Hate Crimes In America Essay, Research Paper

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Did you know that people with blonde hair have low I.Q.s? Or that people less than five feet tall are more likely to spread a disease? How about that people with brown eyes are really worshipers of Satan? That did not sound very logical, did it? No, you know that people with blonde hair can be as smart or as unintelligent as the next person, that short people are not necessarily better hosts to disease, and that people with brown eyes can believe in whatever they want. Some people, on the other hand, would say these things made perfect sense when applied to a different race, religion, ethnic background, gender or sexual orientation. The idea of prejudice is as old as Mans? time on Earth, that someone who is different just is not as good. When a person thinks like this, it can clutter their judgement. They start to see others, different from themselves, as not even human let alone equal. Violence often ensues. When that happens, we have a hate crime. A hate crime does not necessarily have to be a physical violent act. Words and threats can be just as damaging on an emotional level as a physical blow is to the head. Laws have been passed to prevent these actions, however, year in and year out there are hate crimes against different groups running into the thousands?and those are just the reported incidents.

The most common variety of hate crimes is committed against the African American community. Acts of violence and hatred against Blacks have been seen throughout history. The earliest forms of hate groups often led these attacks, and groups of old are still present today, such as, the Aryan Nations, and the Ku Klux Klan (http://sociology.ucdavis.edu/classes/grattetHate\_Crimes\_Class\_Site/Hate\_Groups.html). Although not thriving as they had in olden times, these groups still exist and have strong followings in many different places. Today, because of their lack of popularity amongst broad-minded people, hate groups have changed the way in which they present their ideals. All too often, hate groups try to pass off their outlandish beliefs as a truth of religion. Using quotes from the Bible and other religious texts and twisting them to fit their image (http://sociology.ucdavis.edu/classes/grattetHate\_Crimes\_Class\_Site/Hate\_Groups.html). They also attempt to draw the youth of communities. During a time when teenagers are confused, and feel exiled, they can come upon a web site of pro-Aryan content and easily be swayed. As a teen there is a need to belong, and there they can feel as though they do belong to something much larger than they are. It seems as simple as the sky being blue, ?These people are like me, and they believe these things. It does not cost me anything, all I have to do is agree with them.? That is where it begins. After years of subtle, and some not so subtle, ?brainwash? a teen can become an adult who would do anything for what they now believe to be truth. The idea that anyone who is not Caucasian and does not believe whole heartedly in Christianity, becomes the enemy. In the muddle an entire race can be downcast, and it was once. In a time when ignorant people were in control African American slavery was an everyday event, beating was practically expected, and they were treated as nothing more than the mule or the dog. As time progressed people realized their ways of thinking were wrong and slowly began to change what had always been.

Still, in our day and age, Blacks face racial discrimination all the time. It does not seem as apparent, after the Civil Rights Movement, many people believe everything to be fine and well. This concept is far from the truth. There were, and still are, Whites who treated Blacks as objects, and degraded them at any opportunity. Hate crimes against blacks have been some of the most brutal of any hate crimes. Beating, hanging, and burning, have all occurred as recently as 20 years ago. Churches of gospel, or more commonly churches whose members are prominently African American, are attacked on a regular basis. Churches have always been the most important independent institution in the Black community, and those who would attack African Americans have often attacked their churches (http://www.civilrights.org/kef/hate/). In the year of 1995 there were at least 73 churches which were burned with hateful intent (http://www.fbi.gov/vcr.htm).

The destruction of a religious symbol is nothing to gasp about in comparison to the things done to the Blacks themselves. ?On December 7, 1995, two African American residents of Fayetteville, North Carolina, were brutally and senselessly murdered by three soldiers who apparently identified themselves as neo-Nazi skin heads. Police said the soldiers were looking for Black people to harass and shot the victims as they were walking down the street. A federal investigator later said, ?This [crime] gives new meaning to the definition of a hate crime,? (http://www.civilrights.org/kef/hate/). ? This is an example of the animal brutality a person can treat other people with. This loss of life was completely needless, and exceedingly senseless in the eyes of logic. The mere threat of such an act is enough to send many people out of their homes, their towns, and sometimes their states.

On Friday, March 29, 1996, an African-American woman named Bridget Ward and her two daughters moved into a home in the Philadelphia neighborhood of Bridesburg (http://www.civilrights.org/kef/hate/). Late that night, Ward heard young people marching down the street, chanting, “Burn, motherf–, burn.” The next morning, Ward, who worked as a nurse’s aide, found racial slurs smeared on her house, ketchup spilled on the front sidewalk and back porch, as well as an oily liquid splattered in the rear. Police patrol was stepped up on her block, and the department’s Crisis Prevention and Resolution Unit, which regularly handles racial incidents, investigated the crime. Ward continued to be racially harassed, including a letter threatening her and her children (http://www.civilrights.org/kef/hate/). Five weeks after she moved to Bridesburg, Ward announced her intention to move away. This type of harassment can be typical in dominantly White neighborhoods of small towns, or places in the South.

?In Fairfax County, Virginia, an affluent community near Washington, D.C., in 1993, a 41-year-old Black woman heard the doorbell ring at the home where she was house-sitting. When she looked out the window, she saw a cross burning 10 feet from the front door,? (http://www.civilrights.org/kef/hate/). In the year of 1995 there were 2,988 incidents of hate crimes against Blacks ranging from vandalism of property to cold-blooded murder (http://www.fbi.gov/vcr.htm).

As racism is such a long running thread in our history, you might not have been surprised to find that African Americans are the most targeted group of people. What may surprise you is the second highest form of hate crimes are committed against the Jewish. When you think of the persecution of Jews you might very well remember things such as the Holocaust during World War II, between 1939 and 1942 (Gaynor, p. 781-782). During those years Hitler?s genocide program had been responsible for the massacre of over 6 million Jews (Gaynor, p. 781-782). The number is almost too large to fathom; it?s the equivalent of killing everyone in Chicago, Illinois (Almanac of World Facts). Jews were pulled from their lives, separated from their families, humiliated, forced to work in labor camps and then were killed when they became obsolete workers. Death came in a number of ways including lethal gassing and incineration (Gaynor, p. 781-782). The entire crusade was in an effort to wipe out a group of people which Hitler, and his Nazi followers, felt to be ?intellectually inferior,? as a whole. This block of history is completely denied by some people, and for others it can fuel the flames of hatred.

In the present day, Jews are still largely discriminated against. Followers of the Aryan nation believe solely in Christianity. Views shared by many Aryans are that of the Bible related stories (http://www.kkk.com). Believing that Jews are really the descendants of Cain, who murdered is own brother, Abel (New American Bible). In that sense, anyone who is Jewish becomes their natural born enemy. Individuals take this too literally and they often act out violently. It is more difficult to tell who is Jewish and who is not in comparison to whom is Black. However, facial traits of Jewish heritage are often used to judge whether or not a person is Jewish?despite the poor accuracy of such systems. In this case, there can be victims who are not actually Jewish but are still beaten or attacked merely for ?looking? Jewish. For the people who are indeed Jewish there is far more violence. They are recognized by the usual everyday activities like going to synagogues or during the holiday seasons for celebrating Hanukah.

As with Blacks, Jewish places of worship are swooped down upon by hate groups. ?In 1995, Phoenix, Arizona, the crime of vandalism erupted. A Maltese Cross, SS lightning bolts, “Dirty Jews go to Auschwitz,” “Sieg Heil,” and a swastika were spray painted on the Temple Beth El Congregation.? Temples and synagogues are often sitting duck?s for pranks and vandalism by youth neo-Nazi?s and other groups. Adults, sometimes, show more hatred in their actions than younger followers, in those instances their actions can lead to death (Biskup, p. 112-113). Their examples can push youth to for more dangerous extremes (Biskup, p. 112-113).

On August 19, 1991, a traffic accident in Crown Heights, Brooklyn resulted in the tragic death of seven- year old Gavin Cato and injury to his cousin, Angela (http://www.civilrights.org/kef/hate/). The driver of the car was part of Grand Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson’s motorcade. The Grand Rebbe was a religious leader of Lubavitch Hasidic Jews. A riot followed for over three days during which crowds roamed the streets yelling “Get the Jews” and “Heil Hitler.” Jewish owned homes, cars and other property were attacked and or destroyed. Yankel Rosenbaum, an Australian scholar, was stopped by a gang of twenty youngsters who yelled “Get the Jew.” Rosenbaum was assaulted, stabbed, and left bleeding on a car hood (http://www.civilrights.org/kef/hate/). He died.

Things such as this are in the extreme of disturbing. The fact that a majority of the local town participated in an anti-Jewish campaign is enough to show that even today the hatred still runs deep. There were an estimated 1,068 hate crimes committed against Jews in 1995, with a total of 1,236 victims a portion of whom died as a result (http://www.fbi.gov/vcr.htm). These numbers are startling, they compare with the number of African Americans attacked, rating second, and they show no physical attributes to tell people that they are Jewish.

The group of people with the third highest rate of hate crimes against them is somewhat knew to the prejudice scene in comparison to African Americans and Jews. Homosexuals have not experienced slavery, or mass genocide, however, they are still one of the most targeted groups that fall under hate crime laws. Many people say that part of this is that homosexuality is a choice. In actuality, it is not. Psychological studies were done on people who believed themselves to be gay and until the 1970?s homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder brought on by an early childhood stress, or perhaps a poor relationship somewhere along the road (http://www.ncf.carleton.ca:12345/freeport/sigs/life/gay/out/menu). After years of extensive testing it was voted that homosexuality was in fact not a disorder, but a natural condition that may even be in place from birth onwards (http://www.ncf.carleton.ca:12345/freeport/sigs/life/gay/out/menu). Today many people still disagree with this fact. Arguments are pitted against this defense with the idea that homosexuality appears unnatural, a lot of people say that physically, ?It?s just all wrong. People were made a certain way, and people fit together certain ways and that is just how it is.? Gays and lesbians are often shrugged off as a victim because many people feel that there is a decision involved with it, a choice to be gay. Frankly, that is like asking to be hunted. If it were a choice between being ?normal? and being ?unnatural? you would think that most people would choose to be normal, if for nothing more than their well being. It is not a choice.

When it comes to hate crimes against homosexuals it is generally a different group of people. There are hate groups, which frown upon homosexuality just as much as they frown upon different races. Where it gets tricky is that gays are not born with a stamp on their head reading, ?Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I?m gay.? This makes it somewhat more difficult to distinguish people who are gay from people who seem gay. Homosexuals are often referred to as the ?invisible minority? because of their ability to blend. There are some exceptions, as seen with the classic ?flamer.? A ?flamer? is a person who is positively bursting with gay pride, they go to the marches, they are not afraid of public displays of affection. The first symbol you see when you think ?flamer? is of the stereotypical gay male with make up and nail polish, wearing outlandish and far too feminine clothes for his own good. That would strike most people as being in monstrously obnoxious, it is loud and in your face. There are not many heterosexuals who walk around with ?straight pride? patches sewn to their clothes or bags. So, the idea of a ?flamer? is a very negative image for gay people. Even people who are gay find flamers to be offensive to an extent, it is one thing to be proud and it is another thing entirely to be egotistical about it. This derogatory view of homosexuals sets up a social stigma. If you are gay, your queer?no pun intended. You?re supposed to stick out in the crowd, and always be making romantic passes at people where they are never, ever wanted. Some men feel threatened, perhaps just for their masculinity?s sake, and can become hostile when there is a miscommunication between himself and a homosexual. Sometimes there are a few short, heated words and then it?s over, both parties a little wiser. In other cases things can fall drastically out of hand.

Almost everyone has heard of Matthew Shepard. Not more than a few years ago his death sparked the topic of hate crimes to blazing flames and pushed the gay rights movement back into full swing. On October 6th, 1998 Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson killed Matthew Shepard (Hammer, p. 40-41). On that night McKinney and Henderson found Shepard at a bar, the Fireside Lounge in downtown Laramie, Wyoming. They lured him into their truck, and drove off (Hammer, p. 40-41). After having driven for some time McKinney allegedly said, ?We?re not gay and you?re going to get jacked.? He proceeded to rob Shepard of $20 and hit him repeatedly with a .357-caliber magnum pistol before taking him to a fence line on the eastern edge of town (Hammer, p. 40-41). Henderson tied Shepard to a post and McKinney beat him again (Hammer, p. 40-41). Shepard remained tied to the fence, unconscious, for 18 hours in subfreezing temperatures before a mountain biker discovered him (Hammer, p. 40-41). He died five days later (Hammer, p. 40-41).

In his trial, McKinney claimed, what was later dubbed, the ?gay panic? defense. He stated that a set of emotions from an early experience with a homosexual molestation as a child had been triggered by Shepard?s flirtatious actions (Hammer, p. 40-41). When his emotional flood gate collapsed he went into a rage and beat Shepard senseless. Yes, his memories of a childhood assault do matter, but if this could be an excuse for man slaughter then why not for everyone? Could women kill their dates if they tried to go too far? Could not someone making unwanted advances be beaten, just because? Most people would not agree, and neither did the judge. McKinney did end up being convicted and having to serve time in prison; the trial is currently being appealed. Matthew Shepard became a variety of ?martyr? for gay rights activists all over the country, dragging the issue out over and over again in an effort to emphasize the seriousness of hate crimes.

Episodes similar to the Shepard case have been seen before, numerous times in fact. Why was this one more highly publicized? Perhaps it was just the timing, people were looking for ways to advocate laws against hate crimes and for gay rights. Other gays have died, been assaulted, had their homes vandalized, and been harassed in many ways without much in the way of media frenzy. Occasionally it is over looked that there are other sides to the laws regarding ?sexual orientation.? Not only are gay men attacked, but lesbians and trans-gendered peoples. What threat do lesbians serve against heterosexuals? None really, but there are still people who believe that different is wrong, and they feel that it?s a direct insult on them, and people like them, when someone just has to be different. Most attacks against lesbians occur from group assaults. More often than not, a publicly gay couple will be singled out, followed and then trapped by a group of young men, and occasionally there are women as well. In these instances the most common form of crime would be physical assault and rape, whether it be forced sex with a male and a female victim or with another female of the opposing group (http://www.fbi.gov/vcr.htm). Incidents like those are what make being a homosexual, or even a bisexual for that matter, a very difficult thing to deal with. Many people have no ability to come to terms with their feelings simply out of fear alone.

Since the mid 1900?s there has been an increasing amount of acceptance of homosexuality. There are organizations that worry about whether gays are actually stable as people. Reports are published stating that gays are always from broken homes, that they carry more diseases than a heterosexual does, that they target children and molest them, and that a children should never be raised in a same sex marriage (http://www.frc.org/net/index.html). None of it is founded, or proven, but these organizations defend the idea of family values?even if they do not attack single parent homes, or divorce (http://www.frc.org/net/index.html). In small town atmospheres where rumors can fly, and opinions do not vary much, there is a very high risk of attack. Normally, in larger cities, the risk is decreased due to the general size and variety of people living in the city. It is not always heterosexuals that commit hate crimes of sexual orientation.

In the definition of sexual orientation, the implied meaning is of all possible combinations, including heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gender. The trans-gender section is something that can confuse people, and is looked down upon, in some cases, by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Trans-gendered would refer to transsexuals, having had some type of body altering surgery, or, transvestites, dressing and modifying ones? appearance enough to be somewhat of a ?gender bender.? These people can truly become outcasts. The idea of wanting to be, or act, so much like the opposite sex that you would change the way you look or the way you?re built, is not welcome in many places. Some would think that homosexuals would welcome this because they are looking for the same type of acceptance. Although this can be accepted, there are times when it is looked at as being a ?traitor.? Not all homosexuals think this way about the trans-gendered; very few would find anything wrong with it. The idea is not a war of ?hetero Vs. homo,? but some view it this way and anyone who tries to stand on the line can be shot down. In the category of sexually oriented hate crimes, it is homosexuals and lesbians that take the worst beating but there are other sides to the story that should be acknowledged. The lack of acceptance from one side to another is unsettling.

People are fickle. One day something is completely intolerable, and the next day someone raises their hand and asks, ?Why?? Sometimes there are answers, they do not always make sense and then the other people start to worry. Lines are drawn, sides are picked, and there we stand man verses man, woman verses woman…human verses human. Everyone knows that they are right, and the other is simply mislead, or ignorant. ?Somehow we must be better, they are different from us and they must be?no, they are mistaken.? It is this point that has plagued man for centuries, and every new century we find ourselves a little wiser after all the hurt. Wars are fought over religions, and human rights, and things that should not be taken for granted, but usually are. In one year, 1995, there were a total of 7,144 acts of hatred committed by a human being against another human being. In reality, there were more than that. Not everyone speaks out when it happens; not everyone reports it. They sit, it scars them forever, and they?re afraid to tell anyone. The fear can come from shame, or spite, or self-loathing. As a people we need to understand that life, and people, are precious. Everyone?you, me, the next door neighbors, the man you never met who lives half way around the world?even if he wo not give you the time of day?are all important. Differences make us unique; they build character. How exciting would life be if everyone lived in the three bedroom home, with 2.5 kids, a dog, a cat and a green lawn to mow on Sundays? Insanity would break out, followed by housewives attacking people with their hedge clippers and children trying to put kitties into the microwaves?just for a change of pace. As a race we seem enlightened, but what we need to work on is the appreciation of diversity in people.

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Youth Coming Out