

Clark, C. (1995, July 4). Action by S.D. Fails to Stem Hate Crimes. [San Diego Union Tribune](#), pp. A1, A11.

OVERVIEW

San Carlos student John Wear was beaten and stabbed to death in Hillcrest, California, as he walked to a coffee house with friends. Witnesses to the attack heard Wear's assailants shout "Faggot!" After Wear's death, citizen patrols were formed in Hillcrest and a dozen other communities in the county. A hate crimes training program was instituted for police cadets. The San Diego City Council passed a hate crimes ordinance requiring police to log bias crime statistics. Community leaders held safety forums and the district attorney designated two deputies to focus on the prosecution of hate crimes.

But [hate crimes](#) in San Diego have not subsided. Since Wear's murder, more than 500 hate crimes—many involving violence—have been reported to San Diego police. Hate crimes have persisted despite the fact that a person convicted of assault may see up to three more years added to his or her sentence if the attack is proven to have racial bias.

Law enforcers define a hate crime as one in which someone uses or threatens violence against a person or property because of perceived race, color, gender, religion, ancestry, national origin, sexual orientation, or disability. In San Diego, victims come in all races and religions, but most are Asians, African-Americans, Latinos, undocumented workers, gays, and Jews.

According to San Diego police statistics, perpetrators of hate crimes are most likely to target blacks and Latinos. However, it is gays who tend to be the victims of the most brutal attacks. Jack McDevitt, author of a book on hate crimes and director of the [Center for Applied Social Research](#) at Boston's Northeastern University, says that gays may be the fastest-growing group of hate crime victims because they remain "the one group that it is still socially acceptable to attack." It is not just gay men who are targeted. Lesbian women or those thought to be lesbian are often victims as well.

In 85 percent of hate crimes, the person who commits the violence is unknown to the victim. Morris Casuto of the [Anti-Defamation League](#) says

that what is being attacked is not the personality of the victim, but the characteristics—one's race or religion or sexual orientation. The rise in hate-targeted violence is leading many experts nationwide to ask who is doing it and why. Some of their findings include the following:

- 95 percent of hate crimes are perpetrated by white male teens who go out (usually in groups of two to four) looking for someone to assault.
- The reason that white male teens tend to commit hate crimes may be that some white teens today feel economically and culturally inferior and may see themselves becoming outnumbered by minorities.
- Interviews with those guilty of hate crimes show that the perpetrators really believe that everyone shares their bigoted views, but that they are the only ones tough enough to act.
- In 1994 and 1995, only 20 percent of hate crimes in the city of San Diego have resulted in arrests, with even fewer convictions.
- There is still a problem in getting law enforcement agencies to report hate crimes because some communities do not want the bad publicity.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Why do you think hate crimes are so prevalent today?
- What do you think is the impetus for hate crimes? What methods would you suggest for curbing them?
- What can teachers, parents, and society at large do to instill racial tolerance in young people?

IMPLICATIONS

- Ignorance promotes racism; therefore, [education](#) is the key to racial tolerance. Educators should promote the study of ethnic diversity.
- Prejudice is often a learned behavior. Parents and other adults need to be careful not to inflict prejudicial views regarding race, sexual orientation, disabilities, or religion on young people.
- Many hate crimes go unreported. Even with tougher sentences for those convicted of hate crimes, the number of these crimes will continue to rise unless communities admit there is a problem and

report all assaults involving racial bias.

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