

# HATE CRIMES

Hal Marcovitz



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# CHAPTER ONE

## **How Serious a Problem Are Hate Crimes?**

Hate crimes may involve vandalism, assault, arson, rape, and even murder. They can be committed by individuals or groups of people. Some hate crimes are planned in advance, and others occur spontaneously. Hate crimes are, therefore, similar to other crimes that are part of the fabric of life during the twenty-first century.

But what sets hate crimes apart from other crimes are the motives behind them. Hate crimes are committed because perpetrators harbor biases against the victims. An ordinary criminal may select a victim because the perpetrator wants to take his or her money or other possessions, such as a car, credit card, or cell phone. In a hate crime, the perpetrator selects a victim because he or she harbors great animosity toward the victim's social group—often African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Jews, Muslims, gays, or others whom the perpetrator has concluded does not belong in society. “The main difference between a hate crime and other crimes is that a perpetrator of a hate crime is motivated by bias,” says Nancy Turner, the senior program manager for the Alexandria, Virginia-based International Association of Chiefs of Police. “Hate crimes are unique. Victims of hate crimes are targeted because of a core characteristic of their identity. These attributes cannot be changed. Victims often feel degraded, frightened, vulnerable and suspicious. This may be one of the most traumatic experiences of their lives.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Who Are the Victims?**

According to the FBI, there were 6,121 criminal incidents reported in 2016 (the last year for which statistics are available) that

were motivated by a bias toward race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, or gender identity. In those incidents reported by the FBI, a total of 7,615 people were victimized by hate crimes. Some 58 percent of these incidents were motivated by a bias against the victim's race, ethnicity, or ancestry; 21 percent were motivated by a religious bias; and 18 percent were motivated by a sexual-orientation bias. The remaining incidents were motivated by a gender, gender identity, or disability bias. Meanwhile, officials in Canada reported that in 2016, 1,409 hate crimes were reported in that country—roughly a quarter of the hate crimes committed in the United States. (Canada's population is only about 11 percent as large as the population of the United States.) Of the 1,409 hate crimes reported in Canada, 48 percent were motivated by race or ethnicity. Also, about 33 percent of the crimes were motivated by animosity toward the religious beliefs of the victims, and about 13 percent were motivated by bias against gays. The remaining crimes were motivated by unknown factors, according to Statistics Canada, the government agency that compiles national statistics.

**“The main difference between a hate crime and other crimes is that a perpetrator of a hate crime is motivated by bias.”<sup>6</sup>**

—Nancy Turner, the senior program manager of the International Association of Chiefs of Police

Therefore, in today's world, hate crimes are committed against people because of their religious beliefs, race, or ethnicity; because they are gay or transgender; and even because they have disabilities. In fact, in November 2017 an assailant was sentenced to a prison term of three to six years for sucker punching twenty-two-year-old Michael Patrick Ryan outside a convenience store in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Ryan suffers from cerebral palsy, a disability that often causes patients to walk and otherwise move their limbs with difficulty. As Ryan approached the store, Barry Baker Jr. mocked his gait. Then, as Ryan hobbled by, Baker swung his fist hard, knocking Ryan to the ground.

The incident was caught on a nearby security camera; Baker was arrested and charged with assaulting Ryan. In sentencing

# Hate Crimes Committed in 2016

The largest number of hate crimes committed in the United States in 2016 related to race, ethnicity, and ancestry, according to the FBI's most recent compilation of bias-motivated incidents. Religion and sexual orientation represented the next most common categories of hate crimes. FBI statistics are compiled from incident reports submitted by law enforcement agencies around the country.

## *Bias Incidents by Category, 2016*

Single-bias Incidents	
Race/ethnicity/ancestry	3,489
Religion	1,273
Sexual orientation	1,076
Disability	70
Gender	31
Gender identity	124
Multiple-bias Incidents*	
Total	58
	6,121

\* A multiple-bias incident is an incident in which one or more offense types are motivated by two or more biases.

Source: FBI, "Hate Crime Statistics, 2016," November 13, 2017.  
<https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2016>.

Baker, Judge William P. Mahon told the defendant, "You are a bully. You are a predator. You are a coward. In eighteen years on the bench I have never had such tangible evidence of someone's moral compass being so askew."<sup>7</sup>

## Who Commits Hate Crimes?

According to experts, Baker could be regarded as the typical perpetrator of a hate crime: he is white, and he was twenty-nine years old at the time he assaulted Ryan. The FBI reports that 46 percent of hate crimes in 2016 were committed by whites, and 26 percent of perpetrators were African American. People of Asian

ethnicity committed about 1 percent of the hate crimes, and Native Americans also committed about 1 percent. About 8 percent were committed by groups of individuals of various races. The remaining crimes, about 18 percent, were committed by perpetrators of unknown race or ethnicity.

Experts believe that whites account for most of that 18 percent in the unknown race or ethnicity category, meaning that hate crimes are overwhelmingly committed by whites. Moreover, according to Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, a psychology professor at the Stanislaus campus of California State University, most perpetrators are males—usually no more than teenagers or, as in Baker’s case, young adults. “In recent years, a consistent, if incomplete picture of the ‘typical’ hate crime offender has emerged,” she says. “He is young, white, and male; he does not come from an especially impoverished background [and] he has little or no previous contact with the criminal justice system.”<sup>8</sup>

And as the typical offender enters his teen or early adult years, he has learned to hate others. Gerstenfeld points out that very young children do not hate anyone—they play together regardless of race or religion. But over the course of their early years of development, many young people are exposed to hateful environments where they develop their own biases. Perhaps they hear hateful messages from parents or older siblings, find them in the media, or hear complete strangers voice hateful ideas. Regardless of the source, the messages resonate with some young people; over the years these young people are likely to develop their own biases. In many cases, she says, these biases are well developed by the time young people enter middle school. “By then they have adopted society’s prejudices, and they will usually reject members of [other groups] behaviorally,” she says. “You can verify this by visiting the ethnically diverse middle or high school at lunchtime, where you will see the students mostly sitting with members of their own race or ethnicity.”<sup>9</sup>

**“You are a bully. You are a predator. You are a coward. In eighteen years on the bench I have never had such tangible evidence of someone’s moral compass being so askew.”<sup>7</sup>**

—Pennsylvania judge William P. Mahon



## Hate Groups

As young people develop biases, many of them will seek out others who share their prejudices. It is not hard to find them. Many hate groups maintain presences on the Internet, where they spread their hateful rhetoric. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK), possibly the most notorious of all American hate groups, was established following the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery—both in 1865. Founded by veterans of the Confederate army, the KKK initially directed its venom at losing the war toward the emancipated slaves. The KKK has long since ceased being a national organization, but many small groups continue to claim allegiance to the KKK and have adopted the name and symbols of the Klan. Other groups include versions of so-called neo-Nazis and skin-heads, who base their cultures on the National Socialist, or Nazi, movement led by Adolf Hitler in Germany between the 1920s and 1940s. The Nazis orchestrated and carried out events now known as the Holocaust—the persecution and murders of millions of European Jews and others.

A Neo-Nazi gives a speech during a 2018 rally in Newnan, Georgia. Neo-Nazis base their culture on the National Socialist, or Nazi, movement from 1920s–1940s Germany.



Although numerous hate groups exist in modern-day society, most perpetrators of hate crimes are not members of hate groups. The FBI does not keep statistics on how many perpetrators of hate crimes maintain memberships in hate groups, but experts believe these groups are more interested in spreading their hateful messages than in committing actual crimes. In other words, today's typical member of the KKK is more likely to maintain a website, social media presence, or blog to spread the group's racist rhetoric than he or she is to throw a brick through the window of an African American's home.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a civil rights group based in Montgomery, Alabama, estimates that just 5 percent of hate crimes are committed by members of hate groups. In reality, the SPLC says, most hate crimes are committed by so-called lone-wolf perpetrators. But that does not mean hate groups do not play a role in the commission of hate crimes. The SPLC maintains that many perpetrators find inspiration in the messages spread by hate groups: "Many hate crimes are committed by young males acting alone or in small groups, often for thrills. While these perpetrators may act independently, they are sometimes influenced by the dehumanizing rhetoric and propaganda of hate groups."<sup>10</sup>

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—Southern Poverty Law Center

## **Where Are Hate Crimes Committed?**

Whether perpetrators act alone or in small groups, statistics reflect that hate crimes are often committed in specific places. According to FBI statistics, many hate crimes are committed at or near the homes of the victims, suggesting that perpetrators often vandalize the residences or vehicles of the victims. Of the 6,121 incidents reported in 2016, 1,670—or about 27 percent—occurred at or near the homes of the victims.



A typical example could be found in Multnomah County, Oregon. In March 2017, Hasel Afshar arrived home from a three-day vacation out of state to find his Multnomah home had been vandalized with racist graffiti. One of the messages accused Afshar of being an Islamist terrorist. The vandals also left a note at the house, which read, “If I see you here next month, I will shoot you and burn your house.”<sup>11</sup>

Afshar said he was so unnerved by the crime that he decided to leave Oregon. He planned to move in with friends either in Canada or Australia. “I’m not going to be a hero and stay here and fight about it,” Afshar commented. “I’m not going to sit here and wait for someone to shoot me.”<sup>12</sup> Afshar, who was born in Iran, immigrated to America in 2010. Ironically, he is not a Mus-

lim. Instead, he practices the Baha’i faith. Members of the Baha’i faith accept all religions as equal; members seek to live in harmony with all peoples.

The vandalism at Afshar’s home actually represented the second racist incident he encountered in Multnomah County. Three weeks earlier, he had parked his car in front of a grocery store. As he stepped out of his car, a white van stopped along-

side his vehicle. A man in the van shouted, “Get the [expletive] out of America. We don’t want you here.”<sup>13</sup>

That incident occurred on a public street—in daylight, in full view of whatever witnesses may have been nearby. In fact, hate crimes are typically committed on public streets. FBI statistics show that 1,128 crimes were committed on public streets in 2016—suggesting to experts that these crimes are usually unplanned. In other words, a perpetrator may see a person walking down the street and makes a spur-of-the-moment decision to commit a hate crime. According to Gerstenfeld, many of these crimes are committed by small groups of perpetrators. Typically, she says, a leader suggests everyone in the group take part in the crime, and others go along. As Gerstenfeld explains, “These [are] cases in which offenders, almost always young and in small

**“I’m not going to be a hero and stay here and fight about it. I’m not going to sit here and wait for someone to shoot me.”<sup>12</sup>**

—Oregon hate crime victim Hasel Afshar

## Women Who Commit Hate Crimes

Although the majority of hate crimes are believed to be committed by males, incidents involving female offenders are not uncommon. In December 2017, for example, twenty-nine-year-old Rachel Tuszynski was charged with committing a hate crime, threatening a public official, and criminal damage to property after painting Nazi symbols and other racist graffiti on the home and driveway of Roger Claar, the mayor of Bolingbrook, Illinois. She pleaded guilty and was sentenced to three months in jail.

The FBI does not keep statistics on the gender of known offenders, but a study by another US Justice Department agency, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, found that 17 percent of hate crimes that occurred between 2011 and 2014 were perpetrated by women. Another 8 percent of hate crimes included both male and female perpetrators, the bureau reported.

Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino, a professor of criminal justice at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts, points out that men who harbor prejudices against others are typically very conservative when it comes to women: They regard women's roles as homemakers, responsible mainly for raising children and cooking meals. And yet, says Turpin-Petrosino, many of these men encourage their wives and girlfriends to commit hate crimes. She says, "It may be disturbing to some to consider that while hate culture primarily supports traditional gender roles for women as homemakers, child rearing, and supporters of their male partners, it also invites them to engage in violent acts."

Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino, *Understanding Hate Crimes: Acts, Motives, Offenders, Victims, and Justice*. New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 117.

groups, are just 'bored and looking for some fun.' In other words, like many young people they [are] looking for a little excitement, only they decided to have it at someone else's expense."<sup>14</sup>

## African Americans Are Often Targeted

Very often, the victims of these crimes, whether they are committed by individuals or small groups, are African Americans. As the FBI statistics report, about 58 percent of hate crimes committed in 2016 were attributed to racial or ethnic bias. Of the 4,426 victims in 2016 of this form of bias, 50 percent were African American.



# SOURCE NOTES

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# ORGANIZATIONS TO CONTACT

## **Anti-Defamation League (ADL)**

605 Third Ave.  
New York, NY 10158  
[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)

The ADL has pursued a number of programs to fight hate crimes, most significantly crafting model hate crime legislation and lobbying state legislators to pass antihate measures. By following the link for “What We Do” on the ADL website, visitors can find a number of resources on hate crimes, including the group’s list of American cities that do not report hate crimes.

## **Canadian Department of Justice**

284 Wellington St.  
Ottawa, ON  
Canada K1A 0H8  
[www.justice.gc.ca](http://www.justice.gc.ca)

Canada’s Department of Justice oversees national law enforcement efforts in the country, including the prosecution of hate crimes. The department’s website includes a page devoted to hate crimes titled “Disproportionate Harm: Hate Crime in Canada.” The page includes a list of major police departments in Canada and how each defines crimes of bias.

## **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights**

Schwarzenbergplatz 11  
A-1040 Vienna  
Austria  
<http://fra.europa.eu/en>

The agency studies human rights issues in Europe, including the prevalence of hate crimes. By accessing the link for “Hate Crimes” on the agency’s website, visitors can find numerous reports, including studies of anti-Semitism in Europe, hate crimes against immigrants, and offenses committed against disabled children.

# FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

## Books

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