Hate on the Airwaves

Using mass media to spread ugly messages is hardly a new idea. Hate leaders have long used the latest technology to deliver their rants to the public.

From 1933 to 1945, Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels used radio to incite German opinion against the Jews. His nightly broadcasts featured jazz tunes with anti-Semitic lyrics and fake news reports about evil Jewish “conspiracies.” Goebbels’s programs were remarkably effective shapers of public opinion. “I cannot convince a person,” he once said, “unless I get to know the soul of that person, unless I understand how to pluck the string in the harp of his soul.”

Radio’s power was heard again in 1994 in the African nation of Rwanda. As that nation’s ethnic Hutu majority slaughtered more than 800,000 members of the Tutsi minority, the government radio station mixed pop songs with calls to “finish off the Tutsi cockroaches,” even broadcasting the names of Tutsis who were to be murdered.

Today’s technology is light-years ahead of radio. But for hate groups, the strategy is the same. “A clever use of the media can make even the most evil message seem reasonable,” says Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center. “The power to reach people’s minds is an astonishing weapon.”

— John DiConsiglio

The BAD news:
The success on the Internet and the popularity of its underground rock music with some teens, organized hate groups may be on the rise in the United States.

The GOOD news:
Thanks to better monitoring, tougher prosecution and louder opposition, those groups are having a harder time operating in secret. Here’s a look at some key statistic on hate in America:

Who are Americans?

Estimated U.S. population, 1999:
- Total population: 272 million
  - White: 71.9%
  - African-American: 12.2%
  - Hispanic: 11.5%
  - Asian-American: 3.8%
  - Native American: 0.7%

Do you think America’s diversity should lead to more hate or more tolerance? Why?

Known HATE groups operating in the U.S., 2000:
- 110 KU KLUX KLAN
- 180 NEO-NAZI
- 105 OTHER
- 48 BLACK SEPARATIST
- 39 RACIST SKINHEAD
- 32 CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

TOTAL: 602

Do the KKK and neo-Nazi groups make up more or less than half of all hate groups?
Who are the victims?
Reported hate crimes by victim, 1999:
- 67% of hate crimes had a racial or ethnic motivation.
- 17% of hate crimes had a religious motivation.
- 16% of reported hate crimes were motivated by bias against sexual orientation.

What are the crimes?
HATE CRIMES BY OFFENSE, 1999:
- 35%: INTIMIDATION, either physical or verbal
- 31%: ASSAULTS
- 29%: VANDALISM or destruction of property.
- 5%: Other

17 people were killed in hate crimes in 1999. Racial/ethnic bias motivated 12 of the murders.

Ages of HATE
Reported hate crimes in the U.S. by age of offender, 1998:
- Under 20: 32%
- Under 25: 45%
- Over 25: 55%

U.S. population by age group:
- Under 20: 28%
- Under 25: 35%
- Over 25: 65%

Do young people commit more or fewer hate crimes than you would expect, given their population? Why might that be?

HATE by State
The number of known hate groups in each state:
- 21-33
- 11-20
- 5-10
- 0-4

Are you surprised by the category your state falls in? Why or why not?
Do you think a complete count of hate groups is possible? Why or why not?