



Hate Crimes: An American Tragedy

From the cartoon "South Park" to Ku Klux Klan rallies—and from church bombings to school shootings—racism, violence and hatred run rampant in our country.

Young people know this as well as anyone. And often, young people in our cities and rural areas are the victims, the friends, the perpetrators, or simply the hearers or readers of such tragedies.

And sometimes, our young people are the heroes who stand against hate and violence. Two young Lutheran brothers subdued the shooter in the Springfield, OR, school shooting in the Spring of 1998. The girlfriend of one of the boys who was shot and killed had recently brought him to confirmation class at her Lutheran church.

Definitions: hate crime and hate groups

Hate crime is an intentional crime committed against a person or their property because of a person's race, religion, color, disability, sexual orientation, or nationality.

In 1990, the Federal Hate Crime Statistics Act* began to recognize hate crimes as a specific category of crime. By 1995, 37 states had passed hate crime laws. These laws add increased penalties when crimes are committed based upon hate.

Our country has a long history of hate crimes against many groups, such as Asians, African-Americans, Catholics, Hispanics, Jews, Native Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and many immigrant groups. In 1990, the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence predicted that 25 percent of all minority students will experience violence based upon prejudice.

Hate groups are people organized around the common theme of hatred, especially targeted against a race.

Such groups promote racism and separation of the races. Many groups promote or encourage violence against minority groups. Hate groups include groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nation, Posse Comitatus, Identity, White Aryan Resistance, National Socialists, Order Survivalists, and the Skinheads.

But, not all hate groups are white. Some include people of color with ethnic or religious ties.

Additional warning signs of hate group involvement

- Participation or encouragement of violence toward minority groups.
 - Racist beliefs and practices.
 - Hopelessness about the future.
 - Reject traditional American values.
 - Looking for a place to belong.
 - Many have experienced a life-threatening illness which frightened them severely.
 - Desensitized to the fear of death.
 - Support and involvement in other hate groups.
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Why young people join hate groups

1. **Hopelessness.** A feeling of hopelessness about the world and their place in it.
 2. **Racism.** Growing up with racist beliefs they learned in their family.
 3. **Violence.** History of physical fights, bullying, or abuse at home or school.
 4. **Paranoia.** Fear of minority groups or any non-white people. Fear of the end of the world.
 5. **Scapegoating.** A need to blame someone else, especially minority groups, for all the problems in the world.
 6. **Terrorists.** Influenced by other groups and utilize various computer bulletin boards and terrorist publications.
 7. **Extreme religion.** Groups such as Identity promote neo-Nazi beliefs and hatred of minority groups. Some groups even call themselves Christian, but their beliefs and teachings are not compatible with Christianity and the gospel.
 8. **Family history.** Some may have a family history of involvement in hate groups.
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Bible study: hate, healing and hope

The Bible stresses the unity of all people regardless of color or ethnicity. Through Christ, we are connected to all people of the world. The gospel asks that we get along and live in peace with others who may be different from us.

Purchase or design your own Bible study for class or youth group use, using newspaper articles, scripture references, and the questions below as a guide.

For in Christ you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:26-29

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew,

circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian slave and free; but Christ is all and in all! Colossians 3:9-11

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think people hate?
- Have you ever felt hated? For what reason?
- When it comes to violence and hatred, what do you fear most?
- Do you think people hated Jesus? If so, who might they have been?
- The Apostle Paul tells the Galatians there are no divisions among the people of God, but divisions still exist. What divisions are you aware of among young people?
- What does healing mean to you?
- How might healing lead to hope?
- What does it mean to be "one in Christ" and "heirs to the promise"?
- You or someone you know may feel hopeless because of violence and hatred in their life. How do we communicate hope to each other; to the world?

What you(th) can do

- Educate yourself and others about hate groups and their beliefs.
- Be aware of hate groups operating in your area.
- Stand against and stop racist comments or racist actions. Don't laugh at racist jokes.
- Report any hate group graffiti or activities to proper authorities.
- Pray for victims and perpetrators of violence and hatred. Suggest prayer concerns to your pastor.
- Contact people who influence laws and public policy regarding safety, gun control, violence, and fair sentencing. (see the ELCA's advocacy Web site at <http://www.elca.org/advocacy/>)
- Get involved in conflict resolution groups or classes.
- Get to know others who have ethnic backgrounds, customs, and creeds that are different than your own. Befriend youth, including gays and lesbians, who you know to be victims of bullies.
- Give weapon sightings, threats, and innuendoes serious attention. Report them to authorities or teachers.
- Compare hate group beliefs with those of your church. Invite youth and adults to discuss racism, discrimination, and violence using the gospel as a guide.
- Start a peace club or host a "beyond violence" conference.
- Reach out to those who are lonely or vulnerable; invite them to attend your church or youth program.
- Establish a Peer Ministry group that equips young people to help each other with personal problems. (see the Web site for the National Center for Peer Ministry at <http://www.peerministry.org/>)
- Invite a hate crime victim, former hate group member, or other expert to speak to your youth and parents.

Hate group graffiti, symbols and general information

Hate groups come and go, as do their Web sites, symbols, publications, music, and public visibility. It is not unusual for a hate group to have a name, symbol, Web site or music that, on the surface, seems unassuming, normal, or as if it is a community-based, religious, or educational organization. The following Web sites can provide you some helpful information on hate group symbols, names of organizations, and what the groups stand for.

- **Anti-Defamation league: [A Visual Database of Extremist Symbols, Logos and Tattoos](http://www.adl.org/hate_symbols/default.asp)**
http://www.adl.org/hate_symbols/default.asp
 - **[Close the Book on Hate: 101 Ways to Combat Prejudice](http://www.adl.org/prejudice/closethebook.pdf)** (PDF file) ([Anti-Defamation League](http://www.adl.org/prejudice/closethebook.pdf))
<http://www.adl.org/prejudice/closethebook.pdf>
 - **ELCA Social Statement on [Race, Ethnicity, and Culture](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements/freedinchrist/)**
<http://www.elca.org/socialstatements/freedinchrist/>
 - **Media Awareness Network: [Deconstructing Hate Sites](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/online_hate/deconst_online_hate.cfm)**
http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/online_hate/deconst_online_hate.cfm
 - **[Tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org/index.jsp): Fight hate and promote tolerance**
<http://www.tolerance.org/index.jsp>
 - **American Psychological Association: ["Hate Crimes Today: An Age-Old Foe In Modern Dress"](http://www.apa.org/releases/hate.html)**
<http://www.apa.org/releases/hate.html>
 - **Southern Poverty Law Center: [Hate Groups Map](http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp)**
<http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp>
 - **Civilrights.org: [Hate Crimes](http://www.civilrights.org/issues/hate/index.html)**
<http://www.civilrights.org/issues/hate/index.html>
 - **[Stop Hate Crimes](http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/hate_crimes.html)** (hate crimes based on sexual orientation)
http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/hate_crimes.html
 - **[Simon Wiesenthal Center: Multimedia Learning Center](http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.aspx?c=gvKVLcMVIuG&b=358201)** (holocaust education)
<http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.aspx?c=gvKVLcMVIuG&b=358201>
 - **[ELCA multicultural resources](http://www.elca.org/cmm/resource.html)**
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