

# **Borgman, D. (1995). "Hate crimes and free speech in an angry society".**

## **S. Hamilton, MA: Center for Youth Studies.**

### **OVERVIEW**

The continued increase of hate crimes in our society reflects a growing tendency toward inflammatory public discourse. Free speech is abused as the venting of extreme anger becomes acceptable and entertaining in public and private dialog. As Americans we must acknowledge ourselves to be a violent society, a culture born out of rebellion, spread through aggressive acquisitions, accepting the right of civilians to bear arms as part of our God-given and constitutional rights—a culture that delights in violent entertainment. In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, and in view of the support it has found in many quarters, we must consider the nature of the common good, and the style necessary to finding peace and justice, security, and freedom in our times.

Following are incidents of hate crimes in America:

- \* Asians have been targets for mob violence in the U.S.
  - o Notably in Los Angeles and San Francisco at turn of century.
  - o Koreans during the Los Angeles riots of the early 1990s.
- \* Jews continue to experience attacks on their synagogues, cemeteries, and personally.
  - o Leo Frank was lynched in Georgia in the 1930s.
  - o B'nai B'rith reported 1,452 anti-Semitic incidents in 1989 death threats, bombs, assaults.
- \* Black men were lynched in the South until the 1930s.
  - o A Tuskegee Institute study counted 3,383 lynchings in the U.S. from 1882 to 1936.
- \* The widespread rape of black female slaves is an historic fact.
- \* In 1993 three civil rights legal professionals, including a federal judge, received mail bombs for working to improve race relations.
- \* Anti-gay violence has continued to increase over many years.

What follows are examples of violent lyrics:

- \* Lyrics of rappers and heavy metal musicians.
  - o Skrewdriver.
  - o Metallica.
  - o Public Enemy.
  - o Rappers' regular treatment of women.
- \* Comedians like Andrew Dice Clay.
- \* Radio Talk.
  - o Howard Stern's statements about women and condoning physical attacks on gays.
  - o Gordon Liddy, in May, 1995 gave advice as to how to kill federal agents: "head shots, head shots..."
  - o Bob Mohan of KFYI in Phoenix said that Sarah Brady, wife of disabled James Brady and gun activist, "ought to be put down with a humane shot at the veterinarian's."

### **SOLUTION**

Bonnie Erbe is host of PBS' "To The Contrary," a legal affairs correspondent for the Mutual/NBC Radio networks, and a Scripps Howard News Service columnist. She writes (an article that included some of the facts above, May 1995):

The solution? Each of us must re-embrace civility, even those of us who never abandoned it. We must try to become more flexible and encourage everyone we know to do likewise. We must use the bully pulpit of our own lives to discourage hate and encourage tolerance. We must shun those who preach rigidity and intolerance—on the left or the right—and once again become a country where free speech does not translate into unmitigated incivility.

Otherwise, we are likely to see a second Oklahoma City sooner rather than later.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Do you think hate speech and hate crimes are related?
2. What evidences of hate speech and hate crimes would you add?
3. Do you agree that America is a violent society? If so, why?
4. Why are so many Americans angry these days?
5. Do you agree with the columnist's (Bonnie Erbe) conclusion? What would you add?

Dean Borgman cCYS