

PENNSYLVANIA STATE CONFERENCE NAACP  
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## TESTIMONY

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE'S  
SPECIAL TASK FORCE ON HATE CRIMES,  
TERRORISM AND ARSON  
OCTOBER 22, 1996

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE'S SPECIAL  
TASK FORCE ON HATE CRIMES, TERRORISM AND ARSON

I COME BEFORE YOU THIS MORNING AT YOUR INVITATION AS  
PENNSYLVANIA'S CHIEF OFFICER OF THE OLDEST CIVIL RIGHTS  
ORGANIZATION -- THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF COLORED PEOPLE (NAACP)

IT IS MY PURPOSE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH PERTINENT INFORMATION TO  
ASSIST YOU IN CURBING THE INCREASE OF HATE RELATED ACTIVITIES  
AGAINST ALL PEOPLE IN OUR COMMONWEALTH. I APPLAUD THOSE  
WHO SOUGHT AND FORMED A TASK FORCE ON ISSUES OF HATE,  
TERRORISM AND ARSON. I APPLAUD THIS COMMITTEE FOR TAKING THE  
TIME TO LISTEN AND HOPEFULLY PROVIDE ULTIMATE LEGISLATION  
WHICH WILL PROTECT ALL CITIZENS OF THE COMMONWEALTH FROM  
HATE ACTIVITY.

HISTORY WILL TELL YOU THAT IF ANY MINORITY GROUP HAS  
EXPERIENCED ALL THREE FORMS OF VIOLENT ACTS BEING ADDRESSED  
TODAY, IT HAS BEEN THOSE OF AFRICAN DESCENT. I DO NOT SIT HERE  
TO REHASH THE VIOLENT ACTS AGAINST PEOPLE OF COLOR OVER THE  
YEARS, FOR YOUR RESEARCH ANALYST AND OTHER STAFF MEMBERS  
OF THIS COMMITTEE CAN OBTAIN THE FACTS IF THIS FORUM IS  
SERIOUS IN REDUCING HATE ACTIVITY IN THIS COMMONWEALTH.

HATE CRIME ACTIVITY SHOULD NOT BE NEW TO ANY OF YOU WHO SIT  
ON THE COMMITTEE. HATE ACTIVITY IN WHATEVER FORM, HAS BEEN  
USED UPON PEOPLE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF CIVILIZATION. WE  
KNOW THAT A MASS OF PEOPLE WITHIN A COMMON CULTURE HAVE

BEEN DIVIDED BY CLASS OR CASTE WITH ROLES DETERMINED BY THEIR PLACES IN SOCIETY.

THE DIVISION OF PEOPLE BASED SOLELY BECAUSE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OR COLOR HAS BEEN A LONG TIME PRACTICE AND WHEN A MOVEMENT IS ATTEMPTED TO CLOSE THE GAP OF DIFFERENCES, ONE, TWO OR MANY ARE SUBJECTED TO BIGOTED ACTIONS TO REMIND THOSE OF THE MINORITY OF WHAT THEIR POSITIONS "SHOULD BE" IN THE CIVILIZATION.

IF THIS COMMITTEE IS SINCERE, IT MUST BEGIN TO ANALYZE AND ASK THE QUESTION OF "HOW INTEGRATED IS PENNSYLVANIA?" "ARE WE INTEGRATED ENOUGH?" "HAS THERE BEEN ENOUGH LEGISLATION TO PROMOTE INTEGRATION IN PENNSYLVANIA?" "WHO IS GOING TO STOP WHAT APPEARS TO BE A PROGRESSION OF HATE?" THE ANSWER LIES WITH GOVERNMENT TO PASS LAWS TO EXTINGUISH HATE, PROMOTE INTEGRATION AND ENSURE THE ENFORCEMENT OF SUCH LAWS BY STATE AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT.

IT IS THE BELIEF OF THE NAACP, THAT THE INCREASE IN HATE CRIME ACTIVITY IN PENNSYLVANIA IS BASED SOLELY ON ECONOMICS. PEOPLE WHO ARE IMPACTED BY LAYOFFS, DOWNSIZING AND JOBS GOING OUT OF STATE, "SEEK OUT" SCAPEGOATS TO BLAME FOR WHAT IS HAPPENING THEM. THIS IS WHY GOVERNMENT TAKES THE BLAME, THIS IS WHY GOVERNMENT FACILITIES IN RECENT YEARS ARE BEING TARGETED FOR VIOLENT ACTS. OF COURSE, INDIVIDUALS OF CERTAIN ETHIC GROUPS BECOME THE BRUNT OF THE MISFORTUNES OF OTHERS. THERE IS A VARIETY OF CAUSES, I KNOW IT AND I AM CERTAIN THAT MANY THAT SIT ON THIS COMMITTEE HAVE A VARIETY OF THOUGHTS.

UNTIL THE OFFICIALS OF THIS STATE GOVERNMENT BEGINNING WITH THE GOVERNOR AND HIS CHIEF LAW ENFORCER, THE STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL BEGIN TO PUBLICLY CONDEMN RACIST AND BIGOTED ACTS, THE ENEMIES OF FREEDOM WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE TACIT APPROVAL TO DO WHAT THEY WANT.

THE TACIT APPROVAL HAS PRODUCED OPEN FEELINGS WITH LITTLE OR ANY JUSTICE. AS I SPEAK, I REMIND YOU THAT IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, A MAN OF AFRICAN DESCENT WAS STRIPPED AND THROWN FROM A BRIDGE INTO THE COLD WATERS OF A RIVER NEAR MEADVILLE. HE WAS LEFT TO DIE, BUT SOMEHOW HE SURVIVED TO TELL THE

STORY, YET THOSE INVOLVED IN THE CRIME HAVE NOT BEEN PUNISHED, NOR DOES IT APPEAR THAT THEY WILL. AGAIN THERE IS TACIT APPROVAL. THE LIFE OF A HUMAN BEING WHO HAPPENS TO HAVE DARKER SKIN APPEARS TO HAVE NO WORTH IN PENNSYLVANIA. THE NAACP CONTINUES TO MONITOR THIS CASE AND AWAIT JUSTICE. IN ANOTHER CASE IN TIOGA, PENNSYLVANIA, A 14 YEAR OLD, BLACK MALE WHO WAS BEING HARASSED BY WHITE YOUTHS BECAUSE OF HIS MIXED HERITAGE, AWAITS TRIAL AS AN ADULT FOR MURDERING TWO OF THOSE YOUTHS. THOSE YOUTHS SHOULD NOT HAVE DIED, THE NAACP DOES NOT CONDONE ANYONE TAKING THE LIFE OF ANOTHER BUT AGAIN THERE WAS A CLIMATE OF TACIT APPROVAL IN THE COMMUNITY DESPITE THE YOUNG MANS REQUEST TO CURB THE HARASSMENT. TO MY KNOWLEDGE AND I AM CERTAIN THAT MANY OF YOU ARE AWARE EXPRESSIONS OF BIGOTRY HAS EVEN COME FROM THE MOUTH OF A STATE LEGISLATOR EARLIER THIS YEAR WITHOUT LITTLE IF ANY REPERCUSSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE BODY. EVEN THE NAACP WROTE AND REQUESTED A RESPONSE FROM THE LEGISLATOR AND MINORITY AND MAJORITY LEADERS----NO RESPONSE. AGAIN TACIT APPROVAL.

I HAVE REVIEWED HOUSE BILL 2484 AND IT DOES ATTEMPT TO COVER MUCH OF THE VIOLENCE OCCURRING IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY. IF I COULD SUGGEST ANYTHING TO THIS COMMITTEE IT WOULD BE HOW LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT IS TREATING HATE CRIME ACTIVITY. FOR DECADES, LAW ENFORCEMENT HAS BEEN SLOW TO RECOGNIZE THE REAL NATURE OF HATE GROUPS. CRIMES ARE BEING PROSECUTED ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS, LIKE ANY OTHER ISOLATED MUGGING OR MURDER. WHAT IS FAILING HOWEVER, IS THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT IT IS THE HATE GROUPS THEMSELVES WHO ARE OFTEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE TYPES OF CRIMES.

LAW ENFORCEMENT MUST BEGIN TO TREAT HATE CRIMES THE WAY THEY TREAT OTHER ORGANIZED CRIME ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS MAFIA FAMILIES AND DRUG RINGS. THERE MUST BE A MESSAGE TO THE PUBLIC THAT HATE ACTIVITY WILL BE MET WITH SERIOUS PROSECUTION. THERE CANNOT BE A DUAL STANDARD.

THE NUMBERS OF HATE GROUPS IN PENNSYLVANIA IS EMBARRASSING AND DOES NOT PLACE THIS STATE IN A POSITIVE LIGHT WHEN IT COMES TO HATRED AND BIGOTRY. I END BY ASKING THE EARLIER QUESTION. "HOW INTEGRATED IS PENNSYLVANIA FROM A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LEVEL". HOPEFULLY, WITH A SETTING SUCH AS I AM

WITNESSING TODAY WILL BEGIN TO RESOLVE THE BIGOTRY THAT PERMEATES OUR SOCIETY. THE NAACP STANDS AVAILABLE TO ASSIST IN ANY WAY TO MAINTAIN THE FREEDOMS OF ALL OF THE CITIZENS OF PENNSYLVANIA. WE REMAIN IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS BUSINESS AND HOPE THAT THIS COMMITTEE WANTS TO DO THE SAME. THANK YOU.