

Woman pleads innocent to federal charge

■ A judge orders Azalea Cooley to report regularly to officials and limit travel pending her trial

By DAVE HOGAN
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Azalea A. Cooley pleaded innocent Monday to a charge that she lied to the FBI about alleged hate crimes she later confessed to staging at her Southeast Portland home.

A federal magistrate said she could remain free pending trial.

In an information filed Friday, the U.S. attorney's office charged Cooley with one count of making false statements.

The charge alleged that Cooley lied to FBI agents on or about July 7 when she told them "that she had been the victim of cross burnings, vandalism and other racially motivated incidents at her residence caused by unknown persons other than herself."

She could face up to five years in federal prison if convicted of the felony charge.

Cooley, 40, walked into a Portland courtroom Monday afternoon with Stephen R. Sady, chief deputy federal defender, and entered her plea.

U.S. Magistrate George E. Juba ordered her to report regularly to pre-trial officials and restrict her travel to Oregon and Northern California.

The criminal charge is the latest in a string of unusual developments in a highly publicized case.

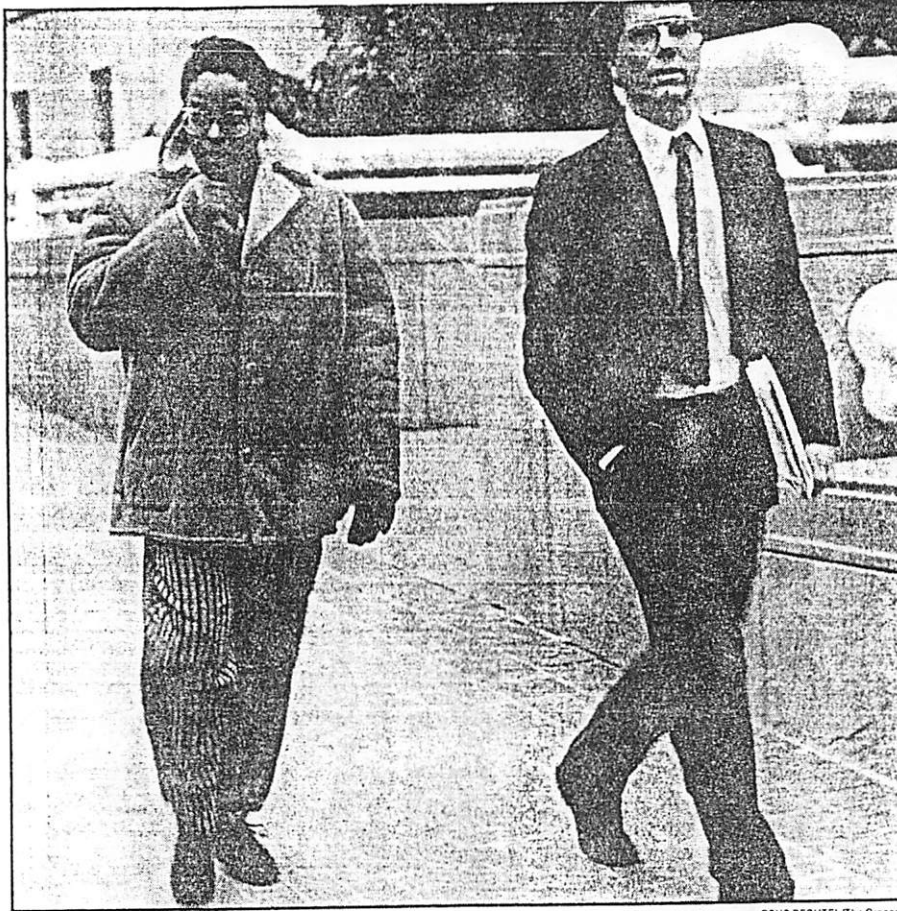
Cooley and her roommate, Susan Soen, reported more than 20 hate crimes at their Southeast Portland home last year, including cross burnings and swastikas painted on the house.

Cooley, who is black, pretended to be confined to a wheelchair and said unknown persons were targeting her with the acts.

The reports caused several community groups to rally around Cooley and Soen and blast the unidentified attackers.

But after a suicide attempt in November, Cooley admitted she could walk and said she had staged all of the hate crimes without Soen's knowledge.

In the meantime, authorities



DOUG BEGHEL/The Oregonian

Azalea Cooley and her attorney, Stephen R. Sady, leave federal court Monday after a brief hearing. Cooley pleaded innocent to charges that she lied to the FBI about alleged hate crimes she admitted staging at her home.

charged Soen with filing a false police report. Police said they had videotaped a person coming out of Cooley's house early Nov. 1 and lighting a cross on the front lawn.

The Multnomah County district attorney's office has since filed two more charges against Soen, alleging that she also filed false police re-

ports on June 24 and Aug. 31.

Soen has pleaded innocent to the charges, which are Class C misdemeanors.

"It doesn't matter how many charges they bring. My client has been falsely accused," Soen's attorney, Emily Simon, said previously.

Soen has filed a defamation suit in

federal court against two Portland police detectives and the city of Portland.

Soen's trial on the charges of filing false police reports was scheduled to begin Tuesday in Multnomah County District Court, but it was postponed Monday to a Feb. 8 court date.

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