

GANG ATTACK ON YOUTH LED BY COP'S SON, CHARGES SAY

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The son of a police officer who investigated Detroit's most powerful street gang faces assault charges for allegedly leading a gang attack on a 17-year-old youth.

Michael Saldana, 19, of Detroit, son of 4th (Fort) Precinct officer Daniel Saldana, was arraigned Saturday in 36th District Court on a charge of felonious assault.

Two of his friends, Kenny Bazzel and John Asher Jr., also were charged. All were freed on personal bond.

Police said on the evening of July 2, Michael Saldana and his friends attacked Joel Aquila, 17, with wooden boards at the corner of Cicotte and Edward in southwest Detroit, and that Saldana chanted "Folk Love" as he hit him.

"Folk" is a Detroit gang, and "Love" is a phrase chanted by members when they attack a victim, according to Saldana's father and other gang specialists.

Michael Saldana said Monday that he was in a fistfight on July 2, but said he had never been a gang member.

"I'm not in no gang. It ain't a place for me. I'm in college," he said. As for the charge that he chanted "Folk Love," he said, "I never said that in my life to anybody."

Michael Saldana said he was standing at the corner waiting to use a pay phone when he was surrounded by a group of young men. They were chanting " **Count** Love," and using hand language to indicate they were members of the **Latin Counts** .

He said when Aquila lunged at him, he punched him. He said Bazzel and Asher ran to his rescue, and fought with others. He said when another **Latin Count** came out of his house and said, "Get the guns," everybody ran.

But Inspector Benny Napoleon, commanding officer of Detroit's gang detail, said six witnesses, two of them not involved in either side of the dispute, supported Aquila's version.

Aquila and another man told police that Michael Saldana used a hand signal to start the ruckus, and that Bazzel drew a gun and fired two shots.

As for Saldana's claim that he had never been a gang member, Napoleon said, "If you walk like a duck, quack like a duck, look like a duck and act like a duck, you are a duck."

But David Cripps, attorney for Michael Saldana, said he had not seen any neutral witness statements that Saldana was a gang member or used gang vocabulary.

Daniel Saldana, who is on medical leave after being involved in a shooting incident in March, said he felt his son was being "persecuted" by gang members and the gang squad because of his own 4th Precinct work.

The elder Saldana said he and his partner were instrumental in the 1990 arrest of a **Latin Counts** leader and several gang members. He said police gang squad cars had circled his block and repeatedly questioned his son in recent weeks.

"It's persecution of me. My son is no angel, but he's not a gang member. He gets drunk and gets in fights, but that's about it."

Napoleon rejected the persecution claims.

Caption: Photo GEORGE WALDMAN

: Detroit police officer Daniel Saldana makes a shooting motion with his hand. His son is accused of leading a gang attack on a 17-year-old youth.

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