

Blame hatred, not race, for this

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Every caring human being is sickened at yet another hate-motivated shooting, at a synagogue in San Diego. The shooter, a self-confessed white nationalist, also claimed responsibility for an earlier fire at a mosque in Escondido. This is the world we live in.

The Southern Poverty Law Center reports a dramatic increase in the number of white nationalist groups in the U.S., from 100 chapters in 2017 to 148 in 2018; the Anti-Defamation League reports a 182 percent increase in incidents of the distribution of white supremacist propaganda, and an increase in the number of rallies and demonstrations by white supremacy groups, from 76 in 2017 to 91 in 2018; and a study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found the number of terrorist attacks by far-right perpetrators quadrupled in the U.S. between 2016 and 2017.

The Anti-Defamation League released a report finding that attackers with ties to right-wing extremist movements killed at least 50 people in 2018. That was close to the total number of Americans killed by domestic extremists, meaning that the far right had an almost absolute monopoly on lethal terrorism in the United States last year.

A February 2018 study by the Cato Institute using 2015 crime statistics from Texas found immigrants in the country illegally were 25 percent less likely to be convicted of homicide than native-born Americans. Legal immigrants were 87 percent less likely.

According to the study, immigrants in the country illegally were also 11.5 percent less likely than native-born Americans to be convicted of sexual assault and 79 percent less likely to be convicted of larceny.

Despite the unpopularity in some camps of my making this claim, I think the above statistics point to the fact that the Trump administration as a government entity, by its systemic xenophobic rhetoric and its demonstrated pejorative attitude towards immigrants, women, the LGBTQ community and minorities in general, has gone a long way toward normalizing, encouraging and even celebrating the violent, hate-filled ideologies and behavior of a twisted minority of Americans, in spite of the lip service the administration pays to being outraged. Actions speak louder than words.

I admit that I, as a progressive, struggle with the flip side of this coin: If white males are now responsible for the majority of hate crimes in this nation, how do I avoid viewing white males with the same generalized malevolence with which white supremacists view other religious, racial, ethnic and gender minorities?

I find myself having a knee-jerk reaction against white males because of their traditional privilege and the undeniable historic wrongs they have perpetrated in their pursuit of power and control; I have to constantly remind myself that white males are no more a monolith and no more responsible as a unit for atrocities than are Muslims, Jews, African-Americans, Latinos, or any other demographic, just because a few of their number have committed such crimes.

We as a people must keep focused on the cause of all this horror: not hate targeting specific demographics, but the rise of unapologetic, open hate as a phenomenon in our nation.

We must resist seeing any entire demographic as deserving of our rage, and focus our efforts on ridding this nation of division, anger and vengeance. We must pour our strength as a country into remembering that we are all humans, all deserving of compassion and love, and that is the fundamental message of the American Experiment.

If we want to claim patriotism, we must make this our creed. America was created to offer this to a tortured world. Let us not abandon the dream now.