied.

"Do you know why I've assigned you these reports?"

"Not really."

"You don't have any idea at all?"

"I have an idea," Bell demurely replied.

The judge said Bell had been convicted of attacking two men he wrongly assumed were Muslims. He added the victims in the case were actually Hindus. "I want you to educate yourself on the accomplishments of their actual ethnic and religious backgrounds," Sheeran told Bell.

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Bell was back in court for sentencing after pleading no contest to charges of breaking into his sister's house while on bond for the ethnic intimidation charges. The judge granted Bell credit for time served and waived future jail time in exchange for the Hinduism paper.

The judge said he expects more from this report than what Bell rendered in his first paper. "Do you know what plagiarism is?" Sheeran asked Bell.

"Yes, your honor," Bell replied.

"It's pretty much here in your first report," the judge said, adding he'd like to see some more original thought in his report on the ancient Indian religion.

Bell's report is due in one month to his probation officer.

[Cole Waterman writes for *The Bay City Times*.]

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