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## Hate Crimes

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### GLOSSARY

**Defensive Hate Crimes** Hate offenses aimed against particular “outsiders” who are regarded as posing a challenge to a perpetrator’s neighborhood, workplace, school, or physical well-being.

**Ethno-violence** Acts of hate that do not necessarily rise to the legal standard of a crime, but contain an element of prejudice.

**Hate Crimes** (also known as Bias Crimes) Criminal offenses motivated either entirely or in part by the fact or perception that a victim is different from the perpetrator.

**Mission Hate Crimes** Hate offenses committed as an act of “war” against any and all members of a particular group of people.

**Modern Racism** Subtle and institutionalized forms of bigotry based on the race of the victim.

**Prejudice** A negative attitude toward individuals based on their perceived group membership.

**Retaliatory Hate Crimes** Hate offenses designed to get even for hate crimes or acts of terrorism.

**Thrill Hate Crimes** Hate offenses typically committed by youngsters who are motivated by the desire for excitement.

HATE CRIMES are criminal offenses motivated either entirely or in part by the fact or perception that a victim is different from the perpetrator. As used by the FBI and a number of other law enforcement agencies across the United States, this definition has three important elements that have been widely accepted: first, it involves actions that have already been defined as illegal in state or federal statutes. Thus, the vast majority of hate crime laws do not criminalize any new behavior; instead, they increase the penalty for behaviors that are already against the law. Second, the definition specifies the motivation for committing the offense; it requires that a racial, religious, ethnic, or some other identified difference between victim and

offender play at least some role in inspiring the criminal act. Third, the definition of hate crimes provided here does not identify a particular set of protected groups to which the hate crime designation can be exclusively applied. Unlike statutes in many states in which protected racial, religious, and ethnic groups are specified, this definition includes any group difference that separates the victim from the offender in the offender's mind. This broad definitional standard undoubtedly introduces some ambiguity in deciding whether or not any particular case fits, but it also allows for inclusion of important cases that might not come up very frequently; for example, attacks on homeless men that have occurred from time to time in various cities across the United States. The use of an open-ended standard also allows for the possibility that other groups can be added to the list protected by hate crime legislation. Some have argued, for example, that gender-motivated crimes of violence (e.g., rape) should be considered a hate crime in order to place them "on equal legal footing with analogous deprivations based on race, national origin, religion, and sexual orientation" (Weisburd and Levin, 1994, p 42; Levin and McDevitt, 2002). Some 13 American states now treat gender-motivated offenses as hate crimes.

The term hate crime first appeared in the late 1980s as a way of understanding a racial incident in the Howard Beach section of New York City, in which a Black man was killed while attempting to evade a violent mob of teenagers who were shouting racial epithets. Although widely used by the federal government of the United States, the media, and researchers in the field, the term is somewhat misleading because it suggests incorrectly that hatred is invariably a distinguishing characteristic of this type of crime. While it is true that many hate crimes involve intense animosity toward the victim, many others do not. Conversely, many crimes involving hatred between the offender and the victim are not "hate crimes" in the

sense intended here. For example an assault that arises out of a dispute between two White, male co-workers who compete for a promotion might involve intense hatred, even though it is not based on any racial or religious differences between them. Similarly, a love triangle resulting in manslaughter may provoke intense emotions, but may have nothing at all to do with race or religion.

## I. LEGAL DISTINCTIONS

The initial piece of Federal legislation regarding hate crimes, the Hate Crime Sentencing Enhancement Act (HCSEA), was passed in 1994. This statute increased sentencing penalties in federal cases with proof of victim targeting based on race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation (Cogan, 2002; Levin, 2002). In 1994, the Violence Against Women Act was passed allowing for punishment and compensation in relation to federal crimes motivated by gender, promoting the inclusion of gender in the definition of hate crimes in a number of states (Jenness & Grattet, 2001).

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act was introduced in 1998 and in subsequent years in an attempt to expand the jurisdiction of federal officials to investigate and prosecute hate-motivated crimes, broadening both the protection and circumstances of protection. This piece of federal legislation has yet to pass Congress.

Limited federal legislation exists in the United States, but it has been primarily left up to the states to formulate hate crime law. While 45 states and the District of Columbia presently have some form of hate crime statute, there exists a wide variation among states in the specifics of their laws. For example, in the area of protected groups (i.e., particular categories are designated as protected in the statute), most states list crimes targeted toward individuals

because of their race, religion, or ethnicity as prohibited. However, a number of states also include other victim characteristics such as sexual orientation, disability, and age. The implication of this lack of uniformity is that members of a particular group may be protected by a hate crime statute in one community but not protected in a neighboring community in an adjacent state.

A second area of legal distinction involves the penalty structure of the statute. In some states, a separate statute exists that prohibits hate crime behavior. In other states the hate crime statute is a “penalty enhancement.” This means that if an existing crime is committed and it is motivated by bias, the penalty on the existing crime may be increased. Penalty enhancements have been applied not only to hate crimes, but to other offenses as well. For example, they have been enacted in connection with crimes committed with a gun, crimes committed by individuals with long criminal histories, and crimes committed against vulnerable victims such as children.

## II. HATE CRIMES AND PREJUDICE

From a psychological perspective, “prejudice” refers to a negative attitude toward individuals based on their perceived group membership—for example, their race, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Although as a form of discriminatory behavior, hate crimes often have an attitudinal dimension, the relationship between prejudice and criminal behavior tends to be complex. There is reason to believe that certain hate offenses result from some personal bias or hatred. Perpetrators may act out of prejudicial beliefs (i.e., stereotypes) or emotions (e.g., envy, fear, or revulsion) concerning people who are different. In the extreme case, a hatermonger may join an organized group in order to devote his life to destroying a group of people he considers “inferior.”

Where it is cultural, a particular prejudice may even become a widely shared and enduring element in the normal state of affairs of the society in which it occurs. As such, it may be learned from an early age through parents, friends, teachers, and the mass media. Individuals separated by region, age, social class, and ethnic background all tend to share roughly the same stereotyped images of various groups. In the United States, for example, some degree of anti-Black racism can be found among substantial segments of Americans—males and females, young and old, rich and poor—from New York to California. In Germany, the same might be said of anti-Semitism as well as anti-Turkish immigrant sentiment. In fact, a recent analysis of anti-Jewish attitudes in east and west Germany found that strong anti-Semitism remained in west Germany even after “four decades of re-education ... and a nearly total taboo on public expressions of anti-Semitism” (Watts, 1997, p. 219).

It is not, however, always necessary for the prejudice to precede the criminal behavior. In fact, from the literature in social psychology, we know that prejudices often develop or at least become strengthened in order to justify previous discriminatory behavior.

### III. WHY TREAT HATE CRIMES DIFFERENTLY?

Since hate crimes by definition involve behavior that is already prohibited by state or federal statutes (e.g., assault, threats, vandalism), the question is frequently posed as to why we need additional penalties. Are these crimes truly different?

We believe that a number of characteristics of hate incidents make them different from other types of offenses. First, hate crimes are directed symbolically at large groups of people, not at a single individual. If youths decide that they do not want Blacks living on their block, they may decide to throw a rock through the window of a home owned by a new neighbor who is

Black. Their intention is to send a message not just to that neighbor but to all Blacks, informing them that their presence in the neighborhood will not be tolerated.

Thus, not unlike acts of terrorism, hate crimes are about messages. Offenders use a criminal event to put the members of an entire group on notice, by example, that they are not welcome in a community, in a workplace, on a college campus, or at school. By contrast, if a window is broken in a simple act of vandalism, the offenders typically have no desire to communicate anything in particular to the property owner; in fact, they frequently do not even know anything about the victim they have targeted.

Another characteristic that differentiates hate crimes from most other offenses is that the victim characteristic motivating the attack (e.g., race or ethnicity) is in most cases ascribed and immutable. A person cannot modify her or his race, ethnicity, age, gender, or disability status. Even a religious identity or a sexual orientation cannot be modified without causing an individual to make dramatic and painful changes in lifestyle. Consequently, if a woman is attacked because she is a Latina, there is little that individual can do to become “de-Latinized” and thus reduce the likelihood of her future victimization. This is also true of perceived characteristics. If a man becomes a hate crime victim because he is perceived by a group of youths to be gay, he is also powerless to change the offenders’ perception of him. The feeling on the part of victims that they lack control over the characteristic that motivated their victimization causes most hate crime victims to feel extremely vulnerable to future bias-motivated attacks.

A third characteristic of hate crimes that makes them different from many other offenses is that the individual victim typically did nothing to provoke the attack and is therefore interchangeable, at least from the perpetrator’s standpoint. To a group of youths waiting outside

a gay bar to attack someone whom they believe might be gay, it does not matter which individual passes through the door next. Whoever comes out is likely to become a victim, because all bar patrons are identical in the mind of the perpetrator.

Indeed, the interchangeability of victims tends to apply as well across groups of victims. If offenders cannot locate the members of one racial group to terrorize, they are likely to target members of another racial group. This aspect of hate crimes suggests that they are often motivated by an offender's psychological need to feel superiority at the expense of his victims.

#### IV. PROBLEMS IN COLLECTING HATE CRIME DATA

During the 1980s researchers, journalists, and government officials increasingly turned their attention to questions regarding the extent and nature of hate crimes in the United States. At that time there were no national data gathered on the incidence and character of such offenses. The FBI, that agency responsible for collecting and reporting national data on crime, did not collect information separately for offenses motivated by bias. For example, a hate-motivated assault reported by the local police to the FBI would be grouped together with other assaults, regardless of their motivation. As a result, it was impossible to distinguish which offenses were hate motivated and which were not.

In April 1990, Congress passed and the president signed the Hate Crime Statistics Act (28 USC 534). Although it did not criminalize any particular behavior, the Act required the Attorney General of the United States to publish an annual report about crimes that "manifest evidence of bias based upon race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity." This act authorized the first national data collection effort undertaken by any public agency to be targeted specifically at hate crimes. The Uniform Crime Reporting Section of the FBI was

designated as the federal agency empowered to collect and tabulate these data.

Although charging the attorney general with the responsibility for gathering information and publishing an annual report about hate crimes, the Hate Crime Statistics Act did not require that local law enforcement agencies report to the FBI. Historically, crime reporting has been voluntary with most but not all major law enforcement agencies agreeing to participate.

Hate crime reporting was initially a different story. Many agencies had not separated hate crime data from other offenses in their collection procedures. As a result, retrieving these data was not an easy task. In addition, many law enforcement agencies resisted the new national emphasis on hate crime investigation. For these reasons, few agencies participated in the original effort. In 1991, 2771 agencies submitted hate crime data to the FBI, which represented only 20% of the agencies participating in the UCR program. Through significant training efforts of the UCR section of the FBI and support from local advocacy groups, however, by 2004 the participation rate had increased to 12,711 agencies representing approximately 75% of all agencies submitting information to the FBI.

These participation figures may not be as positive as they appear. the FBI program allows agencies to submit 0 as their total count of hate crimes. According to the most recent FBI report nearly 85 percent of participating agencies report no hate crimes occurring in their jurisdiction during the previous 12 months. While reporting zero hate crimes may accurately reflect the number of hate crimes in many jurisdictions, scholars suggest that some agencies, particularly in larger, more diverse communities, are not fully and accurately collecting information on and reporting hate crimes (McDevitt et al., 2003). In 2004, for example, three states reported fewer than five hate crimes: Mississippi (2), Wyoming (2) and Alabama (3). Similarly, a number of major cities reported surprisingly low numbers of hate offenses, such as Detroit, MI (0),

Indianapolis, IN (0), Milwaukee, WI (2), Nashville, TN (5), New Orleans, LA (6), and Houston, TX (14) (FBI, 2005a).

## V. TYPES OF HATE CRIMES

When they read newspaper accounts of an assault or vandalism based on race, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, many Americans immediately assume that an organized hate group was involved. Early reports of church burnings in the South during the 1990s almost invariably attempted to implicate the Ku Klux Klan in some sort of far-reaching conspiratorial plan to destroy the fabric of life for Black Americans, especially those who reside in rural areas of the South. After more careful study, however, the situation appeared much more complex. Although a few cases involved the Klan, it turned out that most of the racially inspired church burnings had little if anything to do with White supremacist groups. In South Carolina, for example, two-thirds of them were instead perpetrated by teenagers and young adults looking for a good time. Some of the young perpetrators had tenuous links with the KKK, if only because they enjoyed their symbols of power or Klan propaganda. But most of the youthful offenders operated on their own, without being directly guided by the members of any organized group, including the KKK.

Like church burnings, hate crimes in general are typically committed by individuals without links to any organized groups. With this in mind, we have suggested a typology in which hate crimes can be classified in terms of their offenders' motivations. In our view, there are four distinct types, which we identify as thrill, defensive, retaliatory, and mission. (Levin and McDevitt 2002). This typology has become part of the National Hate Crime Training Curriculum and is taught in the FBI Training Academy in Quantico Virginia.

### A. Thrill Hate Crimes

Based on a prior analysis of Boston Police Department reports, we found that nearly three out of five hate crimes in that city were committed for the thrill. More than 53% of these thrill offenses were committed by two or more offenders looking for trouble in the victim's neighborhood. Perpetrators were predominantly White teenage males, the vast majority of whom—some 91%— did not know the person they were attacking. Latinos and Asians had the highest victimization rates; Whites had the lowest. One surprising finding was the extent of the violence associated with thrill hate attacks. We found that fully 70% of the thrill offenses were assaults, sometimes brutal attacks that put the victim in the hospital (Levin and McDevitt 1993).

Thrill hate crimes are committed by offenders who are looking for excitement. In the same way that some young men get together on a Saturday night to play a game of cards, youthful hatemongers gather to destroy property or to bash minorities. They look merely to have some fun and stir up a little excitement... but at someone else's expense. In a thrill-seeking hate crime, there need not be a precipitating incident. The victim does not necessarily "invade" the territory of the assailant by walking through his neighborhood, moving onto his block, or attending his school. On the contrary, it is the assailant or group of assailants, looking to harass those who are different, who searches out locations where the members of a particular group regularly congregate. The payoff for the perpetrators is psychological as well as social: In addition to gaining a sense of importance and control, the youthful perpetrators also receive a stamp of approval from their friends who regard hatred as "hip" or "cool."

### B. Defensive Hate Crimes

Not all hate offenses are motivated by thrill or excitement; not every hate crime is

committed by groups of teenagers. In defensive hate crimes, the hatemongers seize on what they consider as a precipitating or triggering incident to serve as a catalyst for the expression of their anger. They rationalize that by attacking an outsider they are in fact taking a protective posture, a defensive stance against intruders. Indeed, they often cast the outsiders in the role of those actively threatening them, while they regard themselves as pillars of the community.

As with thrill hate attacks, most defensive hate offenses in our study of incidents reported to the Boston Police involved White offenders who did not know their Asian, Latino, or Black victims. In defensive crimes, however, the majority were committed by a single offender.

Whereas in many thrill-motivated hate crimes a group of teenagers travels to another area to find victims, the perpetrators in defensive hate crimes typically never leave their own neighborhood, school, or workplace. From the point of view of the perpetrators, it is their community, means of livelihood, or way of life that has been threatened by the mere presence of members of some other group. The hatemongers therefore feel justified, even obligated, to go on the “defensive.” Characteristically, they feel few, if any, pangs of guilt even if they savagely attack an outsider.

In thrill hate crimes, almost any member of a vulnerable group will usually “do” as a target. In contrast, the perpetrators of defensive hate crimes tend to target a particular individual or set of individuals who are perceived to constitute a personal threat—the Black family that has just moved into the all-White neighborhood, the White college student who has begun to date her Asian classmate, or the Latino who has recently been promoted at work.

Given the competitive nature of the workplace, it should come as no surprise that many

defensive hate crimes also occur on the job. In their study of “ethnoviolence at work,” sociologists Joan Weiss, Howard Ehrlich, and Barbara Larcom interviewed a national sample of 2078 Americans. These researchers found that 27% of all respondents who reported “prejudice-based” episodes experienced them while at work. These incidents included break-ins, property damage, robbery, harassing language, physical assaults, sexual harassment, or rapes.

### C. Retaliatory Hate Crimes

Retaliatory offenses occur in reaction to a perceived hate crime. Here, it is not important whether in fact an assault occurred, only that the offender believes it took place. Retaliatory offenders are likely to act out individually, often seeking out a victim to target in the victim’s own territory. There appear to be two major types of retaliatory hate crimes: getting even for a previous hate offense and getting even for an act of terrorism. In a number of communities police have recorded specific hate crimes that were perpetrated against victims because of a perceived prior hate-motivated attack. The thinking is “You got one of us, we will get one of you.” In such cases, particular victims are seldom singled out for abuse; offenders look to attack , on a random basis, any member of the targeted group.

A terrorist attack similarly creates the conditions for retaliation in kind. For example many communities witnessed a dramatic increase in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim retaliatory hate crimes in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington DC. For the year 2001, there was a 1,600 percent increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes reported to local police departments (Schevitz, 2002).

#### D. Mission Hate Crimes

On occasion, hate crimes go beyond what their perpetrators consider thrill, defense, or retaliation, at least in the narrow sense. Rather than direct their attack at those individuals involved in a particular event or episode—moving into the neighborhood, taking a job at the next desk, attending the same party—the perpetrators are ready to wage “war” against any and all members of a particular group of people. No precipitating episode occurs; none is necessary. The perpetrator is on a moral mission: His assignment is to make the world a better place for the people in his circle of friends and family to live.

Those who perpetrate a mission crime are convinced that all out-group members are subhumans or demons who are bent on destroying our culture, our economy, or the purity of our racial heritage. The offender therefore is concerned about much more than simply eliminating a few Blacks or Latinos from his job, his neighborhood, or his school. Instead, he believes that he has a higher order purpose in carrying out his crime. He has been instructed by God or, in a more secular version, by the Imperial Wizard or the Grand Dragon to rid the world of evil by eliminating all Blacks, Latinos, Asians, or Jews; and he is compelled to act before it is too late. Mission hate crime offenders are likely to join an organized group such as the KKK or the White Aryan Resistance.

In our study of hate crimes reported to the Boston police, we uncovered only one mission hate offense among our 169 cases (Levin and McDevitt, 1995b). This result is consistent with recent estimates that no more than 5% of all hate crimes in the United States involve organized hate groups.

## VI. ORGANIZED HATE GROUPS

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's Klan-watch project (2006), there may be slightly more than 800 active hate groups in the United States. The Klan-watch project estimates that the number of hate groups has grown by about one-third since 2000. Most of these hate groups are very small with the average group having fewer than 20 members.

The growing presence of hate groups is hardly confined to the United States, but has occurred around the world. In Germany, for example, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution reported in 1991 that

there were 4400 neo-Nazis in Germany, most of whom were skinheads. By adding in all other right-wing extremist and Nazi groups in the country, this figure swells to approximately 40,000. A 2005 Report from the German Government indicates that this number of right wing extremists has remained stable for the past two decades ( Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution 2000 ).

It should also be noted that hundreds of thousands of individuals in many different countries agree to some extent, if not wholeheartedly, with the principles of White supremacy, even if they would never join a hate group. White supremacist groups represent a fringe element among those who commit hate crimes. In statistical terms alone, the membership of all organized hate groups combined constitutes a tiny fraction of the population, most of whom would not consider burning a cross or wearing a swastika. Even so, the influence of White supremacist groups such as Posse Comitatus, National Socialist Movement, Aryan Nations, and the Ku Klux Klan may be considerably greater than their numbers might suggest. It takes only a small band of dedicated extremists to make trouble for a large number of apathetic middle-of-the-roaders. Today these groups increasingly use the internet to communicate their

philosophy of hate.

The newer organized hate groups do not always come so easily to mind for their bizarre uniforms or rituals. Followers of such White supremacy groups as John and Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance (WAR) have shed their sheets and burning crosses in favor of more conventional attire. They often disavow the Klan and the Nazi movement in favor of a brand of "American patriotism" that plays better among the working people of America. In France, one of the original organizing slogans of Le Pen's right-wing party was the utterly respectable idea: "Two million foreigners, two million Frenchmen out of work."

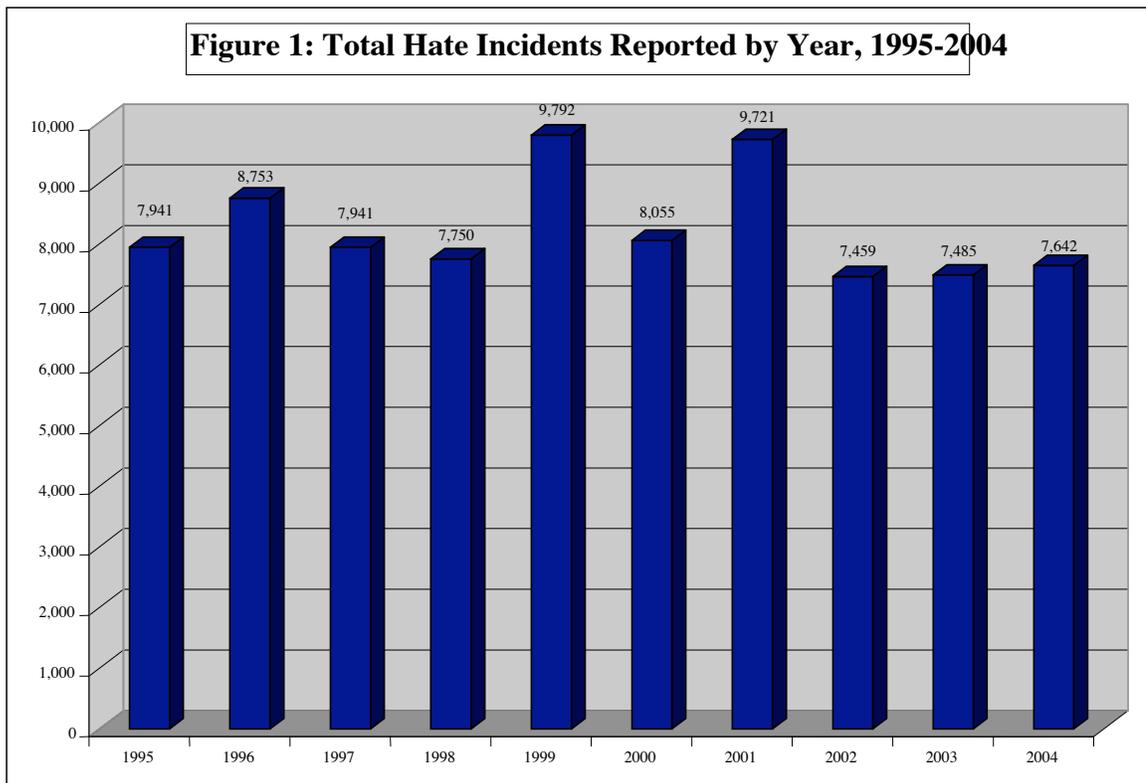
Moreover, White supremacist organizations now often cloak their hatred in the aura and dogma of Christianity. Followers of the religious arm of the hate movement, the Identity Church, are only "doing the work of God." At Sunday services, they preach that White Anglo-Saxons are the true Israelites depicted in the Old Testament, God's chosen people, while Jews are actually the children of Satan. They maintain that Jesus was not a Jew, but an ancestor of the White, northern European peoples. In their view, Blacks are "pre-Adamic," a species lower than Whites. In fact, they claim that Blacks and other non-White groups are at the same spiritual level as animals and therefore have no souls.

It should be noted that White supremacist groups such as the National Alliance and the Creativity Movement have recently suffered a crisis of leadership. Matthew Hale, who heads the Creativity Movement (formerly known as World Church of the Creator) is serving a lengthy prison sentence for his part in a conspiracy to murder a federal judge. The long-time leader of the National Alliance, William Pierce, recently died, leaving a vacuum of leadership in the organization yet to be filled effectively. Defections of members in both hate groups have contributed to the rising popularity of a neo-Nazi organization known as the National Socialist

Movement and a resurgence of membership in racist skinhead groups across the country (Potok, 2003).

## VII. ARE HATE CRIMES ON THE RISE?

Though limited to those crimes that are reported to the police, national hate crime statistics provide a critical measure of the prevalence and distribution of hate crimes throughout the country and over time. Between 1995 and 2004, the FBI reports the total number of hate-motivated crimes reflected in the national statistics remained relatively constant ranging from a low of 7,459 (2002) to highs of 9,792 (1999) and 9,721 (2001—See Figure 1).



Assuming the validity of FBI data, the relatively stable level of reported hate crime is more troubling when compared to other national estimates of violent and property crime (including the FBI's UCR Program) which reported dramatic decreases in all types of crimes over the same period (FBI, 2005).

## VIII. RESPONSES TO HATE CRIMES

Interviews with victims of hate violence indicate that the aftermath of the victimization is characterized by a pervasive feeling of fear. As indicated earlier, the victims of these incidents generally did nothing to bring this violence upon them and thus do not know what to do to reduce their chance of future victimization. Their fear may be based on threats by the offender or friends of the offender but often it is simply based on the random nature of the crime (McDevitt, et al 2001).

In order to reduce fear in victims of hate crimes, it is important to offer them some form of protection from future violence and a degree of reassurance that they are valued members of the community. First of all, community leaders must speak out, condemning the attack. This is important because it sends two essential messages: to the victims, that local residents want them to remain members of that community and, to the offenders, that most people in the community do not support their illegal behavior.

Interviews with hate crime offenders indicate that they frequently believe that most of the community shares their desire to eliminate the "outsider." The offenders often see themselves as heroes or at least as "cool" in the eyes of their friends, because they have the courage to act on what they believe to be commonly held beliefs. Public statements by local community leaders challenge this idea and send a message to offenders that their actions are

not supported or encouraged.

Many hate crimes are perpetrated by young people who do not yet have a profound commitment to bigotry and therefore may be dissuaded from repeating their offense. It is important, therefore, to apprehend youthful hate crime perpetrators at this point, especially in light of the possibility that many property offenders who go undetected may later graduate to hate crimes directed against people. Because what the perpetrators derive from committing such crimes is so minimal in a practical sense, they may be very influenced by a strong statement from society at large that demonstrates that this type of behavior will not be tolerated. There is evidence that the police and the courts (not to mention public opinion) may have become much tougher on youthful hate-crime offenders during the past several years.

The local police play an essential role in responding to hate crimes. Advocacy groups can offer support and encouragement, and political leaders can offer reassurance, but the police represent the only group that can legitimately promise to protect the victim in any future attack. Before law enforcement personnel can effectively offer this protection to victims of hate crimes, however, they must be trained to identify and investigate these difficult cases. The UCR section of the FBI has developed an outstanding training program for local law enforcement that teaches officers how to identify and effectively prosecute hate crimes.

Finally, the most important response to a hate crime, as reported by its victims, is the reaction of those closest to them—their neighbors, co-workers, or fellow students. When a hate crime occurs, victims quite realistically wonder just how widespread is the hatred directed toward them. Do all their neighbors agree with the person who attacked them? Do all of their classmates want them to leave school? Therefore, the most significant reaction for most victims is when members of the perpetrator's group come forward to assure

the victim that they do not agree with the offenders and to urge the victims to remain in the neighborhood, the workplace, or the campus.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Even if they were not labeled hate crimes, offenses committed against individuals because they are different have undoubtedly occurred throughout the history of humankind. Moreover, depending on prevailing economic and political circumstances at any given time and place, there have been important changes in the incidence of such offenses as well. In particular, hate crimes seem to rise whenever one group in a society feels that its advantaged position is being threatened by the presence of another. This was true in Nazi Germany; it was also true in the United States during Reconstruction, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Even large-scale ethnic conflicts such as those in Bosnia and Northern Ireland seem to be based on intergroup competition for scarce resources.

Recent behavioral science research aimed at understanding the causes and characteristics of hate crimes may in part reflect a worsening of intergroup relations during the 1980s and early 1990s, as traditionally disadvantaged groups began to make claims for equal treatment. In addition, however, such efforts to explain hate crimes probably also reflect a heightened sensitivity to violence perpetrated against vulnerable members of society—especially women, gays, and people of color. Because of the recent convergence of new social movements involving civil rights, women, gays and lesbians, and victims in general, we are strengthening our efforts to confront the destructive consequences of hate crimes especially for the most vulnerable among us.

Also See the Following Articles

ENEMY, CONCEPT AND IDENTITY OF • ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND COOPERATION •  
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