

Hate groups should direct venom at mirror

The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution - July 11, 1999

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Benjamin Smith, in his suicide, was his own last hate-crime victim.

Sorry for the pop psychology, but it is hard to imagine that Smith could have come to the vicious and obsessive racism that sent him on his killing spree if the hate had not found in him a ready emptiness to fill. Where goodness is gone, venom finds an indifferent void.

A man who can discover his own worth only by declaring the worthlessness of others -- who has no more to say for himself than to cite the markers of his race or color or the accident of some ethnicity -- is desperately incomplete and fatally sad.

In that, of course, however singular his acts, Smith was not alone. Indeed, the World Church of the Creator -- and here's another outfit degrading the word "church" into an obscenity -- claims 42 chapters for its parodic liturgies of racism and anti-Semitism.

For its other hates as well: It counsels banning immigration and homosexuality, too, while it's at it. And its Web site offers a children's page, with a simple crossword puzzle and an online coloring book that tutor hate to the very young.

The church's is only one of some 250 hate-mongering sites on the Internet. Hate is one of the Web's most vigorous growth industries, and not surprisingly, if you think about it. Out in cyberspace, the vile can find and reinforce each other, free from the usual social restraints that come of disapproving neighbors and disgusted co-workers. There, sick personalities can fester and flourish, the evil blooms of self-fertilization.

Smith's church denies, of course, any link between its mad preachings and Smith's assaults and murders. But its constant battle cry is RAHOWA, mock-arcana for the racial holy war it hopes for. Its Ohio site will lead you to "Skinheads of the Racial Holy War." It sells books such as "On the Brink of a Bloody Racial War."

If it were so that all this did not overflow into real-world violence, like a backed-up sewer, the absurdities could be laughed off as a kind of running sick joke. The church ballyhoos a house band called the SS Bootboys and its leader styles himself the pontifex maximus. These people are fools, clowns who don't even know they are running around with floppy feet and big red noses.

But there is a connection to the violence. Words have outcomes.

"Creators," as they aggrandize themselves, have been linked to other murders, to assaults, to bombings and other vandalism in Florida, California and Washington.

From a presidential aspirant (Pat Buchanan) bugling his troops to religious and cultural war, to religious fundamentalists anathematizing homosexuals, to the spite merchants of rant radio and to the politics of character assassination, we are perfecting the rhetoric of mutual estrangement and dehumanization. We husband our differences to the neglect of our community.

We are playing chicken with ourselves. It is a lug's game.

Tom Teepen's column appears Tuesdays and Sundays.

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Edition: Home; The Atlanta Journal Constitution

Section: Editorial

Page: P8

Index Terms: Column

Record Number: 29263856

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