

UNIT

Teaching About Hate Crimes and Their Impacts

Overview

About This Current Events Unit

This unit is designed to help students learn what hate crimes are and the impacts they have on both individuals and communities, including schools. The lessons also help students understand current trends in hate crimes, types of perpetrator behavior, actions that can help prevent hate crimes, and community initiatives that foster belonging. These resources were created in partnership with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), part of the New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor’s Community Affairs Unit.

Essential Questions

These resources help students explore questions surrounding the impact of hate crimes, including:

- What makes hate crimes different from other crimes?
- How do hate crimes impact both individuals and communities?
- What do we know about the types of motives behind hate crimes, and how can this knowledge help with the prevention of hate crimes?
- How can communities work together to foster belonging and counteract hate?

Additional Context & Background

A hate crime is a crime that is motivated, at least in part, by bias. At the federal level, hate crimes include crimes that are committed because of the victim’s real or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Most states have hate crime laws as well, and the characteristics protected by state laws vary. For example, New York includes age in addition to all the characteristics listed above, while Alabama includes only race, color, national origin, and disability.

Hate crimes can have a devastating impact, not only on survivors of the crimes but also on people who share an identity with the victim and on the health of communities as a whole. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, a hate crime “is more than an assault on the victim’s physical well-being. It is an assault on the victim’s essential human worth. A person who has been singled out for victimization based on some group characteristic—such as race, religion, or national origin—has, by that very act, been deprived of the right to participate in the life of the community on an equal footing for reasons that have nothing to do with what the victim did but everything to do with who the victim is.”¹

As the number of hate crimes committed in the United States increases, students need tools for processing news of hate crimes, understanding their impacts, and exploring how we can build strong communities that foster belonging.

Preparing to Teach

Teaching Note 1: Teaching Emotionally Challenging Content

In this unit, students will encounter descriptions of hate crimes and their impacts on people and communities. While we have chosen examples that we believe convey the seriousness of these crimes without being overly graphic, this topic is emotionally challenging and can elicit a range of emotional responses from students. We can’t emphasize enough the importance of previewing the resources in this curriculum to make sure they are appropriate for the intellectual and emotional needs of your students.

It is difficult to predict how students will respond to such challenging content. One student may respond with emotion to an account or source, while others may not find it powerful in the same way. In addition, different people demonstrate emotion in different ways. Some students will be silent. Some may laugh. Some may not want to talk. Some may take days to process difficult stories. For some, a particular firsthand account may be incomprehensible; for others, it may be familiar.

We urge teachers to create space for students to have a range of reactions and emotions, while also holding students accountable to your class norms. This might include allowing time for silent reflection or writing in journals, as well as facilitating structured discussions

¹ Amicus curiae brief of the American Civil Liberties Union, *Wisconsin v. Mitchell*, 1993, cited in Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls, Controversies*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2017).

to help students process content together. Some students will not want to share their reactions to emotionally challenging content in class, and teachers should respect that in discussions. For their learning and emotional growth, it is crucial to allow for a variety of student responses to emotionally challenging content.

Teaching Note 2: Offensive and Dehumanizing Language

A reading in Activity 2 of Lesson 4 of this unit contains offensive images and slurs, including the n-word and a homophobic slur, the f-word. We advise against reading the racist and homophobic terms in this text aloud. Students/teachers could instead use the substitutions “F” or “the f-word” and “N” or “the n-word” if saying these aloud.

In life and in school, many students will encounter language that has been used historically to perpetuate racism and/or dehumanize people. Such language might be used to intentionally cause offense, and it might also be something they encounter in lessons, when reading literature or historical texts.

Teaching a text that includes racist or homophobic slurs or other derogatory words can elicit fear and anxiety in educators. As educators, we know that unless we prepare to address language with intention and care, we risk causing harm and creating inhospitable classroom environments where students may feel like they do not belong and where they cannot learn. Some racist and dehumanizing terms, such as the n-word, have the power to destabilize a classroom environment if they are encountered without adequate preparation or groundwork. In her talk [“Why It’s So Hard to Talk about the ‘N’ Word,”](#) Dr. Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor states: “I hear from students that when the word is said during a lesson without discussion and context, it poisons the entire classroom environment; the trust between student and teacher is broken” (11:31).

Such terms can also make students who belong to the targeted groups feel uncomfortable and singled out. In her talk, Stordeur Pryor goes on to say: “My black students tell me that when the word is spoken or quoted in class, they feel like a giant spotlight is shining on them” (12:32).

The dehumanizing power and loaded history of the n-word cannot be ignored, nor can the impact it may have on students if not handled sensitively. If it appears in texts or resources that are being used, it is necessary to acknowledge it, understand its problematic nature, and set guidelines for students when reading aloud or quoting from the text. Otherwise, the presence of this word might both harm students and distract them from an open

discussion on a particular topic. We can benefit from applying this same understanding and approach whenever students encounter dehumanizing language in the course of learning. If you realize that you will be asking students to hear, process, and discuss passages with dehumanizing language on a regular basis, however, it is important to reflect on the purpose of the text and its cost to students' emotional well-being.

As always when discussing sensitive topics that may provoke feelings of fear, anger, or concern, it is helpful to revisit your [class contract](#) and remind students of your classroom norms for respectful and safe discussion.

Explore the Resources

Mini-Lessons in This Unit:

1. What Makes Hate Crimes Different From Other Crimes?

In the first mini-lesson in a five-part series, students learn about what hate crimes are and how they can take care of themselves and others while learning about hate crimes.

2. How Do Hate Crimes Impact People and Communities?

In the second mini-lesson in a five-part series, students learn about the impact hate crimes have on people and communities, and the importance of fostering belonging in our communities.

3. Who Are the Victims and Perpetrators of Hate Crimes?

In the third mini-lesson in a five-part series, students explore the data on survivors of hate crimes, as well as research on the motives and behavior of perpetrators.

4. How Do Hate Crimes Impact Schools?

In the fourth mini-lesson in a five-part series, students learn about the impact a hate crime committed by a group of high school seniors had on their school.

5. How Can People Promote Belonging in Their Communities?

In the fifth mini-lesson in a five-part series, students learn about community initiatives that promote belonging and counteract hate.

Additional Resources:

[Explainer: What Is a Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?](#)

This explainer helps students understand what hate crimes are, the impact they can have on individuals and communities, and what we know about the victims and perpetrators of hate crimes.

[Teaching in the Wake of Violence](#)

This mini-lesson contains strategies and activities for supporting your students in the immediate aftermath of violent events targeted at people because of their identities.

[Trauma-Informed Teaching in Action: An Expert Interview](#)

This article shares insights from two experts on how to bring trauma-informed practices to the classroom in addition to teaching from an equity-centered lens.

MINI-LESSON

1. What Makes Hate Crimes Different from Other Crimes?

Overview

About This Mini-Lesson

This is the first mini-lesson in a five-part series on hate crimes and their impacts, created in partnership with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), part of the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

In this mini-lesson, students learn about what hate crimes are and what makes them different from other types of crime. They also consider how they can take care of themselves and others throughout this unit.

What's Included

This lesson uses the following student material:

- Explainer: [What Is a Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?](#)

Additional Context & Background

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Some actions that are motivated by hate do not meet the legal definition of a hate crime, but these acts of hate are still harmful to victims. For example, hate speech includes words

¹ Brian Levin et al., "[Report to the Nation: 2020s – Dawn of a Decade of Rising Hate](#)," Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, California State University, San Bernardino (2022).

or symbols that are intended to degrade, humiliate, or spread hatred against an individual or group of people because of their characteristics or identity. Because speech is protected by the US Constitution unless it causes immediate danger, most hate speech is legal. However, even when it is allowed by the law, it can still harm those it targets and make it more likely that people will commit hate crimes.

Nearly two-thirds of hate crime assaults are committed by people under the age of 25. While most people who commit hate crimes are not members of hate groups, they are often influenced by the hateful ideas these groups spread.² The researchers Jack McDevitt, Jack Levin, Jim Nolan, and Susan Bennett divide hate crimes into four different types depending on what motivates the people who commit them. Hate crimes sometimes fall under more than one of these categories. The following is a description of the categories the researchers developed.

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- **A “leader”** who instigates the crime and may demonstrate more bias than other group members
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Type 2: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that the victim is invading “their” space or taking resources that should be reserved for their own identity group. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech, and they are often teens or young adults.

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Lesson Plan

Activities

1. What Are Hate Crimes?

Distribute the explainer [What Is a Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?](#) Read the first section aloud as a class. Then ask students:

- According to what you learned, what is the difference between a hate crime and other types of crime? For example, what would be the difference between property damage that is a hate crime and property damage that is not?
- Why do you think hate crimes are punished differently than other crimes?

2. How Can We Take Care of Ourselves and Others Throughout This Unit?

Hate crimes can be an emotionally challenging topic for students to learn about. Before teaching the following lessons in this unit, take time to either create a class contract using our [Contracting](#) teaching strategy or to revisit the norms in your existing contract with your students.

Provide students with a list of feeling words, such as the following:

- Angry
- Confused
- Curious
- Nervous
- Numb
- “Nothing”
- Eager
- Reluctant
- Frightened
- Sad
- Frustrated

Ask students to respond to the question below using feelings from the list you provided or other ones. You may wish to give them the option to share their responses anonymously (for example, in a word cloud).

What feelings are you carrying with you after reading and talking about hate crimes?

Then discuss the following questions as a class:

- Are there actions you would like to take to help you take care of yourself and process what you learn about hate crimes?
- What do we need from each other to create a safe and brave space for our conversations about hate crimes and their impacts?
- How can our class norms help us hold meaningful conversations on this topic?

3. Final Reflection

Ask students to write their response to the following question on an [exit ticket](#):

What is one norm from our contract that you think will be especially helpful throughout this unit and why?

MINI-LESSON

2. How Do Hate Crimes Impact People and Communities?

Overview

About This Mini-Lesson

This is the second mini-lesson in a five-part series on hate crimes and their impacts, created in partnership with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), part of the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

In this lesson, students learn about the impact hate crimes have on people and communities and the importance of fostering belonging in our communities.

What's Included

This lesson uses the following student material:

- Explainer: [What Is a Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?](#)

Additional Context & Background

A hate crime is a crime that is motivated, at least in part, by bias. At the federal level, hate crimes include crimes that are committed because of the victim's real or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Most states have hate crime laws as well, and the characteristics protected by state laws vary. For example, New York includes age in addition to all the characteristics listed above, while Alabama includes only race, color, national origin, and disability. While collecting information is challenging, the overall number of hate crimes appears to be increasing in the United States.¹

Some actions that are motivated by hate do not meet the legal definition of a hate crime, but these acts of hate are still harmful to victims. For example, hate speech includes words or symbols that are intended to degrade, humiliate, or spread hatred against an individual

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or group of people because of their characteristics or identity. Because speech is protected by the US Constitution unless it causes immediate danger, most hate speech is legal. However, even when it is allowed by the law, it can still harm those it targets and make it more likely that people will commit hate crimes.

Nearly two-thirds of hate crime assaults are committed by people under the age of 25. While most people who commit hate crimes are not members of hate groups, they are often influenced by the hateful ideas these groups spread.² The researchers Jack McDevitt, Jack Levin, Jim Nolan, and Susan Bennett divide hate crimes into four different types depending on what motivates the people who commit them. Hate crimes sometimes fall under more than one of these categories. The following is a description of the categories the researchers developed.

Type 1: The most common type of hate crime is committed by a group of perpetrators, often teens or young adults, who are seeking excitement and to feel momentarily powerful. They select victims from a different identity group that they believe are vulnerable. According to the researchers, this type of hate crime can involve the following people:

- **A “leader”** who instigates the crime and may demonstrate more bias than other group members
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Type 2: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that the victim is invading “their” space or taking resources that should be reserved for their own identity group. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech, and they are often teens or young adults.

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Type 4: This type of hate crime is the least common but most deadly. Perpetrators believe that they are “crusaders” and are deeply committed to their prejudiced beliefs. They seek to eradicate the group they target and often kill multiple people at once. The perpetrator usually commits the crime alone but is often influenced by—or a member of—a hate group. These perpetrators are usually young adults or adults.

Hate crimes can have a devastating impact, not only on survivors of the crimes but also on people who share—or are perceived as sharing—an aspect of their identity with the victim and on the health of communities as a whole. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, a hate crime “is more than an assault on the victim’s physical well-being. It is an assault on the victim’s essential human worth. A person who has been singled out for victimization based on some group characteristic—such as race, religion, or national origin—has, by that very act, been deprived of the right to participate in the life of the community on an equal footing for reasons that have nothing to do with what the victim did but everything to do with who the victim is.”³

Preparing to Teach

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time for silent reflection or writing in journals, as well as facilitating structured discussions to help students process content together. Some students will not want to share their reactions to emotionally challenging content in class, and teachers should respect that in discussions. For their learning and emotional growth, it is crucial to allow for a variety of student responses to emotionally challenging content.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. How Do the Impacts of Hate Crimes Differ from the Impacts of Other Crimes?

Read the following two crime scenarios as a class:

Scenario 1: A woman drives to the grocery store and parks her car outside. When she comes out again, her car windows have all been smashed. Nothing is stolen. The perpetrator is arrested and tried for property destruction. There is no evidence that the attack was motivated by bias.

Scenario 2: A woman drives to the grocery store and parks her car outside. When she comes out again, her car windows have all been smashed, and the car is spray-painted with a racial slur that targets her identity, as well as the phrase “You don’t belong here.” Nothing is stolen. The perpetrator is arrested and tried for a hate crime as well as property destruction.

Ask your students:

- How might both of these crimes impact the victim in similar ways?
- How might the impact on the victim be different between these two crimes?

2. How Do People Describe the Impacts of Hate Crimes?

Ask your students to read through the three quotes in section 2 (“How Do Hate Crimes Impact People and Communities?”) of [the explainer](#) in their small groups.

Students should discuss the questions that follow each quote:

- **Quote 1:** Why do you think the two men said they would be less afraid if the perpetrator had burned a sports flag instead of their gay pride flag?
- **Quote 2:** How can hate crimes make it difficult for the victims to feel like full participants in their communities?
- **Quote 3:** How can hate crimes impact people who were not directly targeted but who do share an aspect of their identity with the victim?

When students have finished discussing in their groups, ask for volunteers to share aspects of their discussion with the class.

3. Final Reflection

Ask students to write their response to the following question on an [exit ticket](#):

How can hate crimes make it more difficult for the people who are impacted to feel a sense of belonging in their communities?

Extension: New York Connections

In addition to the examples in section 2 of [the explainer](#) that students read in Activity 2, ask your students to read and discuss the following examples from news stories:

1. Flayton [who is 20] sometimes takes off his yarmulke [small round cap] when he goes out on the streets in New York. He's seen the attacks against people in his own Brooklyn neighborhood, people targeted for being visibly Jewish, and takes the decision with a heavy heart. "At the end of the day, I don't want to get attacked on the train," he says.⁴

Reflect: How do hate crimes targeting Jews impact the way Flayton feels able to express his identity in public?

2. Chris Kwok is a board member of the Asian American Bar Association of New York. In 2021 he described his reaction to the increase in hate crimes targeting people of Asian descent in New York City that occurred during the pandemic.

"The political and social invisibility of Asian-Americans have real-life consequences," Mr. Kwok said. "The invisibility comes from Asian-Americans being seen as permanent foreigners — they can't cross that invisible line into becoming real Americans."

Several highly publicized incidents early in the pandemic were not handled as hate crimes, Mr. Kwok said. If they had been, it "would have sent a signal that

⁴ Mallory Simon, "[Not just neo-Nazis with tiki torches: Why Jewish students say they also fear cloaked anti-Semitism](#)," CNN, July 1, 2021.

this was unacceptable and that if you were going to target Asian-Americans, there would be consequences," he said.⁵

Reflect: If the incidents targeting Asian Americans that Chris Kwok mentions were prosecuted as hate crimes, what messages about belonging would that send?

⁵ Alexandra E. Petri and Daniel E. Slotnik, "[Attacks on Asian-Americans in New York Stoke Fear, Anxiety and Anger](#)," *New York Times*, October 15, 2021.

MINI-LESSON

3. Who Are the Victims and Perpetrators of Hate Crimes?

Overview

About This Mini-Lesson

This is the third mini-lesson in a five-part series on hate crimes and their impacts, created in partnership with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), part of the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

In this lesson, students learn what researchers know about the survivors of hate crimes, including where the gaps are in the data. Students also learn about the motives and behavior of perpetrators of hate crimes and what these types of behavior suggest about hate crime prevention.

What's Included

This lesson uses the following student material:

- Explainer: [What Is a Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?](#)

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Lesson Plan

Activities

1. What Do We Know about Hate Crimes?

Ask students to individually read section 3 (“What Do We Know about Hate Crimes?”) of the explainer [What Is a Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?](#)

Then ask them to reflect on the following prompt in their journals:

Choose one piece of information you find **surprising**.

- Why did you find this information surprising?
- What more would you like to know about this piece of information?

Choose one piece of information you find **troubling**.

- Why did you find this information troubling?
- What more would you like to know about this piece of information?

Once students have finished writing, have them share aspects of their entry in pairs. Then discuss the following questions as a class:

- How could information about victims help with efforts to prevent hate crimes?
- Why is it important to make sure statistics on hate crimes are accurate?

2. What Do We Know about Perpetrators of Hate Crimes?

Place your students in small groups of three or four. Ask them to read section 4 (“What Do We Know about Perpetrators of Hate Crimes?”) of the explainer [What Is a](#)

[Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?](#) Then ask them to discuss the following questions with their groups:

- Why do you think a large proportion of hate crimes are committed by young people acting in groups?
- How do you think efforts to prevent hate crimes might be different depending on what type of hate crime these efforts seek to prevent?
- When do you think people are more likely to be “heroes” and stand up against a hate crime? When do you think they are less likely to stand up?

Ask for volunteers to share aspects of their discussion with the class.

3. Final Reflection

Ask students to write their response to the following questions on an [exit ticket](#):

What is one action you think people can take to help prevent hate crimes?
Under what circumstances do you think this action is likely to work? Under what circumstances do you think it wouldn't work?

MINI-LESSON

4. How Can Hate Crimes Impact Schools?

Overview

About This Mini-Lesson

This is the second mini-lesson in a five-part series on hate crimes and their impacts, created in partnership with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), part of the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

In this mini-lesson, students learn about vandalism committed by a group of high school seniors at their school, which was determined to be a hate crime. Students explore the impact this crime had on the people directly affected by the vandalism as well as on the community as a whole.

What's Included

This lesson uses the following student material:

- Reading: [A Black Principal, Four White Teens and the 'Senior Prank' That Became a Hate Crime \(Washington Post\)](#)

Additional Context & Background

A hate crime is a crime that is motivated, at least in part, by bias. At the federal level, hate crimes include crimes that are committed because of the victim's real or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Most states have hate crime laws as well, and the characteristics protected by state laws vary. For example, New York includes age in addition to all the characteristics listed above, while Alabama includes only race, color, national origin, and disability. While collecting information is challenging, the overall number of hate crimes appears to be increasing in the United States.¹

Some actions that are motivated by hate do not meet the legal definition of a hate crime, but these acts of hate are still harmful to victims. For example, hate speech includes words

¹ Brian Levin et al., "[Report to the Nation: 2020s – Dawn of a Decade of Rising Hate](#)," Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, California State University, San Bernardino (2022).

or symbols that are intended to degrade, humiliate, or spread hatred against an individual or group of people because of their characteristics or identity. Because speech is protected by the US Constitution unless it causes immediate danger, most hate speech is legal. However, even when it is allowed by the law, it can still harm those it targets and make it more likely that people will commit hate crimes.

Nearly two-thirds of hate crime assaults are committed by people under the age of 25. While most people who commit hate crimes are not members of hate groups, they are often influenced by the hateful ideas these groups spread.² The researchers Jack McDevitt, Jack Levin, Jim Nolan, and Susan Bennett divide hate crimes into four different types depending on what motivates the people who commit them. Hate crimes sometimes fall under more than one of these categories. The following is a description of the categories the researchers developed.

Type 1: The most common type of hate crime is committed by a group of perpetrators, often teens or young adults, who are seeking excitement and to feel momentarily powerful. They select victims from a different identity group that they believe are vulnerable.

According to the researchers, this type of hate crime can involve the following people:

- **A “leader”** who instigates the crime and may demonstrate more bias than other group members
- **A “fellow traveler”** who participates in the crime
- **An “unwilling participant”** who does not actively participate in the crime but does not attempt to stop it
- **A “hero”** who attempts to stand up against the crime and stop it

Type 2: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that the victim is invading “their” space or taking resources that should be reserved for their own identity group. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech, and they are often teens or young adults.

Type 3: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that a hate crime was committed against their own identity group. They seek out a victim from the group they believe was responsible. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech, and they are often teens or young adults.

² Jack McDevitt, Jack Levin, Jim Nolan, and Susan Bennett, “Hate Crime Offenders,” in *Hate Crime: Concepts, Policy, Future Directions*, ed. Neil Chakraborti, (Willan, 2011).

Type 4: This type of hate crime is the least common but most deadly. Perpetrators believe that they are “crusaders” and are deeply committed to their prejudiced beliefs. They seek to eradicate the group they target and often kill multiple people at once. The perpetrator usually commits the crime alone but is often influenced by—or a member of—a hate group. These perpetrators are usually young adults or adults.

Hate crimes can have a devastating impact, not only on survivors of the crimes but also on people who share—or are perceived as sharing—an aspect of their identity with the victim and on the health of communities as a whole. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, a hate crime “is more than an assault on the victim’s physical well-being. It is an assault on the victim’s essential human worth. A person who has been singled out for victimization based on some group characteristic—such as race, religion, or national origin—has, by that very act, been deprived of the right to participate in the life of the community on an equal footing for reasons that have nothing to do with what the victim did but everything to do with who the victim is.”³

Preparing to Teach

Teaching Note 1: Note on Offensive and Dehumanizing Language

The reading in Activity 2 of this lesson contains offensive images and slurs, including the n-word and a homophobic slur, the f-word. We advise against reading the racist and homophobic terms in this text aloud. Students/teachers could instead substitute “F” or “the f-word” and “N” or “the n-word” if saying these aloud.

In life and in school, many students will encounter language that has been used historically to perpetuate racism and/or dehumanize people. Such language might be used to intentionally cause offense, and it might also be something they encounter in lessons, when reading literature or historical texts.

Teaching a text that includes racist or homophobic slurs or other derogatory words can elicit fear and anxiety in educators. As educators, we know that unless we prepare to address language with intention and care, we risk causing harm and creating inhospitable classroom environments where students may feel like they do not belong and where they cannot learn. Some racist and dehumanizing terms, such as the n-word, have the power to destabilize a classroom environment if they are encountered without adequate preparation

³ Amicus curiae brief of the American Civil Liberties Union, *Wisconsin v. Mitchell*, 1993, cited in Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls, Controversies*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2017).

or groundwork. In her talk "[Why It's So Hard to Talk about the 'N' Word](#)," Dr. Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor states: "I hear from students that when the word is said during a lesson without discussion and context, it poisons the entire classroom environment; the trust between student and teacher is broken" (11:31).

Such terms can also make students who belong to the targeted groups feel uncomfortable and singled out. In her talk, Stordeur Pryor goes on to say: "My black students tell me that when the word is spoken or quoted in class, they feel like a giant spotlight is shining on them" (12:32).

The dehumanizing power and loaded history of the n-word cannot be ignored, nor can the impact it may have on students if not handled sensitively. If it appears in texts or resources that are being used, it is necessary to acknowledge it, understand its problematic nature, and set guidelines for students when reading aloud or quoting from the text. Otherwise, the presence of this word might both harm students and distract them from an open discussion on a particular topic. We can benefit from applying this same understanding and approach whenever students encounter dehumanizing language in the course of learning. If you realize that you will be asking students to hear, process, and discuss passages with dehumanizing language on a regular basis, however, it is important to reflect on the purpose of the text and its cost to students' emotional well-being.

As always when discussing sensitive topics that may provoke feelings of fear, anger, or concern, it is helpful to revisit your [class contract](#) and remind students of your classroom norms for respectful and safe discussion.

Teaching Note 2: Teaching Emotionally Challenging Content

In this unit, students will encounter descriptions of hate crimes and their impacts on people and communities. While we have chosen examples that we believe convey the seriousness of these crimes without being overly graphic, this topic is emotionally challenging and can elicit a range of emotional responses from students. We can't emphasize enough the importance of previewing the resources in this curriculum to make sure they are appropriate for the intellectual and emotional needs of your students.

It is difficult to predict how students will respond to such challenging content. One student may respond with emotion to an account or source, while others may not find it powerful in the same way. In addition, different people demonstrate emotion in different ways. Some students will be silent. Some may laugh. Some may not want to talk. Some may take

days to process difficult stories. For some, a particular firsthand account may be incomprehensible; for others, it may be familiar.

We urge teachers to create space for students to have a range of reactions and emotions, while also holding students accountable to your class norms. This might include allowing time for silent reflection or writing in journals, as well as facilitating structured discussions to help students process content together. Some students will not want to share their reactions to emotionally challenging content in class, and teachers should respect that in discussions. For their learning and emotional growth, it is crucial to allow for a variety of student responses to emotionally challenging content.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Why Is it Important to Feel Safety and Belonging in School?

Ask students to respond to the following prompt in a private journal entry:

When do you feel safe and accepted at school? When do you not?

Tell your students that in this lesson, they will learn about some of the impacts that hate crimes can have on schools, including how they affect students' sense of safety and well-being.

2. What Impact Did Hate Speech and Vandalism Have on a Maryland High School?

The *Washington Post* article "[A Black Principal, Four White Teens and the 'Senior Prank' That Became a Hate Crime](#)" explores an incident involving racist, homophobic, and antisemitic vandalism on a high school campus in Maryland. Read the entire article with your students. (Note: This article includes and discusses offensive and dehumanizing language and hate symbols. Preview before sharing with your students, and use the Note on Offensive and Dehumanizing Language at the top of the lesson to determine how you will approach this reading with your class.)

Then discuss the following questions with your students:

- How might hate crimes, including vandalism, impact individuals in targeted groups?
- How do such crimes impact people who haven't been directly targeted?
- How do they impact whole communities?
- Why do you think acts of antisemitism, racism, and homophobia occurred together in the school described in the article? What is the relationship between these different acts of hate?
- What is an appropriate response by a school community when students have committed acts of hate? What should justice look like? What should the consequences be for the perpetrators, and how might those perpetrators contribute to healing their communities?

3. Final Reflection

Ask students to write their response to the following questions on an [exit ticket](#):

What is one change our school could make to help students feel safer and have a stronger sense of belonging? Why do you think this change would help?

Extension: New York Connections

In addition to the *Washington Post* article in Activity 2, ask your students to read the ABC News article "[12-year-old New York boy arrested in connection with anti-Semitic graffiti at school](#)." When antisemitic incidents occur in school, they can have profound effects on students. After reading the article, share with your students the following short passage, which describes the impact that antisemitic attacks had on a student in another school:

When Paige was a senior in high school at a public school in New Jersey, she was the target of a string of antisemitic attacks by her classmates. She described her reaction afterwards: "The anger consumed me and I really didn't know what to do. I knew I didn't belong there."⁴

You can use a selection of the questions in Activity 2 to guide a class discussion about this article and short passage.

⁴ Sharon Otterman, "[She Was Excited for a New School. Then the Anti-Semitic 'Jokes' Started](#)," *New York Times*, March 7, 2020.

MINI-LESSON

5. How Can People Promote Belonging in Their Communities?

Overview

About This Mini-Lesson

This is the second mini-lesson in a five-part series on hate crimes and their impacts, created in partnership with the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), part of the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

One of the main impacts of hate crimes, as students have learned in the previous lessons, is that they make it more difficult for both the direct target and those who share—or are perceived as sharing—an aspect of their identity with hate crime victims to feel belonging and safety in their communities. In this lesson, students explore three examples of community initiatives that work to promote such belonging and safety, which can help to counteract some of the impacts that hate crimes have on people's sense of community, belonging, and safety. Finally, students consider what actions they, their schools, or their communities can take to foster a greater sense of belonging for all.

What's Included

This lesson uses the following student material:

- Handout: [Big Paper: How Have Communities Worked to Promote Belonging and Safety?](#)

Additional Context & Background

A hate crime is a crime that is motivated, at least in part, by bias. At the federal level, hate crimes include crimes that are committed because of the victim's real or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Most states have hate crime laws as well, and the characteristics protected by state laws vary. For example, New York includes age in addition to all the characteristics listed above, while Alabama includes only race, color, national origin, and disability. While collecting

information is challenging, the overall number of hate crimes appears to be increasing in the United States.¹

Some actions that are motivated by hate do not meet the legal definition of a hate crime, but these acts of hate are still harmful to victims. For example, hate speech includes words or symbols that are intended to degrade, humiliate, or spread hatred against an individual or group of people because of their characteristics or identity. Because speech is protected by the US Constitution unless it causes immediate danger, most hate speech is legal. However, even when it is allowed by the law, it can still harm those it targets and make it more likely that people will commit hate crimes.

Nearly two-thirds of hate crime assaults are committed by people under the age of 25. While most people who commit hate crimes are not members of hate groups, they are often influenced by the hateful ideas these groups spread.² The researchers Jack McDevitt, Jack Levin, Jim Nolan, and Susan Bennett divide hate crimes into four different types depending on what motivates the people who commit them. Hate crimes sometimes fall under more than one of these categories. The following is a description of the categories the researchers developed.

Type 1: The most common type of hate crime is committed by a group of perpetrators, often teens or young adults, who are seeking excitement and to feel momentarily powerful. They select victims from a different identity group that they believe are vulnerable.

According to the researchers, this type of hate crime can involve the following people:

- **A “leader”** who instigates the crime and may demonstrate more bias than other group members
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- **A “hero”** who attempts to stand up against the crime and stop it

Type 2: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that the victim is invading “their” space or taking resources that should be reserved for their own identity group. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech, and they are often teens or young adults.

¹ Brian Levin et al., [“Report to the Nation: 2020s – Dawn of a Decade of Rising Hate,”](#) Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, California State University, San Bernardino (2022).

² Jack McDevitt, Jack Levin, Jim Nolan, and Susan Bennett, “Hate Crime Offenders,” in *Hate Crime: Concepts, Policy, Future Directions*, ed. Neil Chakraborti, (Willan, 2011).

Type 3: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that a hate crime was committed against their own identity group. They seek out a victim from the group they believe was responsible. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech, and they are often teens or young adults.

Type 4: This type of hate crime is the least common but most deadly. Perpetrators believe that they are “crusaders” and are deeply committed to their prejudiced beliefs. They seek to eradicate the group they target and often kill multiple people at once. The perpetrator usually commits the crime alone but is often influenced by—or a member of—a hate group. These perpetrators are usually young adults or adults.

Hate crimes can have a devastating impact, not only on survivors of the crimes but also on people who share—or are perceived as sharing—an aspect of their identity with the victim and on the health of communities as a whole. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, a hate crime “is more than an assault on the victim’s physical well-being. It is an assault on the victim’s essential human worth. A person who has been singled out for victimization based on some group characteristic—such as race, religion, or national origin—has, by that very act, been deprived of the right to participate in the life of the community on an equal footing for reasons that have nothing to do with what the victim did but everything to do with who the victim is.”³

Preparing to Teach

Teaching Note: Teaching Emotionally Challenging Content

In this unit, students will encounter descriptions of hate crimes and their impacts on people and communities. While we have chosen examples that we believe convey the seriousness of these crimes without being overly graphic, this topic is emotionally challenging and can elicit a range of emotional responses from students. We can’t emphasize enough the importance of previewing the resources in this curriculum to make sure they are appropriate for the intellectual and emotional needs of your students.

It is difficult to predict how students will respond to such challenging content. One student may respond with emotion to an account or source, while others may not find it powerful in the same way. In addition, different people demonstrate emotion in different ways.

³ Amicus curiae brief of the American Civil Liberties Union, *Wisconsin v. Mitchell*, 1993, cited in Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls, Controversies*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2017).

Some students will be silent. Some may laugh. Some may not want to talk. Some may take days to process difficult stories. For some, a particular firsthand account may be incomprehensible; for others, it may be familiar.

We urge teachers to create space for students to have a range of reactions and emotions, while also holding students accountable to your class norms. This might include allowing time for silent reflection or writing in journals, as well as facilitating structured discussions to help students process content together. Some students will not want to share their reactions to emotionally challenging content in class, and teachers should respect that in discussions. For their learning and emotional growth, it is crucial to allow for a variety of student responses to emotionally challenging content.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Where Do You Feel a Sense of Belonging?

Begin by asking students to respond to the following prompt in their journals:

Close your eyes and imagine a place where you feel a sense of belonging and safety. Then open your eyes and reflect:

- What does the place look like?
- How do you feel when you are there?
- Who else is there in this place? What do you share with them?

When students have finished writing, share the following question with them:

Based on what you wrote, what do you think are the elements that help people feel belonging and safety in a place?

Ask students to write their answers on sticky notes and place the sticky notes on a board in your classroom. (Alternatively, you could ask students to add their words or phrases to a word cloud.)

One of the main impacts of hate crimes, as students have learned, is that they make it more difficult for both the direct target of the hate crime and those who share an aspect of their identity with the victims to feel a sense of belonging and safety in their communities. Explain to students that in this lesson, they will learn about community initiatives that are designed to promote people's sense of safety and

belonging. Initiatives such as these can help to counteract some of the impacts that hate crimes have on people's sense of community, belonging, and safety.

2. How Have Communities Worked to Promote Belonging and Safety?

This activity is organized around the [Big Paper](#) strategy. Print the [Big Paper: How Have Communities Worked to Promote Belonging and Safety?](#) handout and place each example on a large piece of poster paper.

Note: The original photo used in Example 2 contains profanity in the background. For a version without profanity, pause the *Inside Edition* video "[Black Teen Ballerinas Reclaim Space Home to Robert E. Lee Statue With Photo Shoot](#)" at 0:06 and share that image with your students instead.

Place students in groups of three or four and give each group one paper. Students should write their questions and comments on the paper. They can respond to each other in writing but should remain silent.

Once students have finished "discussing" their first text, ask them to rotate to read each of the other papers and add any additional questions or comments in writing.

After students have read and commented on each text, discuss the following questions as a class:

- What did you learn from this activity?
- What other tools do people use to promote belonging and safety in their communities?
- What efforts can you think of in our community that seek to promote belonging and safety?

3. Final Reflection

Ask students to write their response to the following prompts on an [exit ticket](#):

- If our school takes the issue of belonging and safety seriously, we will . . .
- If our community takes the issue of belonging and safety seriously, we will . . .
- If we do nothing, we risk . . .

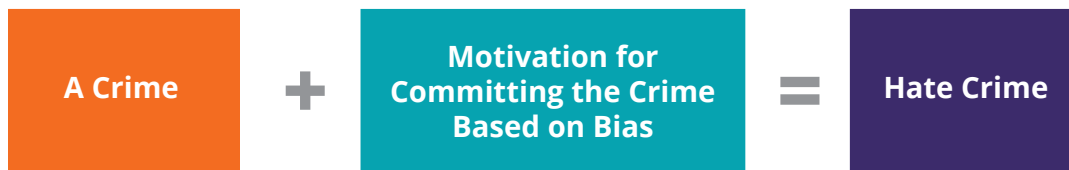
EXPLAINER

What Is a Hate Crime and How Do Hate Crimes Impact People?

This explainer can help you understand what hate crimes are and the impact they can have on individuals and communities.

1. What Is a Hate Crime?

Under the law, the definition of a hate crime is:¹



In other words, a hate crime must include both a **crime** and **hate**.

A **crime** can include property damage, assault, or murder.

In this context, **hate** means that the perpetrator (the person who commits the crime) chooses the victim (the person or group they target) because they believe the victim has certain characteristics or a certain identity.

Federally Protected Characteristics

Under federal law, hate crimes are crimes that are committed because of the victim's:

Race	Color	Religion	National Origin
any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry	skin pigmentation other than, and especially darker than, what is considered characteristic of people typically defined as white	a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices	national ancestry, parentage

Continued on next page

¹ US Department of Justice, "Learn About Hate Crimes," accessed September 25, 2023.

Sexual Orientation	Gender	Gender Identity	Disability
a person's sexual identity or self-identification as bisexual, straight, gay, pansexual, etc.	the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex	a person's internal sense of being male, female, some combination of male and female, or neither male nor female	a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions

Source: The definitions in this table are from Merriam-Webster's online dictionary.

Hate Crime Laws

The federal government has hate crime laws, and most states do as well. The characteristics protected by state laws vary. For example, New York includes **age** in addition to all the characteristics listed above, while Alabama includes only race, color, national origin, and disability.

Hate crime laws usually act as **penalty enhancers**, meaning that someone convicted of a hate crime gets a stricter punishment than someone who commits a similar crime but is not motivated by bias.

Other Acts of Hate:

Some actions that are motivated by hate do not meet the legal definition of a hate crime, but these acts of hate are still harmful to victims.

For example, hate speech includes words or symbols that are intended to degrade, humiliate, or spread hatred against an individual or group of people because of their characteristics or identity. Because speech is protected by the US Constitution unless it causes immediate danger, most hate speech is legal. However, even when it is allowed by the law, it can still hurt the people it targets. Hate speech can also make it more likely that people will commit hate crimes.

REFLECT

- According to what you learned, what is the difference between a hate crime and other types of crime? For example, what would be the difference between property damage that is a hate crime and property damage that is not?
- Why do you think hate crimes are punished differently than other crimes?

2. How Do Hate Crimes Impact People and Communities?

1 Two men describe their reaction to having their gay pride flag burned outside of their home in Omaha, Nebraska, in 2015: “Had the man who burned our gay pride flag burned our Husker [football] flag, we would have still called the police—but we wouldn’t have felt as threatened . . . We wouldn’t have wondered ‘what’s next?’ What became so clear to us after Saturday night, is that the intent really does make a difference. Seeing him waving that burning symbol of a controversial, and inherent part of our being(s) as a minority, in front of our house as a clear message, made it scary. It made it an attack as opposed to a prank.”²

REFLECT

Why do you think the two men said they would be less afraid if the perpetrator had burned a sports flag instead of their gay pride flag?

2 According to the American Civil Liberties Union, a hate crime “is more than an assault on the victim’s physical well-being. It is an assault on the victim’s essential human worth. A person who has been singled out for victimization based on some group characteristic—such as race, religion, or national origin—has, by that very act, been deprived of the right to participate in the life of the community on an equal footing for reasons that have nothing to do with what the victim did but everything to do with who the victim is.”³

REFLECT

How can hate crimes make it difficult for the victims to feel like full participants in their communities?

3 Zainab, a Muslim woman, describes her reaction to hearing about hate crimes targeting other Muslims: “It does affect my behaviour . . . Because I become more fearful and would avoid going to certain places that I feel might be a risk to my safety. And especially within certain times, I would avoid walking within those areas.”⁴

REFLECT

How can hate crimes impact people who were not directly targeted but do share an identity with the victim?

2 Quoted in Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls, and Controversies*, 4th ed. (Sage Publications, 2017), 16.

3 Amicus curiae brief of the American Civil Liberties Union, *Wisconsin v. Mitchell*, 1993, cited in Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls, and Controversies*.

4 Mark A. Walters, Jenny L. Paterson, Liz McDonnell, and Rupert Brown, “Group identity, empathy and shared suffering: Understanding the ‘community’ impacts of anti-LGBT and Islamophobic hate crimes,” *International Review of Victimology* 26 (issue 2): 143–62.

3. What Do We Know about Hate Crimes?

Collecting data on hate-motivated crimes is difficult:

- Fewer than half of all hate crimes that are committed are reported to the police.⁵ Some of the reasons why hate crimes aren't reported include:
 - The victim fears the perpetrator will retaliate against them.
 - The victim does not believe that the police will take action.
 - The victim does not have enough evidence that the perpetrator was motivated by bias.
 - The victim does not know that they are the victim of a hate crime.
- The FBI collects statistics on hate crimes, but thousands of law enforcement agencies across the country either do not report data to the system or report zero hate crimes.⁶

While collecting information is challenging, the overall number of hate crimes appears to be increasing in the United States.⁷

Hate crimes targeting a specific group of people almost always spike after the spread of negative news or conspiracy theories involving that group of people. For example:

- Hate crimes targeting people who were perceived as Arab or Muslim increased after 9/11 because these groups were falsely blamed for the attacks.
- Hate crimes targeting people who were perceived as Asian increased during the COVID-19 pandemic because they were falsely blamed for spreading the illness.

Hate Crime Statistics

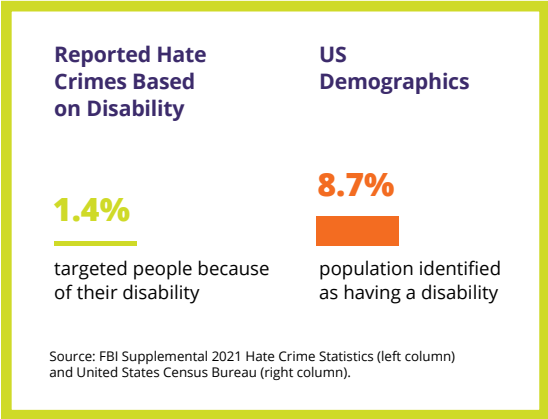
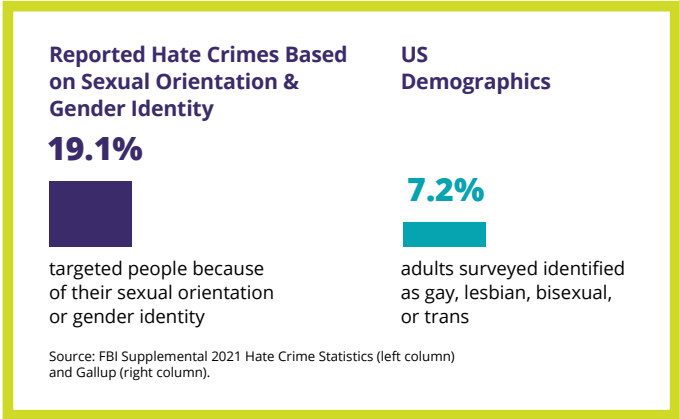
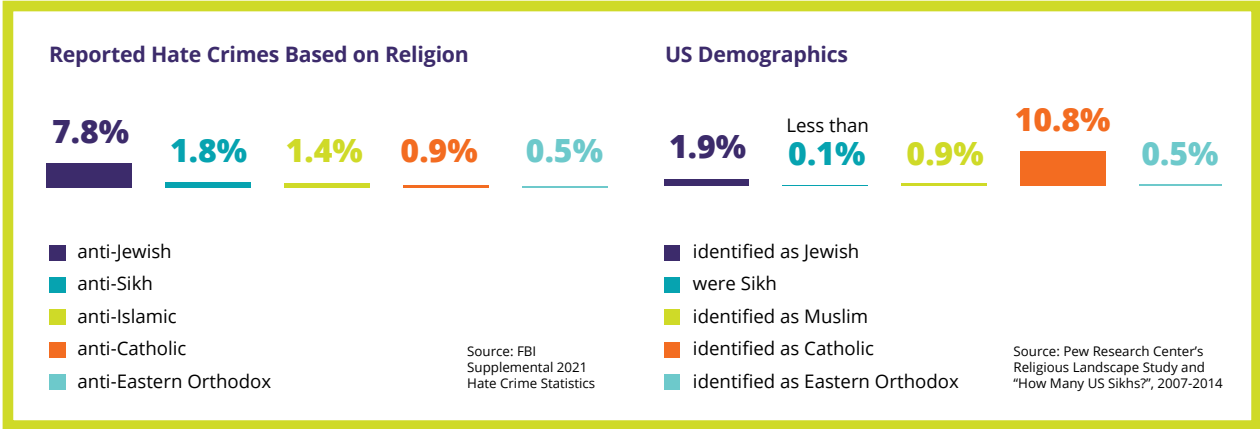
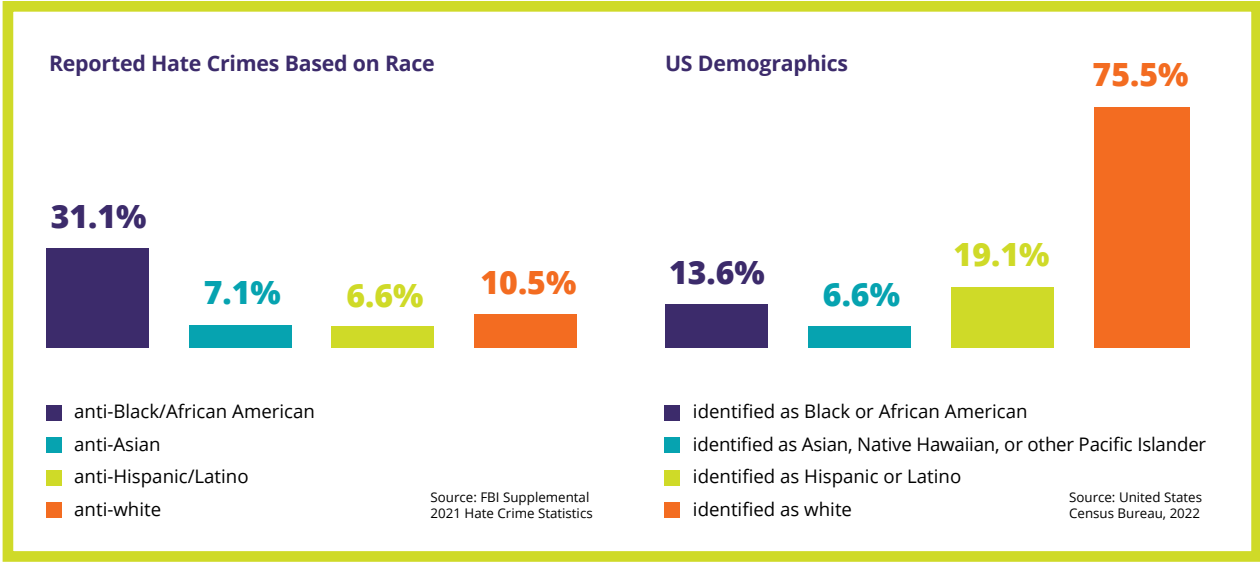
The figures on the next page show data reported to the FBI on hate crimes committed in 2021 or 2022, compared to data on the percent of adults in the United States who identify with each characteristic. The comparison can help you see which groups are overrepresented or underrepresented in hate crimes data. Keep in mind that most hate crimes are not reported to the FBI, so these numbers do not paint a complete picture.⁸

⁵ Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls, and Controversies*, 4th ed. (Sage Publications, 2017), 16.

⁶ Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes*, 16.

⁷ Brian Levin with Kiana Perst (courtesy of the Network Contagion Research Institute), Analisa Venolia, and Gabriel Levin, "Report to the Nation: 2020s – Dawn of a Decade of Rising Hate," Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, California State University San Bernardino, August 4, 2022.

⁸ The following page describes the types of hate crimes and characteristics the FBI collects data on: <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-information/ucr/hate-crime>.



REFLECT

- How could information about victims help with efforts to prevent hate crimes?
- Why is it important to make sure that statistics on hate crimes are accurate?

4. What Do We Know about Perpetrators of Hate Crimes?⁹

Nearly two-thirds of hate-crime assaults are committed by people under the age of 25. While most people who commit hate crimes are not members of hate groups, they are often influenced by the hateful ideas that these groups spread.

The researchers Jack McDevitt, Jack Levin, Jim Nolan, and Susan Bennett divide hate crimes into four different types, depending on what motivates the people who commit them. Hate crimes sometimes fall under more than one of these categories. The following is a description of the categories they developed.

Type 1: The most common type of hate crime is committed by a group of perpetrators, often teens or young adults, who are seeking excitement and to feel momentarily powerful. They select victims from a different identity group that they believe are vulnerable. According to the researchers, this type of hate crime can involve the following people:

- A **“leader”** who instigates the crime and may demonstrate more bias than the other group members
- A **“fellow traveler”** who participates in the crime
- An **“unwilling participant”** who does not actively participate in the crime but does not attempt to stop it
- A **“hero”** who attempts to stand up against the crime and stop it

Type 2: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that the victim is invading “their” space or taking resources that should be reserved for their own identity group. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech and are often teens or young adults.

Type 3: The perpetrators of this type of hate crime believe that a hate crime was committed against their own identity group. They seek out a victim from the group they believe was responsible. The perpetrators may be influenced by conspiracy theories or hate speech and are often teens or young adults.

Type 4: This type of hate crime is the least common but most deadly. Perpetrators believe that they are “crusaders” and are deeply committed to their prejudiced beliefs. They seek to eradicate the group they target and often kill multiple people at once. The perpetrator usually commits the crime alone but is often influenced by—or a member of—a hate group. These perpetrators are usually young adults or adults.

REFLECT

- What do you think about the finding that a large proportion of hate crimes are committed by young people acting in groups? Why do you think that might be?
- How do you think efforts to prevent hate crimes might be different depending on what type of hate crime these efforts seek to prevent?
- When do you think people are more likely to be “heroes” and stand up against a hate crime? When do you think they are less likely to stand up?

9 The information in this section is from the book *Hate Crimes: Concepts, Policy, Future Directions*, ed. Neil Chakraborti (New York: Routledge, 2015).