

# Hate crimes are not a serious problem

Sociology, Violence



In his 1999 article for the New York Times, Andrew Sullivan makes a peculiar argument about hate, hate crimes, and society's way of dealing with them. Sullivan begins his article by seemingly trying to comprehend what motivated some of the most gruesome, senseless, and brutal hate crime killings in recent US history. Sullivan concludes his introductory paragraph by stating that, for all of the society's definitions of hate, people still do not really understand it and are thus unable to approach and resolve the problem of hate in a meaningful way.

In the sections that follow, Sullivan argues that hate is far less clear a concept than prejudice, bigotry, or bias. He questions whether hate is meant to stand in for all of these concepts or represent a combination of them. Here, Sullivan makes a mistake of making a false dichotomy. He argues that, if the hate encompasses everything from the above, then the fight against it is quixotic or meaningless. If, on the other hand, hate refers to a specific object, then fighting against it would be unconstitutional. There are a lot more ways to categorize hateful behavior and subsequently deal with it than Sullivan would have his readers believe.

Western society is becoming increasingly more complex. Among other things, this means that hate has evolved and so should our understanding of it. Throughout his article, Sullivan argues that figuring out what is hateful and what is not was a lot easier in the "good old days". Because it is hard to determine the delicate boundaries between hate, prejudice, bias, and anger, Sullivan thinks people should just grow a thicker skin and embrace hateful and racist behavior as daily parts of their lives. I strongly disagree with this sentiment, especially now, when the society is divided more than it has ever

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been before. Instead of giving any kind of hate a free pass, as Sullivan would seemingly have us do, our legislators, media, and ordinary citizens should strive to mitigate it as much as possible, if not eradicate it altogether.

## **Hate Crime Laws Are Unnecessary**

This article is taken from Robert H. Knight's testimony before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and is in relation to the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999. Knight testified as a representative of The Family Research Council and argued against the said law on grounds that it would give too much power to the federal government and infringe upon the right of free speech. In reality, the law was meant to give the Federal Government greater power in fighting hate crime. As Knight saw it, the law created special classes of victims and provided them with a higher level of protection than those who did not fall under these specially created classes.

As Knight sees it, the law would compromise free speech and equate it with hate speech. Knight brings to mention the popular novel 1984 and the concept of thought policing. While the author brings some insightful points in their article, drawing this kind of comparison is patently absurd. Knight seems to be especially concerned with the "normalization" of homosexuality, as he returns to this issue several times throughout the article. The said law, according to Knight, would make it a federal offense to say anything negative about homosexuality. Indeed, Knight states that "homosexual activists have characterized even mild formulations of opposing views as a proximate cause of violence". Having in mind how terribly homosexual had been treated in the past, I really have no objection with

laws that would provide extra protection for them. Knight also bashes NGO agencies that are dedicated to gathering statistics pertaining to violence against the homosexual population. In the article, Knight dismisses their data as inconsistent and plainly wrong. In the final analysis, Knight seems to be bothered by the fact that homosexuality had begun to enter the mainstream of American society. He seems to be bothered by this a lot more than the actual law he is testifying against.

As its title implies, the third article argues that the current legislature is more than enough to deal with all violent crimes, including hate crimes. The article was written by Fred Dickey and originally published in the Los Angeles Times Magazine in 2000. Like previous authors, Dickey also begins his article with an anecdote involving an angry white man who had been convicted of hate crimes against women. As it turns out, Billy McCall, is an unstable individual who is prone to lash out and attack indiscriminately in his fits of rage. Dickey uses McCall as an example of the relative inefficiency of hate crime statutes and uses his case to argue against expanding the legal definition of hate crimes.

The core of Dickey's article is the author's claim that hate crimes laws are a product of good intentions that ultimately do more harm than good. The author states that this kind of legislature is ostensibly aimed at punishing terrorists and high-profile hate crimes. Instead, the main offenders consist of poor and uneducated people who are more prone to "throwing punches than bombs". Basically, Dickey believes that the people who are most likely to be prosecuted for hate crimes will not even be aware that this kind of

legislature exists. Furthermore, Dickey echoes Robert H. Knight's statement about thought policing by claiming that prosecutors will go out of their way to link the offenders with racist beliefs and behavior.

While Dickey actually makes some really solid points in his article, I am still left unconvinced that US judiciary system should just ignore the fact that many of the violent crimes that happen are indeed motivated by hate towards "others". Even though the expanded legislature may very well fail as a deterrent, it will still put the violent and hateful behind the bars.