

DEFUSING COMMUNITY TENSION:

A RESPONSE TO HATE CRIMES

Article

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Hate crimes are not a recent phenomenon. Hate crimes have been a part of United States history, partly motivated by racial and religious bias. As Europeans began to colonize during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Native Americans became targets of bias-motivated intimidation and violence. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, legalized slavery continued in the United States after most western democracies abolished it. The Civil War gave birth to groups like the Ku Klux Klan who lynched African Americans, burned crosses to frighten and intimidate black families, and painted swastikas on Jewish synagogues. These acts became the synergy for national hate. Irish Catholic immigrants faced widespread discrimination while mobs of angry whites burned down their churches. The Chinese and Japanese immigrants who were recruited as workers were subjected to legal restrictions and mob violence. Less than fifty years ago, African Americans were banned from registering to vote. They were frequently beaten and often murdered. As Americans deal with the historic pain and anguish associated with these atrocities, realities of lingering violence continued through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>1</sup>

Since the mid-1980s, hate crimes have received more public scrutiny than ever before, largely due to several sensational incidents. Alan Berg, a very liberal and controversial disc jockey from Denver Colorado, was shot to death by three white men as he returned home from work in 1984. Berg was Jewish and his public opinions of those who were anti-Semitic was commonplace on his daily radio broadcasts. His death brought attention to the growing number of unknown white supremacists groups in the United States. In 1988, three African American men were attacked and one was killed when their car broke down in a white New York City Neighborhood.

In 1993 the city of Sacramento was plagued by a series of fire bombings that occurred within three months. The suspect targeted human relations institutions that included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Jewish synagogues, and the State Building for Human Rights. In June 1999, two brothers, Matthew and Tyler Williams, firebombed three Sacramento Jewish synagogues within a forty five minute period. The Williams brothers were from Shasta County and followed white supremacist propaganda on the Internet. The Williams brothers were also linked to the slaying deaths of a gay couple in Redding committed just days before the fire bombings in Sacramento. The Williams brothers were apprehended for the fire bombing and were charged with deaths of the gay couple in Redding. The lifestyle of homosexuality became a new target for hate crime as attacks on gays and lesbians increased. The media's scrutiny on these incidents moved hate crimes up the political ladder at local, state, and national levels.<sup>2</sup>

The challenges facing Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be different and more difficult to track and manage than in the past. The advent of the Internet as a superhighway has provided hate groups a fast and proficient way to disseminate information. Anyone who has a cause, an issue, or a bias can send messages of hate around the world at the touch of a key. The use of websites, on-line videos, chat rooms, and digital audio are reaching large audiences easily and inexpensively. It is giving hate groups the power to recruit members throughout all of society. One of the most unfortunate and impressionable target populations for the Internet are children who have access to hate information without their parents' knowledge. One hate group website, entitled *Stormfront for Kids*, advertises comic books for children that depict African

Americans as animals and refers to them as stupid and not human. Linked to this site is a video game in which you can hunt down and shoot at African Americans and Jews, who are referred to as the antichrist.<sup>3</sup>

The Internet provides a multitude of information for individuals who would not normally have access to something specific. For example, on March 23, 1995, the full text of the *Terrorist's Handbook* was posted on the Internet. This posting included instructions on how to make a bomb, the same type of bomb that was used in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. By the time the Oklahoma bombing took place, three more people had posted bomb-making instructions on the Internet. Over fifty hate groups are reported to be communicating on the Internet daily.<sup>4</sup>

The growing diversity in the United States is also generating a new kind of hate phenomenon. Minority groups victimize other minority groups and Caucasians. In 1988, a Hispanic family moved into a predominately African American neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. The subsequent violence that resulted against the Hispanic family, by their African American neighbors was based on a visceral aversion to social change. The offenders in this case justified their violence in order to preserve their homogeneous neighborhood. They saw the Hispanic family as an infringement in their established community.<sup>5</sup> In 1996, two African American men in Lubbock, Texas murdered a white father of three. The two murderers admitted to police that they sought out a white victim.<sup>6</sup>

According to the 2000 United States Census, the Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority group nationwide, with skyrocketing numbers. The statewide figures for Hispanics show a thirty two percent increase overall. This places Hispanics virtually

even with African Americans as the nation's largest minority.<sup>7</sup> The growth in the Hispanic population, particularly here in California, has generated fear, suspicion, and hatred. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, since 1995 there has been a sixty three percent increase in the number of hate crimes reported against Hispanics.<sup>8</sup>

Accompanying this growing concern is the influx of immigrants coming into this country both legally and illegally. Controversies over issues of immigration, what languages should be taught in schools, the use of welfare and other social services has increased the number of incidents of hate crimes against Hispanics, Asians, Asian-Pacific Americans, and others who are stereotyped as newcomers to this country.<sup>9</sup> On August 10, 1999, Buford O'Neil Furrow shot and killed an Asian American postal worker minutes after he shot up a Jewish daycare center in Los Angeles. Furrow was a lieutenant for the Aryan Nation, a hate group that is very active on the Internet advocating violence against African Americans, Jews, and Asians.<sup>10</sup>

It is evident that hate and prejudice have established a long legacy within this country's past and it will certainly continue in the future. As the United States' population grows and becomes more diverse, hate crimes will increase.

A strategic plan is a long-term, future-oriented process of assessment, goal setting, and strategy building. It maps an explicit path between the present and a vision of the future that relies on careful consideration of an organization's capabilities and environment. A well thought out strategic plan leads to priority-based resource allocation and other decisions that are essential to being successful in the future.

The purpose of planning is to improve the chances of reaching desirable outcomes. The benefits of planning enable an organization to prepare for contingencies

that could prevent it from attaining its goals. This planning process will prepare a framework for the organization's orderly growth and progress, and build a strategy for the allocation of resources in a manner that will allow the organization to meet its goals.<sup>11</sup>

The plan is designed to define strategies. These strategies will develop, implement, and manage large urban law enforcement agencies with the goal of defusing community tension as it relates to hate crimes by the year 2006.

This is a long standing issue in terms of police response to crime. Law enforcement becomes driven by the crime, and the criminal investigation becomes their primary focus and responsibility once the victim has been interviewed. The main difference with a hate crime is the trauma effects more than the person directly victimized. Hate crimes have a long lasting effect on the community. Members of the Jewish community in Sacramento, after the firebombing of their synagogues, felt a sense of discomfort afterwards. One Jewish community member said that this feeling was like a disease that quickly spread feelings of terror and loathing across the entire community. Community victimology is not taught in the police academies or in advanced officers training. Law enforcement's investigative behavior is to focus on the actual victim, ensure their safety and well being, and to go vigorously forward with the investigation once the victim has been interviewed.

Why does this occur? It is law enforcement's nature, based on training and experience, to focus on solving the crime. Law enforcement personnel are not trained to recognize the outside effect that hate crimes have on the community. They are focused on a single victim, one that can be seen when they come forward and say they were

injured by the actions of another. Some law enforcement personnel are still not culturally sensitive, at least enough to recognize the inclusiveness of the community, as a whole, when acts of hate occur. Some officers view hate crimes like they do any other crime, but hate crimes are different. They are generated and motivated out of pure hate for someone who is different. Law enforcement has embarked on training cultural sensitivity for many years. The California State legislature has mandated it. What was missing out of that training was the inclusion portion that broadens law enforcement's representation of all people. The inclusion portion strengthens and enhances law enforcement's communication among individuals and across race, gender, and other diverse backgrounds. It creates best practice procedures and policies that promote respectful, high-performing, diverse, and inclusive organizations.<sup>12</sup>

The city of Sacramento is considered a metropolitan city that encompasses ninety eight square miles and a population of 407 thousand diverse residents. The city has a reputation of being political yet caring for the needs of its diverse communities. The Sacramento Police Department consists of one thousand men and women who are dedicated to protecting life and property, solving neighborhood problems, and enhancing the quality of life in Sacramento. The Sacramento Police Department has built into its organization mechanisms, which reach out into the community and support public involvement inclusion. The department has a long-standing statewide reputation of dedicating itself to a community policing philosophy. The department runs one of three Regional Community Policing Institutes (RCPI) in the state. The RCPI trains law enforcement and community members on community policing philosophy, strategies, and tactics. The department assigns neighborhood police officers to communities to work

cooperatively with its members to solve neighborhood problems and quality of life issues. The department has established a number of working partnerships with businesses and community members to improve working relationships with open communication. They have also established a Biased Crimes Unit that solely investigates crimes that are motivated by hate.

The Sacramento Police Department has come to recognize that two factors can impact crime. The first is the police and its community must work together. The second is that both the police and the community must genuinely care about their communities and the people who represent them. This means that the police department and the citizens of Sacramento must share of themselves to ensure they are looking out for each other. They must all ensure that both the department and the communities are inclusive of all cultures and they take time to respect and care for one another. Moreover, they continue to help educate each other through working partnerships that makeup Sacramento's communities.

In *Hate Crimes: The Rising Tide of Bigotry and Bloodshed*, the authors recommended forming coalitions in order to fight bigotry. Local governments, communities, and organizations need to bind together to fight prejudice and bias-motivated crime. According to Levin and McDevitt, these groups would serve as clearinghouses of information about services, victim's rights, and a focal point for resources.<sup>13</sup> Currently, no California law enforcement agency has a community response team in place that would only focus on community tension.

As the Sacramento Police Department and community bind together challenges will emerge, but they have positioned themselves to meet them head-on. The police

department and the community have already cemented their commitment to collaborate. This commitment must continue so that it may provide a solid foundation for an even brighter future.

A vision, mission, and values statement was created for this article based on current Sacramento Police Department directives. The statements were modified however, to describe the department's progress towards the future.

This vision statement allows both members of the department and community to look forward from where we are to where we want to be. The mission statement describes how the department will work in partnership with the community to enhance the quality of life in the City of Sacramento. The value statement describes what the men and women of the Sacramento Police Department value as core characteristics. The goals and objectives give us direction and a plan of action to address community tension as it relates to hate crimes.

#### Vision Statement

The Sacramento Police Department is an organization that is dedicated to leadership in law enforcement. We raise the bar for others to reach. We endeavor to always be prepared for the future and we embrace the challenges that the future brings with open arms. We are an organization that actively and consistently supports inclusion and diversity. We are dedicated to working with our community members to maintain harmony and equality for all.

Included in the development of the strategic plan is the department's mission statement. The mission statement emphasizes the ideas asserted in the vision statement and conveys the objectives that are necessary to accomplishing goals.

#### Mission Statement

The mission of the Sacramento Police Department is to work in partnership with the community, to protect life and property, solve neighborhood problems, and

enhance the quality of life in our City. We are committed to a vision of the future that is inclusive to the diversity represented in our communities.

## Values

### The Sacramento Police Department Values Commitment.

As a member of the Sacramento Police Department, we accept responsibility for contributing to the quality of life in our community. We believe the character of our Department is best reflected in the quality of service provided by each of our members. We will meet the challenges of the future to provide quality through our shared values and commitment to:

- Serve in an impartial, courteous, responsive, and effective manner
- Maintain an attitude that respects the dignity and rights of those we serve
- Facilitate open communication with our community
- Support inclusion and diversity in our organization and in our community
- Professionalism that is the result of a clear sense of perspective and direction strengthened by teamwork and innovation
- Remain enthusiastic and put empathy first in the public and employee relations
- Promote community harmony, cooperation, and involvement
- Be ever mindful that we are members of the community that we serve <sup>14</sup>

All that we do will reflect a commitment that ensures we merit the support and trust of our community members. <sup>15</sup>

## Goals and Objectives

The Sacramento Police Department is committed to working with its community to create Unity Response Teams (URT):

- Within one year, URT will be developed to assist local law enforcement and the community during hate crime incidents
- The URT will consist of members of local law enforcement, members of the victimized community, local law enforcement chaplain, victim support personnel, legal aide, financial support liaison, and the media
- The URT will respond to a catastrophic hate crime, such as the Sacramento synagogue firebombings, with the ability to mobilize the community in a quick, efficient, and effective manner to assist and support law enforcement and victims of hate crimes
- The URT will promote positive intergroup relations among the diverse community through community service projects
- The URT will bring together people of different cultures, through inclusion training to help in understanding each other and to promote unity among all people
- The URT will serve as a clearinghouse for the community. This will consist of community activities related to improving relationships of all cultures, rumor control, and investigative case status and updates<sup>16</sup>

The goals and objectives provide the framework to address community tension as it relates to hate crimes. The desired outcomes of the goals and objectives represent what we hope to achieve by working in partnership with the community and living up to our core values.

#### Outcomes

- Law enforcement and the community work together to be better prepared to respond to hate crimes
- Law enforcement becomes more inclusive in sharing of information and meeting the needs of the victimized community
- Law enforcement develops a better understanding of the impacts of hate crimes as it pertains to the community as a whole
- Law enforcement helps to remove the communities' feelings of hostility, isolation, and tension that can result from hate crimes
- Law enforcement maintains the trust, confidence, and accountability with the victimized community

The URT will only respond to hate crime incidents as needed. The type of response will be dictated by the level of seriousness of the crime and the impact on the community. The level of response will be determined by the URT leader. Since the URT is composed of mostly volunteers, the type of response is extremely important in sustaining interest by the members of the URT in all future incidents. The following is a breakdown of the levels of response for the URT:<sup>17</sup>

### Level III

This is the highest level of response and should only be used in major hate crime incidents. All of the URT members listed above would be activated to mobilize.

Examples of a Level III response would be a hate-related murder, church bombing, or Columbine type shooting incident.

### Level II

A Level II response is used in those situations that do not meet the seriousness stated in Level III. Examples of a Level II response would be a church or residence that was tagged with hate graffiti or a family that is being terrorized by a hate group. In a Level II response, a smaller group of URT members will be mobilized to assist the victims. The URT leader will determine which members will be included in a Level II response.

#### Level I

There are numerous examples of hate crimes that occur which do not require a major response. Examples of a Level I response are minor hate graffiti by juveniles or racial disturbances between neighbors. In a Level I response the URT leader will have the Victim Support Liaison contact the victims and direct them to the appropriate service providers.

Once members of the URT have been identified, a training plan must be developed in order to educate all URT members on the significance of their roles. The following organizations can contribute to the training plan.

- Law enforcement chaplain's victim support training
- City of Sacramento, Inclusion Commitment Training
- Simon Wiesenthal's Museum of Tolerance
- Grassroots organizations familiarity workshops

In order to develop an effective organized response, the URT will participate in a mock hate crime exercise with all of the agencies and community groups that will be involved in an actual response. This exercise will be video taped so that it can be shared with other regions, the media, and critical stakeholders on how law enforcement and the

community can respond to community tension as it relates to a hate crime incident. The mock exercise will be incorporated into the training plan and participated in annually.

Yearly evaluations will be the responsibility of the URT. The evaluations will be used to determine vital feedback on the success of the URT and to see if the stated outcomes are being met. The evaluation information will be provided to the public in the form of a Unity Response Team Annual Report. Included in the annual report will be synopsis information regarding incidents the URT responded to during the year. Evaluation comments will also be included in the annual report. These comments should be gleaned from the following:

- The participating members of the URT
- The participating agencies involved in the URT
- Members of the community in which the URT served

A measure of the success of the stated outcome will be obtained based on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of those participating in this plan and from those members of the community who have experienced the URT response.

### Conclusion

The unquestionable truth is that hate crimes have been a long part of human history and will remain as a distressing element of our future. From the earliest recorded history to the present there are accounts of individuals and groups committing acts of intimidation and violence against others simply because of their race, religion, physical handicap, and sexual orientation. Every hour in America, someone commits a hate crime. Every day in America, eight African Americans, three whites, three gays, three

Jews, and one Latino become hate crime victims. Every week in America, a cross is burned.<sup>18</sup> As law enforcement leaders focus on the future trends of hate crimes, it is evident this problem is increasing worldwide, and will continue to increase, further heightening the importance of this issue.

As a process of this research, trends were identified that will influence the future of hate crimes. Some of these trends were:

- Demographics are changing. Increases of the minority population will be a source of frustration for both Caucasians and minorities. These two groups will be competing for the same resources that may lead to hostility on both sides.
- The speed and access of the World-Wide-Web and the Internet will present many challenges for law enforcement in the future. The Internet provides a source for hate groups to spread their messages and recruit members. This activity goes relatively unchecked due to increasing number of hate groups using the Internet. In most cases, law enforcement can not take any enforcement measures because of first amendment protections of free speech provided by the constitution.
- The lack of consistent hate crime statistics. In order to accurately track hate crimes, federal legislation must be enacted to mandate hate crimes reporting by all law enforcement agencies throughout the nation.
- Victims are discouraged from reporting hate crimes to law enforcement. The impetus behind this issue is that because some minority communities lack confidence in the criminal justice system they are reluctant to report a hate crime. This does not mean that hate crimes are declining. On the contrary, hate crimes are increasing and it is up

to governmental and criminal justice organizations to link together and build relationships with the diverse communities that hold animosity and distrust.

This article outlined strategies that large urban law enforcement agencies could use to defuse community tension as related to hate crimes in the future. Law enforcement plays an important role in responding to hate crimes. Their actions in protecting and helping the victim at the scene of a hate crime, conducting the initial investigation, and reporting the matter to outside resources, are critical factors in determining the response of both law enforcement and the community to the incident. One of the inherent problems with law enforcement's response to hate crimes is that, in some cases, law enforcement personnel may view a hate crime like any other crime. This article suggested that hate crimes need to be viewed differently by law enforcement. Law enforcement needs to recognize what a hate crime does to a community and respond to the needs of not just the victim but also the victimized community.

As was stated, hate crimes not only effect the victim, but also have a devastating effect on the community which the target victim represents. A sense of vulnerability, tension, and fear can stretch throughout a victimized community. Communities have become polarized, not just by the incident itself but also by the straightforward police response that is perceived as callous and apathetic. This can lead to unrest within the community and distrust of police and government officials. A recent study by Gregory M. Herek, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of California, Davis, suggested the negative effects of a hate crime might last longer than those of any other crime. A hate crime victim maintains higher levels of depression, stress, and anger for as long as five years after the victimization occurred. The reason for much of the distress was that a

hate crime survivor feels a heightened sense of personal danger and vulnerability. This is due to the fact these types of attacks are based on a fundamental aspect of the victim's personal identity. These feelings of personal danger, anger, and vulnerability usually infuse themselves into the community, which the victims represented.<sup>19</sup>

Along with this approach, several other strategies can be studied. These strategies involve the community, the educational systems, and the police. Leadership involves looking towards the future and recognizing the changes that need to be made in order to be successful in the workplace. These strategies might enhance the effectiveness of the Unity Response Teams. These strategies are:

- Diversity and tolerance education – this could target elementary school children to help them relate to others from different backgrounds and cultures. Sociologists have indicated children recognize racial differences early in life and by the age of 12, they have already developed stereotypes.<sup>20</sup>
- Strengthen law enforcement's multilingual reporting and educational services – law enforcement must continue to target bilingual and multicultural police officers so departments can bridge language and culture gaps within our communities. Bilingual hiring notices posted in immigrant communities will assist in this endeavor. By reaching out into these communities, law enforcement can better protect minority groups that might otherwise fear police.
- Community based dispute mediation – conflict management programs provide mediation services to prevent disputes from escalating into larger community problems.

- Legislative/Court monitors – volunteers watch their local court system and legislative body for hate related decision-making. These monitors analyze court cases and legislative bills that involve hate crimes. They then meet with court and legislative leaders to interact and make suggestions.

There actually is some good news. All over the country people are standing up and fighting hate. Schools are promoting tolerance and inclusion. In addition, more often than not, when hate flares up, good seems to erupt as well. In the fight against hate crimes, law enforcement agencies will only have a limited impact alone. It will take the efforts of a community working in partnership with its law enforcement agency to rise above the acts of prejudice and injustice. Levin and McDevitt noted,

The criminal justice system, even when it operates at maximum effectiveness, is limited in its ability to stem the rising tide of bigotry and bloodshed. Solutions that work will require that our leaders lay the groundwork by long-term planning to reduce both intolerance and resentment.<sup>21</sup>

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Simon Wiesenthal Center, *Hate Behavior and Hate Crimes: What Motivates People to Hate?* (Sacramento: Senate Publications, 1999), 2-3.
- <sup>2</sup> Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt, *Hate Crimes: The Rising Tide of Bigotry and Bloodshed* (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), 1-8, 75, 86-87.
- <sup>3</sup> Vince DiPersio and William Guttenburg, *Hate.Com: Extremists on the Internet* (New York: Home Box Office Films, 2000) Short Video.
- <sup>4</sup> Cass R. Substein, "Is Violent Speech a Right?," *The American Prospect Magazine*, (Summer 1995), 23.
- <sup>5</sup> American Psychological Association, "Hate Crimes Today: An Age-Old Foe In Modern Dress." Internet. <[www.apa.org/pubinfo/hate/homepage.html](http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/hate/homepage.html)>. Accessed: November 1, 2005. 6.
- <sup>6</sup> Simon Wiesenthal Center, 88
- <sup>7</sup> United States Census Bureau Website. Internet. <[www.census.org](http://www.census.org)>. Accessed April 8, 2001
- <sup>8</sup> American Psychological Association, 10.
- <sup>9</sup> Karen McGill Lawson and Wade Henderson, "Hate Crimes Are a Serious Crime," in *Hate Crimes, Opposing Viewpoints* (Washington, D.C.: 1997), 17.
- <sup>10</sup> DiPersio and Guttenburg.
- <sup>11</sup> California State Department of Finance, *Strategic Planning Guidelines*, (Sacramento: Department of Finance, 1996) 1-2.
- <sup>12</sup> Captain Richard Shiraishi, Sacramento Police Department, interview by author, Sacramento, Ca. August 9, 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Levin and McDevitt, 79
- <sup>14</sup> Sacramento Police Department, *Sacramento Police Manual of Orders* (Sacramento, Ca: City of Sacramento, 2000), 3
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Captain Richard Shiraishi, Sacramento Police Department, "Crisis Response Team," [2<sup>nd</sup> draft], June 10, 2000, Greater Sacramento Unity Network Against Hate, Sacramento, Ca. 1-7.
- <sup>17</sup> Shiraishi, 5-7.
- <sup>18</sup> Simon Wiesenthal Center, 97.
- <sup>19</sup> Gregory M. Herek, "The Impact of Hate Crime Victimization," American Psychological Association Website, Internet.<[www.apa.org/ppo/pi/herek](http://www.apa.org/ppo/pi/herek)>. Accessed: January 13, 2001. 1
- <sup>20</sup> Bureau of Justice Assistance, 42
- <sup>21</sup> Levin and McDevitt, 1

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