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Svenson: Why is there so much hate?

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By Jake Svenson

May 13, 2008

Just a few weeks ago, my social studies class finished a study unit on the Holocaust. Last week, I read about the swastikas and anti-Semitic messages that have been scrawled on the door and walls of a local synagogue.

Wisconsin, our country, and our world cannot tolerate this mindless hate.

During my school 's Holocaust unit, I was lucky enough to see Tim Scott, a lawyer who travels to local schools with a presentation about the Holocaust.

He took us through a vivid and eye-opening story that helped us understand how the Jews and others in the Holocaust felt as they were torn from their homes and families, very possibly never to see either again.

He spoke of the flames of hate that could impel human beings to destroy groups of other people who were "different, " and asked us to consider the flames of hatred we see in our own world.

As the two incidents of our local synagogue 's defacement show, it is clear that the deadly flames of the Holocaust have not been extinguished completely. Were actions like these one of the ways the seeds of the Holocaust were planted in Germany?

Simply put, hatred of groups that people see as "different " helps start holocausts. Anti-Semitism was a major factor in causing the Holocaust. The kind of hatred that started a holocaust once can do so again, as the genocide in various countries since the Holocaust has shown.

That is why it is important to combat such hatred in our midst. We like to think that we have become more tolerant, but some statistics suggest otherwise.

Hate crimes in Wisconsin, often underreported, have almost doubled in the last decade. Forty-three such crimes were reported in 1996, but that number grew to 84 in 2006.

A few head-shakings, some discomfort or sadness, an investigation that may or may not result in the conviction of the person or persons responsible for a hate crime: These reactions are not enough to combat the hate that impelled someone to scrawl what went up on our local synagogue.

I see casual hatred and intolerance in my own life. In our school, some students use the word "gay" as an insult.

Most of these kids probably do not think they hate homosexuals, but by saying "gay" as a derogatory term over and over again, they perpetuate a climate of dislike and intolerance that may lead to hatred.

I hear other stories of discrimination. My grandmother told me that some of her friends asked her if she was going to sell her house and move because a black family recently moved in next door. Although she replied, "of course not," her story shows that racism lingers on in the United States.

So what can we do to extinguish the flames of hate that arise in our own community?

We can examine our own consciences to ensure that as individuals we do not ever contribute to the fire. We can speak out against acts like those reported this week and against all such words and acts.

These things will help douse the flames of hatred. If we put out those flames, maybe humans can finally live in peace.

Svenson is an eighth grade student in the Middleton Cross Plains School District.

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