



When a black teenager was found hanging from a swing set by a belt that was not his own one morning late last summer, the first thought by his friends, family, and community was that it wasn't a suicide. Lennon Lacy, they believe, was lynched.

Now, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has launched a probe into the death, which the coroner in Bladen County, North Carolina, initially ruled a suicide based on evidence his family says is circumstantial: that he was distraught over the recent death of his uncle.

"It's nonsense. Yes he was depressed, but he was grieving just like his other siblings," said Rev. Gregory Taylor, a family friend who gave the uncle's eulogy the day before Lacy's body was discovered in his hometown of Bladenboro. "In the African-American community where we deal with grief openly and emotionally, doesn't mean we are clinically depressed."

The Lacy death is not the first hanging death of a black person in the South in recent years that the FBI investigated as a possible hate crime, nor was it the last. In late March, when Otis Byrd, 54, was found hanging by a bedsheet in the woods of Claiborne County, Mississippi, the agency stepped in to take over the case. Like Lacy, Byrd showed no sign of despondency, friends said. He was reportedly getting his life back together after his parole in 2006 following more than two decades in state prison for a murder committed during a robbery.

In April his family hired Michael Baden, an independent pathologist, to independently examine Byrd's police, medical and autopsy records. Baden is known for his work on numerous high-profile cases, including the reinvestigation of the John F. Kennedy assassination and the Michael Brown killing in Ferguson, Missouri.

[More...](#)