

Embracing Multiculturalism: Addressing Hate Crimes

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The term “hate crime” was coined in the 1980’s by journalists and policy advocates who needed language to describe a series of incidences targeting African-Americans, Asians, and Jews. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines hate crimes as “a criminal offense committed against a person, property, or society that is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin.”

Some people think racism and other forms of hatred ended with the abolition of slavery and the end of the Holocaust. Remember the 1998 assault and murder of Matthew Shepard near Laramie, Wyoming? Or the anti-Semitic attack on Chaim Spear in Brooklyn, New York, in 2000? What about current events involving the Jena 6, Madonna Constantine, Megan Williams, and even hate crimes on ISU’s own campus? The recent flurry of hate crimes in the United States gives us reason to pause and think about our society, the experiences of people from our own and other cultural groups, and what can be done to encourage a community where multiculturalism is truly valued.

What can I do, you ask? As a member of the ISU community, you have the opportunity and a responsibility to:

1. Educate yourself and others about hate crimes and violence targeted at members of specific groups – in the United States, the world at large, and in our own community.
2. Be aware of hate groups operating in your community or hometown.
3. Be clear that you will not tolerate racist/sexist/homophobic comments or actions. Don't laugh at racist/sexist/homophobic jokes.

4. Report any hate group graffiti or activities to authorities.
5. Get involved in conflict resolution groups or classes. You may also wish to become involved with peace and justice communities, which help raise public awareness and support for initiatives that empower those affected by injustice, and engage community members in social justice activism.
6. Get to know others who have ethnic backgrounds, customs, sexual orientations, creeds, and worldviews that are different than your own.
7. Take a stand. Get involved in peaceful demonstrations against racism, hatred, violence, and ignorance. Sign a pledge. Send letters.

You have many opportunities to make a significant and remarkable impact on the world. How will you make a difference?

Let us put our minds together and see what kind of life we can make for our children.

-- Sitting Bull (Dakota Sioux Chief, c. 1834-1890)