The American Jewish Committee
Advancing Democracy, Pluralism and Mutual Understanding

Hate and the Internet
by Kenneth S. Stern

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Introduction

For ten or twenty dollars a month, you can have a potential audience of tens of millions of people. There was a time when these folks were stuck surreptitiously putting fliers under your windshield wiper. Now they are taking the same material and putting it on the Internet." – Ken McVay[i]

Visit any archive on hate and extremism and you will find a treasure trove of books, newspapers, magazines and newsletters. If you are lucky enough to find original mailers, many will be plain brown or manila wrappings, designed to protect the recipient from inquisitive neighbors and postal workers.

If the archive includes material from the 1980s and early 1990s, it likely contains videotapes and radio programs, maybe even dial-a-hate messages from "hot line" answering machines. It may also house faxed "alerts" that were broadcast to group members with the push of one button, in place of old-fashioned telephone "trees." Supporters of the Branch Davidians at Waco used faxes, as did groups involved in some militia confrontations.

Today's hate groups still mail newsletters, print books, produce videos and radio programs, have message "hot lines," fax alerts and, yes, put fliers under windshield wipers. But they increasingly rely on the Internet. Hate groups understand that this global computer network is far superior to the other modes of communication. Even in its infancy — for the 'net is still being defined — it is already what CDs are to records, and may, for many, become what electricity was to gaslight. The Internet is the most remarkable communication advancement of our time because it is easier, cheaper, quicker, multimedia, immense, and interactive. Hate groups no longer have to search for people to hear their message, or hope members will distribute newsletters. They now can set up web sites that "surfers" young and old can visit.

Once someone finds one site, he or she will be advised of, and with one mouse-click transported to, other like-minded groups through "links." Each hate group no longer communicates in isolation: it uses the Internet to advertise and to create the illusion that hate is not practiced in isolation at the fringes, but is part of a strong worldwide movement. The irony is that a black hate group that dehumanizes whites and a white hate group that dehumanizes blacks frequently are two mouse-clicks from each other, the connective tissue being antisemitism in general, and Holocaust denial in particular.

While hate on the Internet has been recognized as a growing problem, few workable solutions have been suggested. Some human rights groups have been content to document the sites, following the decades-old strategy that shedding light on hate activity will help solve the problem. But this approach, while still appropriate, is now more complex. When an old-fashioned hate newspaper was exposed, only the truly committed or curious would bother to find it. Today, when a hate web site is brought to light, anyone with a computer can access it. Exposure now means providing hatemongers free advertising in a medium of immediate accessibility.

Some human rights groups have suggested regulating the Internet, either through laws or software. As we will see, these "quick fixes" miss the mark, while more time-intensive measures – such as improved training of school-age children in basic Internet skills – hold more promise.

But it is not only school children who will need new strategies for a world in which computers will be the primary research tool. The continued development of the Internet will force human rights groups and others to reexamine – for the first time in many decades – basic strategies about how we combat hatred and hate groups. This paper will analyze the history of hate on the Internet, provide a blueprint for combating the problem, and most importantly, demonstrate ways to use this new technology to fight hatred throughout society.

ENDNOTES

[i] Barry Lazar, "Ken McVay leads the fight against hatred on the Net," The Gazette (Montreal), April 8, 1997, p. B4.

1980s and 1990s up to the Oklahoma City Bombing

"The amount of hate spread by computers has continued to give hatemongers influence far out of proportion to their

numbers and makes the spread of virulent antisemitism and Holocaust denial all too easy." — Rochelle Wilner, national chair of the Canadian League for Human Rights[i]

"Almost every time I talk to educators they [tell me] that their students are getting their first introduction to group hate through the Internet." — Ann Van Dyke of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission[ii]

Louis Beam is a notorious racist. Just ask the good people of Galveston, Texas. They knew him as the Grand Dragon of the Texas Realm, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, as well as the leader of a paramilitary group called the Texas Emergency Reserve. On February 14, 1981 Beam led three hundred people to Galveston, where he set a mock Vietnamese boat ablaze. He proclaimed that white people must "take back" the United States "by blood." His campaign terrorized local Vietnamese fishermen, threatening their livelihood, as well as their lives.[iii]

By the mid-1980s Beam was working with the Idaho-based Aryan Nations, one of the most important Christian Identity[1] groups in America. Before most people had given serious thought to buying a computer, Beam was operating a computer network. He used it to promote the violent antigovernment rhetoric that would later become the staple of the militia movement. Beam even used the new technology to issue a "hit list." According to the Atlanta Journal, Beam "proposed an assassination point system by which whites would earn the designation 'Aryan warrior.' It would take one full point to become an 'Aryan warrior.' The murder of a member of Congress would be worth one-fifth of a point, judges one-sixth, FBI agents and federal marshals one-tenth, journalists and local politicians one-twelfth. One full point would be given for assassinating the President."

FROM NOVELTY TO USEFUL TOOL

Beam's use of computers to communicate with other haters was a novelty in the 1980s. Personal computers, still new to the market, had little memory and were generally used for small business, home wordprocessing and bookkeeping needs. A massive linking of personal computers — the Internet — was being discussed as a way for colleges and other such institutions to transfer data between remote computers, not as a way to hook up personal computers worldwide.

By the early 1990s, however, the commercial appeal of the Internet grew exponentially. Companies such as Prodigy, America OnLine and CompuServe, as well as many smaller providers, offered connections to at least some parts of the Internet. Businesses, nonprofits, and academic institutions began hooking up employees. For some people, electronic mail (known as "e-mail") quickly became a habit, replacing many phone calls and letters.[iv]

Private bulletin boards began springing up and were quickly employed by a growing number of racist groups.[v] With names such as Patriot Net, Liberty Net and Paul Revere Net, a few hundred such systems were serving the far right in the early 1990s. These were relatively secure sites that allowed like-minded people to share information from computer to computer. White supremacists could sleep while their computers dialed up and downloaded the bulletin board's news, ready to read with their morning coffee. Linda Thompson, an early promoter of the militia movement, ran a bulletin board through which she claimed to reach 36,000 people. "We're a news service," she said. "We use the computer as the end of the line, not the beginning. We get information in by Federal Express, faxes and phone, then we put it on the bulletin board for the widest distribution."[vi] Bulletin boards also allowed extremists some degree of security both by controlling who could have access to the system and by encryption of messages.[vii]

NEWSGROUPS

Less secure, but also quick to catch on, were Internet newsgroups. Called "Usenet," these were sites available to anyone with Internet access. Newsgroups allowed people to chime in with information or comment on topics from bridge to ferrets to gardening to baseball. Well before the Oklahoma City bombing, newsgroups such as alt.conspiracy and talk.politics.guns were venues for militia members to share a wealth of information, advice and paranoia. Whole treatises on the formation of antigovernment paramilitary units were posted. Manuals and handbooks were shared.

A good lesson of the Internet's potential occurred in March 1995 when rumors abounded in militia-oriented newsgroups that the government was gearing up for a massive arrest of militia members, supposedly on March 25, 1995. Jon Roland of the Texas Constitutional Militia, posted the following:

We continue to get confirming reports, but so far no hard evidence, of a mass arrest . . . To the basic reports have come several unconfirmed reports as to which the targets might be and what offenses might be staged to be blamed on militia activities. . . . The atrocity targets include the following . . . : Crowded public places, to be bombed, and the bombings blamed on militia leaders . . . .[viii]

The paranoia and fear seemed palpable, the preparations frightening, as the date approached.[ix] Someone posted instructions for making an ammonium nitrate bomb, the type that would be used the next month during the Oklahoma City

bombing. Someone else offered to share the formula for C-4 explosives. In the newsgroup rec.pyrotechnics, a person provided the recipe for Sarin, the poison used on the Tokyo subway. According to researcher Rick Eaton, "The only outrage came from a user who complained the formula was posted in the wrong place."

This free flow of instantaneous information helped speed the quick growth of the militia movement, from one organization in Montana in February 1994 to groups in over 36 states by the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995. While the militias lacked any organized center, they relied on the instant communication and rumor potential of this new medium.[x] As the March 25th rumors demonstrated, there was little ability for people to verify the credibility of the information they received. (Steve Stockman, then a member of Congress, wrote to Attorney General Reno on March 22, complaining about the "impending raid.") Even if someone were in a remote part of Montana and needed a satellite dish for television, the Internet made them part of a global community of like-minded people, whom they were predisposed to trust.

A WINDOW ON THE WORLD OF HATE

On the other hand, the newsgroups also allowed a small but dedicated group of researchers and activists to gain a quick and accurate reading of the militia movement. Months after the first successful militia group was launched in early 1994, a few dozen people began exchanging information about the far right on a listserv. Members could share their research and observations with all others on the list simply by sending an e-mail message. Many postings taken from militia-supporting newsgroups demonstrated the increasing paranoia, the apparent heavy arming, and calls for violence in the spring of 1995. Information gained in large measure from the Internet prompted the American Jewish Committee to issue a report called "Militias: A Growing Danger" at the beginning of April 1995. Released with a "sense of urgency" the report warned of possible attacks on government. An accompanying memo highlighted the potential for such an incident on April 19, 1995, the second anniversary of the fiery end of the Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas, given the importance of Waco in militia ideology. Shortly after 9:00AM on that April morning, Timothy McVeigh, who believed in the racist anti-government ideology the researchers were monitoring, blew up the Alfred Murrah Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, killing 168 people. Most Americans immediately assumed that "Middle Eastern" terrorists were behind the carnage. Most researchers following the far right on the Internet suspected, correctly, that the bombers were homegrown.

Immediately after the bombing, the militia-oriented parts of cyberspace reflected what would later show up in far-right publications: an instant belief that the United States government was somehow behind the bombing. Even after the trial and conviction of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols in the following years, the conspiracy theories bandied about here – with downloadable "documentation" – rival those that took decades to develop about the Kennedy assassination. One can imagine a militia-oriented person reading this material and plotting acts of terrorism to be done in the "name" of the dead babies of Oklahoma City.

The Internet is a perfect medium for fueling conspiracy theories, given its capacity to circulate wild rumor and unfounded speculation at warp speed. For while it is the most democratic medium it does not have the checks and balances of older forms: editors at newspapers, management at radio and television stations. Even racist newsletter producers had to make decisions about content, and what might embarrass them.

It is also the perfect communication device for those who have a world view defined by hateful ideologies and theologies. Most zealots involved in extremist and racist politics tell of a "born-again" experience, a moment when they "discovered" some supposedly "suppressed truth" about how the world really functions. Those who bought the militia's cornerstone belief in a secret "New World Order" were convinced that a small group not only controlled the US and other governments, but also was so powerful that it could dictate where there would be earthquake and floods. That you didn't see reference to this evil entity in the major newspapers or broadcast networks was taken as empirical proof of its far-reaching power. For these conspiracy theorists, the only medium beyond the control of this unseen but all-powerful cabal was the Internet, because anyone with a computer and a modem had access to it. If you looked at the world in this skewed way, the newsgroups of the Internet became more credible than the New York Times.

A SENSE OF POWER AND COMMUNITY

On the eve of the Oklahoma City bombing, those researchers who used the Internet as an eye and ear on the racist far-right and militias spotted something beyond the medium's rumor potential: it had also created a heightened sense of community. Before the Internet, you could imagine a far-right zealot reacting to some event and having a beer with like-minded neighbor, or calling a comrade on the phone. Now, whether in a remote corner of Idaho or in a major California city, people instantaneously could vent, react, share thoughts, information, and strategy with a global community of like-minded people.[xi]

And so they did. Almost immediately after the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995, transcripts of militia-promoting short-wave radio talk shows were posted on the Internet, expounding conspiracy theories of government responsibility.[xii] When Timothy McVeigh was arrested days after the bombing, the Aryan News Agency posted the following advice:

"EVERYONE either cease public Net activities, or restrict them exclusively to posting NEWS about 'the incident,' at least for the next few days until we can ascertain the program and plan of the Washington Criminals . . ."

Someone also posted instructions for an Oklahoma-style fertilizer bomb in alt.conspiracy. "The information specifically details the construction, deployment and detonation of high-powered explosives," the message read. "It also includes complete details of the bomb used in Oklahoma City, and how it was used and could have been used better."

In July, 1995, when then-Congressman Charles Schumer was preparing to hold hearings about the militia movement and its specific threats against government employees, a man identified as Mike Chapman, moderator of the newsgroup misc.activism.militia, wrote:

According to an AP story Rep. Charles "Cereal Killer" Schumer, D-NY, will hold an unofficial forum on private militias. He's been unable to get congressional support for full-blown congressional hearings on militias so he's going to use this route instead.

I sure wouldn't cry if some militia fellows showed up at that meeting and gave Schumer a special high-energy present for his efforts. . . . Nope, I wouldn't cry if someone MP5'd Schumer or Klinton [sic] or Reno or any of them. I wouldn't necessarily agree with the action, but once it's done, well, it's done and we're all better off.[xiii]

White supremacist tracts, militia threats, recipes for terrorism, and other such tracts continued to be posted to Internet newsgroups and on bulletin boards following the Oklahoma City bombing, but a revolutionary new vehicle for hate on the Internet was also being born. For while Usenet allowed like-minded people to share texts and hope others would stumble upon and become taken by their conversations, the World Wide Web would open up a new universe of communication. It would soon become as the talkies were to silent films, or early television to radio.

ENDNOTES

[1] Christian Identity is the main theology on the racist far right today, providing a "religious" justification for hating blacks and other racial minorities as not even human and Jews as the literal offspring of the devil. It is an offshoot of a nineteenth century religion called British Israelism. Christian Identity adherents believe that white Anglo Saxons are the "true Jews," and profess a blatantly racist theology. According to one Christian Identity analysis of Genesis, God first created minorities, not as people, but as beasts. Later, God created Adam and Eve. Eve, impregnated by Adam, produced Abel, whose descendents were white, Nordic Aryan types, i.e., "true Jews." Eve, impregnated by Satan, produced Cain, whose descendants are the people known as Jews, but who are really imposters and demonic. See Leonard Zeskind, "The Christian Identity Movement: A Theological Justification for Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence," Center For Democratic Renewal, Atlanta, Ga., 1986 and Michael Barkun, Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[i] "Antisemitic incidents declining in Canada: B'nai Brith," Agence France Presse, Feb. 5, 1998

[ii] Sudarsan Raghavan, "Hate sites on Net soar, study discovers," Calgary Herald, January 8, 1998, p. D2.

[iii] For details on Louis Beam see Kenneth S. Stern, A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate, (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[iv] A personal computer connects to a computer network via a local phone call, so it is generally less expensive to send a message across the country, or the world, by e-mail than a traditional phone call. E-mail is also quicker than "snail mail," doesn't require paper, envelopes or stamps, and is waiting for the recipient whenever his or her computer is turned on. Most e-mail programs also make it easy to send a message to scores of people by either preprogramming "groups" or simply by clicking on names of people in the computer's address book. If you want to respond to someone's e-mail, you don't have to look up an address: the computer automatically knows how to route your response.

[v] This history of the early use of the Internet by far-right groups taken from Kenneth S. Stern, A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[vi] See Kenneth S. Stern, A Force Upon the Plain, p. 226.

[vii] Many messages were encrypted with a common system called "PGP" for "Pretty Good Privacy."

[viii] See Kenneth S. Stern, A Force Upon the Plain, p. 172.

[ix] On March 22, 1995 this frantic "Patriot WARNING!!!" appeared in alt.conspiracy: Our network has obtained information about a planned move by a joint ATF/MJTF task force against "domestic terrorist organizations' scheduled to occur on 3/25/95 at 0400 (4am). Patriot Organizations: THIS MEANS YOU! . . . They are getting us ready with the propaganda about "terrorists" in the wake of events in Japan. Pay attention to the hype on the TV. They are now telling us to be prepared for something like what happened in Japan (Nerve gas/Subway). . . . Just tonight KTLA in Los Angeles finally admitted that FEMA would be involved with a similar incident within the United States. What was FEMA set up to deal with??? Hurricanes and earthquakes, right?Ok. You should all get the point. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, its [sic] too late for you. For those of you who have been preparing, keep your heads up. We have no choice.

[x] Many militia rumors of secret attack plans by disloyal or foreign elements were actually recycled John Bircher anti-Communist phobias of the 1960s, given new life in large part due to the Internet.

[xi] This capacity was also recognized by the militias. Consider this essay Milton John Kleim, Jr. wrote "On Tactics and Strategy for Usenet":"USENET offers enormous opportunity for the Aryan Resistance to disseminate our message to the unaware and the ignorant. The State cannot yet stop us from 'advertising' our ideas and organizations on USENET . . . NOW is the time to grasp the WEAPON which is the NET, and wield it skillfully and wisely

while you may still do so freely. . . . Each USENET 'cyber guerilla' must obtain a listing of all Net NEWS groups that are available on their system, and search through the list for groups suitable for our posts." Nathaniel Sheppard, Jr., "Hate in Cyberspace," Emerge August 30, 1996 vol. 7, no. 9, p. 34.

[xii] For these postings see Kenneth S. Stern, A Force Upon the Plain

[xiii]See Kenneth S. Stern, A Force Upon the Plain, p. 229.

Web Sites of Hate
"You're not going to find a Nazi on a street corner handing out copies of Mein Kampf. It's now on the Internet."[i] – Samuel Macy, originator of HateWatch

Don Black is a long-standing neo-Nazi.[ii] He joined the National Socialist Youth Movement in 1970, and for the last three decades has been an important figure in the far right. He even became the head of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Black is a long-time associate of David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader who "modernized" the organization in the 1980s. Like Duke, Black wanted to make the face of hatred more presentable to the general public. Like Duke, he gave up his KKK robes for less offending attire and ran for public office (a U.S. Senate seat from Alabama). And he, like Duke continued to peddle racist and antisemitic materials through organs such as the National Association for the Advancement of White People.

Black is also an ex-convict. In the 1980s he served a federal sentence for conspiracy. He and his white supremacist cohorts tried to take over Dominica, a small Caribbean Island, in order to establish a white supremacist government. While jailed, Black learned about computers. He later put that knowledge to work, revolutionizing hate on the Internet.

Today the Internet is nearly synonymous with the World Wide Web, the various "sites" individuals, groups, governments, companies, and academic institutions have established. Almost every organization seems to have an address (called a URL, short for "Uniform Resource Locator") on the web. This was not so only a few years ago. In March 1995, when Black opened Stormfront, it was the first overtly neo-Nazi World Wide Web site. Stormfront, as you can see, sports graphics that conjure up images of Nazi Germany. It is billed as a "resource for those courageous men and women fighting to preserve their White Western culture, ideals and freedom of speech and association – a forum for planning strategies and forming political and social groups to ensure victory."

From its homepage.[iii] you can access a bulletin board, a series of "frequently asked questions" (called FAQ) about what Black calls white "nationalism," libraries for text or graphics, a calendar of upcoming events, chat rooms, and a treasure trove of antisemitic and racist tracts, from articles by David Duke to claims printed by the neo-Nazi group National Alliance that Jews secretly rule America. There are weekly newsletters, listservs, and versions in German and Spanish. But what is most impressive about Stormfront is its "links" session. It is a gateway to an entire universe of racism and antisemitism.

LINKS

Links are what they sound like – ways to go effortlessly from one web site to another. With just a click of a mouse you can go hopping around related places on the World Wide Web. Links are one of the best things about the Internet. Many museum sites, for example, link with other museums so that you visit one collection, then another, without having to type in a new web site address. Black's links, while not an exhaustive collection of hate sites, remains an impressive first step into the universe of bigotry. All the sites shown in this chapter are ones that you can go to, one from the other, by clicking on links in the various sites.

Click on Stormfront's link to "White Nationalism/White Patriotism," for example, and you can visit organizations from World

Wide White Power (for a good part of 1998 it had an opening graphic of a skinhead leaping from a computer terminal, beating up a Jew), to those who preach RAHOWA! (Racial Holy War), to a site for "Independent white racialists." This site proclaims "Your skin is your uniform," sports articles by dead and imprisoned members of the terrorist group "The Order" (which robbed banks and killed Denver talk show host Alan Berg in the 1980s) and even has an audio file[iv] of a speech by George Lincoln Rockwell, deceased leader of the American Nazi Party. One of the more eclectic linked sites is the Aryan Dating Page.

Other headings for linked sites include: White Rights/Racially Conscious Conservatism, Eugenics, Academic Publications on Ethnology and Race, White Heritage and Culture, Political Campaigns (David Duke, Patrick Buchanan), Legal Defense, Revisionism [the term Holocaust deniers use to make their antisemitic ideology sound academic], Opposition to Zionism and Israeli Terrorism, Christian Identity, Ku Klux Klan, Skinheads, White Power Music, International (including Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National in France).

OTHER HATE- AND VIOLENCE-PROMOTING SITES

Following Black's example, hundreds of hate-filled sites have proliferated. Some, like this one from the White Aryan Resistance, sport racist cartoons.

As does Aryan.com:

Violence, of course, is championed by texts too. The Johnny Reb site, for example, proclaimed:

The hunting of deer, pheasant, rabbit and other traditional game WILL NOT BE PERMITTED during the 1997-1998 hunting season. However, the Dept. of Fish and Game has provided a substitute species so that the State will not lose license revenues and so that hunters will not lose their skill in the field. Therefore July 1, 1997 through June 1, 1998 has been declared open season on Porch Monkeys (Unemployeous Africanus.) Regionally known as "Jigaboos", "Saucer lips", "Jungle Bunnies", "Spooks," "Niggers", and "Spear Chuckers." – Traps may not be baited with pork chops, fried chicken, watermelon, ribs, cheap whiskey, ripple wine, flashy clothing, or more than five (5) grams of crack cocaine. Helpful Huntin [sic] Tips Shooting Porch Monkeys involves looking for bright colors, watermelon seeds, old Cadillacs and Lincolns, empty wine bottles, junkies, hookers, following the smell of cooking pork or carp, and listening for loud rap music. Happy Hunting.[v]

Among the menus available from the Whitepower site is the Racial Holy War Kitchen, where "you will find instructions, ingredients and even diagrams on how to make all sorts of bombs, explosives and weapons. . . . This is of course for educational purposes . . . ."[vi] Various sites offer a whole litany of bomb-making recipes.

Nazi paraphernalia is also easy to come by on the Internet. The Aryan Graphics site offers a full range of Nazi pins, flags, and other material for sale:

Audio files of speeches of Adolph Hitler can also be found and downloaded from the Internet.

Web sites with swastikas at least are open about their hate. Others try to present themselves as mainstream, at least at first blush. One such site seems to be, and apparently is, that of a Florida business-related group. However, it also hosts a web site on "Politics and Terrorism." Complete with music, it is a virtual assault on Jews and Israel.

Dripping blood, it sports an Anti-Semitism Index as follows, with all items hyperlinked[1] so that the full documents can immediately be accessed:

Anti-Semitism, the word is a misnomer- David Irving, "anti-Semites used to be people who hate Jews, Now, anti-Semites are people whom Jews hate" - The branding of Patrick Buchanan - Winston Churchill on the "The Jews" - Who Rules America - Henry Ford Sr, The Dearborn Independant [sic] - Read this only at the risk of offending Bnai Brith - Some original reportage of the Russian pogroms - anti-Christian bashing, Christian baiting - The full text of an article by Mark Twain on the Jews, 1898 - Cleansing Christianity from American culture - Iranian President Khatami charges US Government ZOG - Adolph Hitler, Book, Why ? - Nixon, branded as an anti-Semite.

The web site of Radio Islam is run by Ahmed Rahmi, a notorious antisemite who once even read Mein Kampf on Swedish public radio.[vii]

It offers, among other instant selections:

Revisionist pictures

Shahak: about Jewish "Religion

The international Jew By Henry Ford

L' UNESCO et Auschwitz Par le professeur Faurisson

The Protocols of Zion (in 6 languages)

Current Issues for Blacks and Jews

The Protocols of Zion (in Russian text)

As you can see, the Radio Islam site provides a treasure trove of antisemitism, from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion[2] to articles by Nazi apologists to Holocaust denial to Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. You can also listen to antisemitism over this site by downloading audio files or by clicking on a button that connects you to Radio Islam.

Radio Islam is also an internationally oriented site, allowing you to find antisemitic material in French, English, Swedish, German, Russian, Arabic, Portugese, Spanish, Italian and Norwegian. You can also click on information pertinent to any country. In the section on the United States, for example, documents purport to show that America's founding fathers shared Radio Islam's paranoia about Jews. Neither George Washington nor Benjamin Franklin ever uttered the antisemitic diatribes that Radio Islam attributes to them. Both statements are antisemitic frauds circulated, and debunked, earlier in this century. Radio Islam and other sites have given these forgeries new life on the Internet.

Radio Islam's link section is also novel. Instead of listing different sites hyperlinked from a page on Radio Islam's site, it takes you instead to the commercial search engine[3] Infoseek which then automatically runs a search on Radio Islam's URL.

This gives you a listing of other sites, including Holocaust denying and Farrakhan- promoting URL's, which mention Radio Islam and to which you can then travel with a mouse click. Among them:

Welcome to the

Blacks and Jews Newspage

This page is dedicated to the dissemination of accurate information about the historical relationship between Blacks and Jews.*

Obtain your copy of *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews, Vol. 1*

* This site is managed by The Historical Research Department. It IS NOT an OFFICIAL website of the Nation of Islam or of Professor Tony Martin or others named within. Visit our brothers and sisters at the N O I by clicking HERE

The site repeats the fraudulent libel of the Nation of Islam's book The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews. A functional rewrite of the Protocols targeted to an African-American audience, the book (and this site) misrepresents the minor role played by a few Jews in the enslavement of blacks and recasts it as a huge Jewish attack on black people. Among other material available by hyperlink from this site are:

The Jewish Abolitionist Myth

Julian Bond Kneels for Jewish Cash

Henry Louis Gates: Self-described "HEAD NIGGER IN CHARGE"

Morris Seligman-Dees & Southern Poverty Law Center talks HATE?

Where are the Jews in Clinton's RACE INITIATIVE?

Liquor, Lies & Edgar Bronfman

Amistad: The Answer to The Secret Relationship?

Letters & Correspondence Links

The links site connects back to Radio Islam, to racist and antisemitic Afrocentric sites, to sites that offer the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the "Talmud Exposed," and various Holocaust denying sites. Interestingly, both white supremacists and black supremacists routinely connect to sites that offer classical antisemitism and more recent forms, such as denial of the Holocaust. In the circuitous world of the Internet, white hate groups demonize blacks and black hate groups demonize whites, but the connective tissue between them is a shared antisemitism.

HOLOCAUST DENIAL

Links from either white or black antisemites will lead you to Bradley Smith's "Committee for Open Discussion of the Holocaust Story." Presented as a defender of "intellectual freedom" and "free speech," in reality this site repeats the lies and distortions that neo-Nazis and others have promulgated for the last twenty or more years, claiming that Jews "made up" the Holocaust.[ix] By quoting out of context and misrepresenting scientific facts (such as the properties of the Zyklon-B gas used in the gas chambers), Holocaust deniers make it seem that the Nazi plot to murder Jews during the Second World War, the use of gas chambers as part of that plot, and the death of approximately six million Jews are not established facts, but fiction. (For Holocaust denial to have any credence, of course, every credible historian – English, French, German, American, Israeli – would have to be part of a great conspiracy to hide "the truth.")

Because deniers especially target young people born long after World War II, because their agenda is political and not historical, and because they want to create the illusion of "debate," the Internet is a near-perfect tool for them. One of the most prominent parts of Smith's homepage is a box with "Web Sites That Address Holocaust Revisionism." Broken down into "Pros" (15 sites) and "Cons" (5 sites), these cells are then hyperlinked to the various sites. In the real world, of course, credible historians "debate" issues relating to the Holocaust all the time, as academics do in any field. But there is not one tenured professor of history in the United States who professes Holocaust denial. No credible historian would "debate" a denier, because merely by showing up he or she would concede what the denier wants to create: the appearance that reasonable people can and do differ about the defining facts of the Holocaust. But while there is no equivalence in the real world between the organizations Smith lists of "pros" and "cons,"[x] the Internet allows the illusion of one between, say, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and neo-Nazi Ernst Zündel. Web pages, unlike museums and well-reputed organizations, are easy to create.

HATE SITES TARGET YOUTH

Also linked in this virtual world of hate are numerous sites geared to the young, including many Skinhead sites. Some, such as Resistance Records, let people download music with racist and neo-Nazi lyrics. Then there are "jokes." The "Jewish Joke Center" asks "What do Jews and apples have in common? Both look good hanging from a tree."[xi] And there have been games such as "Concentration Camp Manager," where the more Jews you herd together the better[xii]

and "Hang Leroy,"[xiii] among others. One site, called "Creativity for Kids," is sponsored by a neo-Nazi group and has been called a "Sesame Street" for haters.[xiv] Other sites include games, including copies of commercially available ones redesigned to let players "win" when they murder Jews, blacks, and other racial and religious minorities.[xv] Even hate sites that don't offer such frills are slickly designed to attract young people.

THE NUMBER AND IMPACT OF HATE SITES

These sites don't display hatred simply as amusement. They all have a political purpose and have changed how some hate groups function in the real world. As Westchester County (NY) District Attorney Jeanine Piro noted when asked about the presence of the neo-Nazi group the National Alliance in her community, the group was active on the Internet. She credited this new technology for both helping them to recruit and to cut down the need for public meetings.[xvi]

The number of hate sites remains uncertain: As the Ottawa Citizen reported, one source put the number of racist sites at 600, including "35 right-wing 'militia' sites, 94 advocating a racial hierarchy, 51 sites promoting terrorism and 35 white-supremacy sites [while another "expert"] put the number of white-supremacy sites alone at 250."[xvii] Another source puts the count of hate sites at over 800.[xviii] Interestingly HateWatch director David Goldman thinks the number of group-linked hate sites actually decreased toward the end of 1998 and into 1999, possibly due to the labor and cost involved in their maintenance.[xix]

However, the number of sites is not the most critical factor. If a real-world hate library had 800 books and few visitors, it would not matter; if it were constantly used, it would. The real "numbers" questions are: How many people are recruited to the world of hate by these sites? How many people already in this world are going to be empowered to act by the new medium's treasure trove of information and allusion of power and community? And, most importantly, rather than just bemoan what the bad guys are doing, how are people of good will going to use this new technology not only to counter hate on the Internet, but more critically, hate in society?

ENDNOTES

[1] Hyperlinks are areas in images or text (frequently represented by a blue font with underscore) on which, if you click, you will be taken to another place within the web site or another place on the World Wide Web.

[2] The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is a Russian czarist forgery based on a nineteenth-century novel about politics and Napoleon. Napoleon was removed, and Jews were substituted as a group whose "elders" met secretly to control the world. The Protocols served as a fuel for European pogroms. It was popularized in the United States by automaker Henry Ford who was given a copy in 1920. He believed it and then popularized it through his paper the Dearborn Independent, starting a campaign against "the international Jew."[3] Most people who want to find something on the Web, whether vacation rentals, consumer products, hobbies, or news, use search engines. Companies such as Yahoo!, Excite, Infoseek, Alta Vista and others are virtual starting gates for surfing the 'net. Plug in a word or two, wait a couple of seconds, and you are presented with a list of potential sites, newsgroups, etc. of interest. Just click on an item listed, and you go directly to that page. These engines are helpful to haters too. Plug in the word "nigger," for example, and you will find thousands of "hits," many of which will lead you into a virtual world of racism.

[i] Anne Kallas, "Infoplus: Crime & Safety Report: Combatting Crime on the Internet," Dayton Daily News, April 23, 1997, p. 3B.

[ii] David Beard Fort, "Former KKK Leader Transmits His Hate Through Cyberspace," Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel, March 18, 1995.

[iii] Please note: Web sites are always changing. Some disappear, and new ones reappear all the time. Content on any page is easily changed. The sites described in this paper were all available when research was being conducted in 1998 and 1999.

[iv] The Internet not only allows people to send text and graphics, but also audio and video. While the technology is still relatively primitive, people can now watch video and listen to live radio through their computers.

[v]. hatewatch.org [visited December 2, 1998] [vi] Aryeh Dean Cohen, "Weaving a Web of hatred," The Jerusalem Post, August 11, 1997, p. 7.

[vii] Aryeh Dean Cohen, "Weaving a Web of hatred," The Jerusalem Post, August 11, 1997, p. 7.

[viii] On the Web version of this paper this link is redirected to AJC's Web site, where information on Farrakhan is available.

[ix] For an authoritative exposé of Holocaust Denial see Deborah Lipstadt's Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory (New York: Free Press, 1993) and Kenneth S. Stern's Holocaust Denial (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1993).

[x] One exception is the "Con" site of the Jewish Defense League, which itself is a hate group.

[xi] Aryeh Dean Cohen, "Weaving a Web of Hatred," The Jerusalem Post, August 11, 1997, p.7.

[xii] Sudarsan Raghavan, "Hate sites on Net soar, study discovers," Calgary Herald, January 8, 1998, p. D2.

[xiii] Steve Young et al, "Hate on the Web," Digitial Jam CNNFN,October 22, 1997; Wednesday 8:18 pm Eastern Time, Transcript # 97102210FN-L11.

[xiv] Raymond Smith, "Neo-Nazis, skinheads, extremists go online to spread philosophies," The Times Union, July 22, 1998, p. D8.

[xv] Seymour Diener, "Governments need to tackle problem of Web hate sites," The Ottawa Citizen, May 13, 1998, p. 14.

[xvi] James Ridgeway et al, "Neo-Nazis in 'Jew York' Group Linked to McVeigh gets organized here, published by mainstream press," The Village Voice, June 3, 1997, p. 42.

[xvii] The Ottawa Citizen, May 13, 1998.

[xviii] Gina Smith, Ted Koppel, "Hate and the Internet," ABC Nightline, January 13, 1998, transcript #98011301-j07.

[xix] Interview with author, January 6, 1999.

Law Enforcement
"There are racist, horrific, godless messages on the Net that encourage people to violence. They can say that every Black in the United States should be killed, that there should be another Holocaust. But the people posting these messages can't be prosecuted because they can't be specifically linked to subsequent actions."[i] – Brian Levin, Richard Stockton College Imagine that you are Yen Nguyen. You're twenty-seven, a graduate student in microbiology and molecular genetics at the University of California at Irvine, and one morning – September 20, 1996 – like most mornings, you turn on your computer and check your e-mail. Today you're especially eager, because you're expecting to hear from a friend about visiting next weekend.

You log on, but there is no message from your friend. Instead, you see this:

Hey stupid fucker

As you can see in the name, I hate Asians, including you. If it weren't for asias [sic] at UCI, it would be a much more popular campus. You are responsible for ALL the crimes that occur on campus. YOU are responsible for the campus being all dirt. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE. That's why I want you and your stupid ass comrades to get the fuck out of UCI. IF you don't I will hunt all of you down and Kill your stupid asses. Do you hear me? I personally will make it my life carreer [sic] to find and kill everyone one [sic] of you personally. OK?????? That's how determined I am.

Get the fuck out. Mother Fucker (Asian Hater)

At about the same time, Sabrina Lin, a 19-year old sophomore studying mechanical and aerospace engineering, turned on her computer, and received the same message. As did Tracy Wang, an 18-year-old sophomore majoring in biology, and Thien-Thu Hoan, an 18-year old junior also studying biology, and William Liu, a 22-year-old senior majoring in mechanical engineering, and Jerry Lee and Jason Lin and Hen Diep and, all told, about 60 students at UCI.[ii]

Imagine being any one of these sixty students. You recheck your e-mail and see that you (and fifty-nine others) have been sent the above message from "'Mother Fucker (Hates Asians)' ." If you are in your room do you double-check your door locks? Would you have trouble sleeping? How much thought do you give before venturing out on campus the next morning?

A MILESTONE PROSECUTION

You would think that sending a message like this one is a hate crime and should be prosecuted, but hate crimes are not simple matters, especially those committed by computer. Consider the problems. It was only in the 1980s and 1990s that civil rights organizations became vigorous in proposing various forms of hate crime legislation. There was an understanding that our laws should acknowledge the difference between coming home and finding "Kilroy was here" versus "Kill all (fill in the blanks)!!!!" scrawled on your garage door. Just think about having to explain one graffito, or the other, to your eight-year-old child. The first is an annoyance, the second is a terrifying message that impacts the entire community.

Hate crime legislation does not make hate illegal. Through vehicles such as the Hate Crime Statistics Act, it encourages accurate collection of information about hate crimes. And it enhances penalties for crimes where the victim is selected on the basis of his or her race or religion, and in some models sex, sexual orientation, or disability.

While it is impossible to paint a bright line that would separate hateful actions that are legal from those that are not, consider the following possibilities. If the person who wrote this e-mail to the Asian students instead had stood on a soapbox in the middle of campus and announced "I hate Asians . . . I personally will make it my life career to find and kill every one of them," that would most likely be protected speech, despite its reprehensible nature. If the same person made the same comment to a group of Asian students or to a mob of students organized to protest Japanese trade tariffs, that would most likely not be protected. The nature of the threat and the circumstances in which it is communicated help determine whether it is either speech protected under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, or illegal action. Even before the Internet, there were many gray areas. Applying standards to hate e-mail is even more complex.

If you were an Asian student and you opened your door to an animated, clearly hateful person who uttered the words of

the Internet posting above, that would most likely constitute an illegal act under many states' harassment statutes. If you opened your door and the person said the same words, clearly as a joke, in parody of a neo-Nazi, that would likely be no crime. The same question of context and intent would apply if you switched on your telephone answering machine and heard these words.

What if you received a printed copy of this e-mail message in the U.S. mail? Like the phone threat, it is directed specifically at you, unlike the general message that a student on a soapbox might utter. Depending on the type of statute available in the jurisdiction, a prosecution might be successful.

Consider the difficulty prosecuting a crime that occurs only in cyberspace. Unlike the face-to-face threat, there usually is no eyewitness to identify the perpetrator. Unlike the threat on a phone message machine, there is no voice to compare to any suspect or phone records to check. Unlike the mailed threat, there is no postmark, no fingerprint, no saliva under the stamp for a potential forensic match. There is only an e-mail path left of the message, showing from which terminal the message was sent, and when.

Michael Gennaco is a very talented prosecutor. An assistant U.S. Attorney in southern California, he remembered that under federal law 18 USC § 245 (b) (2) (A)[iii] it is illegal to "intimidate or interfere with . . . any person because of race . . . or national origin . . . because he is . . . enroll[ed] in a public college . . ." This law conjures up images of the civil rights area, when segregationists tried violence and threats of violence to keep blacks out of southern educational institutions. Gennaco used this law to prosecute the nation's first e-mail case, convicting Richard Machado, a naturalized U.S. citizen.

On that morning of September 20, 1996, Machado had gone into a computer lab on campus. He entered the UCI computer system and researched all the people who were on-line right then. He culled the Asian-sounding names and inserted them as addresses of a message he had already composed, explaining why he hated Asians and what he planned to do to them. After finding sixty or so, he decided to hide his identity. Instead of signing "Richard Machado" he wrote "Motherfucker Asian Hater."[iv] He also altered his user name; instead of rmachado@uci.edu, it became motherfucker@uci.edu. Then he tested his plan, sending himself the threat to insure that there were no paths back to him.[v] It worked. He then sent the message to his sixty targets, and to himself. Then he logged off, left, and logged on to a different terminal, checking for replies.[vi] When he didn't get enough, he resent the threat. This time more responses came, showing fright, anger, anxiety. Machado then sent a third message to the same recipients, this time using his real name, pretending to be a victim of the threat. "Just keep an eye out for any suspicious person," he wrote.

But just as computer crime is new, so are the ways that computer criminals can trip up. Unbeknownst to Machado, Jason Lin – one of his targets – was working upstairs at the time. Lin figured out that the message must have come from the lab. He rushed downstairs. The only person there was Machado. As it turned out, Lin's quick action wasn't necessary. Video surveillance cameras recorded Machado's actions.[vii]

At trial, Machado didn't deny his deed. "I was bored," he said "I wanted to see people's reactions to an e-mail. I gave it a sense of hatred, but my intentions were not that of the letter. I was bored. I meant no harm."[viii]

But harm he did. Recipients like Sabina Lin were "scared . . . scared that somebody – somebody knows my e-mail address and can send me e-mail like this."[ix] "UCI is . . . a very large campus and it's dominated by Asians . . . [A]nd comparing the ratio of the students here and the people that he found to e-mail, I feel very threatened by this. [From the UCI computer system he could also] learn my home address and home phone number."[x] Lin hesitated making new friends, and stopped walking on campus. "My friends would take turns [picking] me up from classes. . . . I don't talk to strangers at all. . . . I carry Mace. . . .[My parents] asked me to transfer."[xi]

When Jerry Lee saw the e-mail he was worried that the sender might be stalking him.[xii] Lee had a job closing the library at 1:00AM, and he now felt particularly vulnerable. It effected his job. His sleep. He worried that the person had his "address and he can, you know, bust in at any time."[xiii]

Another victim, William Liu, "knew it wasn't a joke because it was so serious, so intense. . . . you don't know anything about that person. You don't know what potential they have for harm or what they might do to you." The e-mail, he said "blatantly violates another's private space." He called Machado a "wimp, trying to hide behind a computer screen."[xiv] In some ways Machado was like a cyber-burglar, violating his victims' sense of privacy and security.
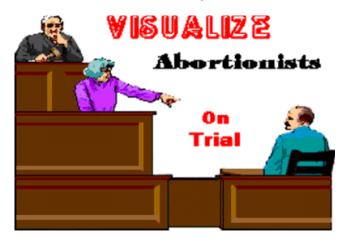
After a hung jury, Machado was retried and convicted in the first hate e-mail case in U.S. history. Some may claim that Machado's free speech rights were violated. But the Internet was simply the means through which he communicated his threat. If the threat – as here – were "action" and not "opinion," it was not more protected speech than if a phone or the mail were used in a similar illegal way. There certainly should be and will be other similar prosecutions for crimes where the Internet is used.[xv] But most of the hatred on the Internet is opinion, not illegal action, and cannot be prosecuted in this country.

CIVIL LIABILITY

Civil suits have also been used to combat hate on the Internet. In 1997, five doctors and two abortion clinics brought a case in U.S. District Court in Oregon against various anti-abortion activists.[xvi] Seeking both damages and a court order prohibiting many of the anti-abortionists' actions, the plaintiffs' major complaint was that they had been subjected to a "campaign of terror and intimidation by defendants that violates the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act," federal legislation enacted in 1994 after a series of assassinations of abortion providers and bombings at abortion clinics.

Specifically, the plaintiffs pointed to four "communications" that were in their view not protected speech: a "Deadly Dozen" poster which listed the names, addresses and phone numbers of various abortion doctors, offered a $5000 "reward" for "information leading to . . . their arrest," and stated that abortion was prosecuted as a "war crime" at Nuremberg; a poster with the photograph of and personal information about a particular doctor, with the notation "Guilty of Crimes Against Humanity"; a bumper sticker which advocated "Execute . . . Murderers . . . Abortionists"; and an Internet site called the Nuremberg Files.

The site was premised on the belief that, sometime in the future, abortion will be, ex post facto, declared illegal, just as the crimes of the Nazis, which were legal when carried out under Nazi law, were later made punishable at Nuremberg. It follows, the site argued, that it makes sense to collect as much information now as possible, to facilitate prosecutions at a later date. To many, this seemed like a subterfuge for an intended threat. The site encouraged collection of personal information not only about abortion providers, but also about their spouses and children. Also troubling was the fact that it crossed out the names of providers who had been murdered, such as that of Dr. Barnett Slepian, a doctor assassinated while in his home, with his family, in Buffalo, New York.

In addition to listing doctors, clinics, judges and law enforcement personnel, the website also listed MISCELLANEOUS SPOUSES & OTHER BLOOD FLUNKIES including Pat Ireland, Jack Kevorkian, Cybil Sheppard, Whoopi Golderg, and many others.

The judge ruled that three of the four communications (all except the bumper sticker) were objectively "true threats" and actionable under applicable law. And, in February 1999, a jury returned a $107 million verdict for the plaintiffs, and enjoined the defendants from continuing to publish or distribute the communications at issue, including the Internet site.

On appeal, this case will help define various important issues, among them: whether a threat has to be both intended as a direct threat, or just perceived as a direct threat. Any decision may not fully explore the free speech implications of the Internet since that was only one medium of publishing the message, and the case was brought not under the general type of state harassment law, but primarily under a specific federal statute. Nonetheless, this case demonstrates that just as certain printed and spoken speech is beyond First Amendment protection because it is really illegal action, not all Internet communications are protected from civil liability and restraint.

ENDNOTES

[i] Nathaniel Sheppard, Jr. "Hate in Cyberspace," Emerge, August 30, 1996, Vol. 7, No. 9, p. 34.

[ii] United States of America vs. Richard Machado, United States District Court for the Central District of California, SA CR 96-142-AHS, TR vol. 1, pps. 1-150-51.

[iii] 18 USC § 245 (b) (2) (A) reads, in pertinent part, "Whoever, whether or not acting under color or law, by force or threat of force, willfully injures, intimidates or interferes with, or attempts to injure, intimidate or interfere with –(2) any person because of race, color, religion, or national origin and because he is or has been –(A) enrolling in or attending any public school or public college . . . (5) shall be fined under this title, or imprisoned not more

than one year, or both . . .

[iv] Machado TR 1-153

[v] Machado TR 1-154

[vi] Machado TR-1-154-55.

[vii] Machado TR 1-156-57.

[viii]Machado TR 1-170.

[ix] Machado TR 1-178

[x] Machado TR 1-178-81

[xi] Machado TR 1-178-190

[xii] Machado TR 1-198.

[xiii] Machado TR 1-199-202.

[xiv] Machado TR 2-63-98

[xv] Hate messages have come from many universities, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, including Georgia State, Idaho State, Northeastern, Rutgers, South Florida, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Pittsburgh. Nathaniel Sheppard, Jr. "Hate in Cyberspace," Emerge, August 30, 1996 Vol. 7, No. 9, p. 34.

[xvi] For an excellent synopsis of this case, see Kara Stein, "Background Report: American Coalition of Life Activists v. Planned Parenthood," American Jewish Committee, New York, 1999.

The problem with
"Those who would guard our morals haven't yet realized that forbidding anyone under 18 to enter a site is the easiest way of making sure teenagers take time off from driving their parents insane and browse these web sites instead." – Jeff Abramowitz. [i] The Macado and Nuremberg File cases remind us that while some egregious instances of hate on the Internet can and should be prosecuted, few rise to that level. Hateful opinions are protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Unless they constitute an immediate and specific threat, they cannot and should not be illegal. As the U.S Supreme Court noted in 1997 when it overturned the Communications Decency Act of 1996 (an attempt to regulate pornography on the Internet), laws cannot stand if they suppress "a large amount of speech that adults have a constitutional right to receive."[ii] And since the Internet is global, laws in any single country have only limited applicability. Neo-Nazi George Burdi, a Canadian and the founder of Resistance Records, uses an American Internet provider in order to avoid censorship.[iii]

What, then, should be done about the proliferation of hate sites? First, we should not overrate the danger. Some of the calls to regulate or censor the Internet are born of fear associated with any new medium, much as there was when radio, movies, and television were new. While groups will continue to exploit the Internet's potential, their web sites are not reaching millions of new potential converts. While web sites make information available to millions of people, users must access these sites. Most will not. As George Vradenburg III, senior vice president and general counsel of America OnLine points out, hateful "voices are only going to get traction if there's widespread circulation, word of mouth, distributions of them. [One source says there are] 163 hate sites, but we have every day 800 million web hits from AOL members." AOL represents about 40 percent of web activity in the United States – this equates to about 2 billion "web hits" a year. By contrast, the traffic to hate sites is relatively small.

Ken McVay, director of Project Nizkor (a web site which combats Holocaust denial), points out that "Stormfront gets 700 hits a day on its site. My site, which is marginal compared to AOL, gets 6-8,000 hits a day just on its homepage, and maybe 30-40,000 hits a day, just people looking for information." There are at least three different categories of people who will come across hate sites. The concerns we should have about each group differ:

People within the orbit of hate ideologies and theologies who will find information, a sense of community and an illusion of power from these sites.

People who stumble across a site and visit briefly out of curiosity but, as with pornography on the Internet, will not linger.

Students and others who use the Internet for research.

Proposers of easy "solutions" to hate on the Internet don't appreciate these distinctions. Some people have said that hate sites should be prohibited on the Internet, and warn that if they are permitted, they will harm both the Internet community and society at large."[iv]

But Don Black, originator of the hate site Stormfront, counters, "If Thomas Jefferson had a web site today, he would be censored because in his autobiography he says that nothing is more certainly written than that these, the Negro people, are to be free, nor is it less certain that equally free they cannot live under the same government. Well, that makes Thomas Jefferson a separatist and by the definition of [those who would outlaw hate sites], then his site would be subject to censorship." [v]

The danger of the proliferation of hate is real, but Black correctly underscores the dilemma of official censorship. While it is attractive to do away with the problem with a huge "delete" key, the issues involved deserve a more nuanced response for three reasons. First, any attempt to ban sites that merely advocate hate and do not cross the line to unlawful action would fail as unconstitutional. Second, just as with the unsuccessful effort earlier in the 1990s to pass "hate speech codes" on many college campuses, attempts at suppression change the public discourse from condemnation of the hater's message to support of the hater's rights. Third, even if it were sound policy to try and remove hate sites, to do so would be impossible. The Internet is simply too large and global for such a solution to work.

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY

Some large providers, like America Online[vi], have policies that prohibit users from certain types of conduct, including engaging in hate.[vii] While this practice is both consistent with the First Amendment (companies are not government entities and can define the boundaries of acceptable behavior of its clientele) and commendable (America OnLine is using its own First Amendment rights to proclaim it will not help promote bigotry), asking providers to pull the plug on hate sites won't solve the entire problem. For example, after a rash of racist postings that attracted news attention in Canada, some people suggested that one notorious offender's provider cut off his account. "Go ahead and send off all the complaint letters you want," the racist wrote. "I have several freenet accounts under various names all over North America, I also have several Unix shell accounts in Europe and Australia, over 60 back-up e-mails for posting through Dejanews, and God knows how many open NNTP servers that allow posting to Canadian news groups. So, get all the accounts cut that you want, all you accomplish is delaying me for maybe, mmm, five minutes."[viii]

Hate groups understand this universal nature of the web.[ix] Rev. Fred Phelps has a simple message: "God hates fags." He has a web site to promote his theology. "It hurdles over boundaries, international boundaries," he says. "If we preached . . . in Australia we would be prosecuted . . . But that . . . God blessed web site barreled right through all those artificial boundaries, gets over into Australia and preaches to all those people."[x] Many hate sites also have "mirrors" in other countries, insuring that even if their connection to the Internet is pulled in one place, their site would still be functional. As Ken McVay says, "if you have any idea of regulating what's going on on the 'net, get it out of your head. If you can get a hate site off AOL, just ask yourself how much clout the Jewish community would have convincing Mr. Quaddafi in Libya not to put that same site on one of his servers, and you begin to see the magnitude of the problem."

FILTERS

Recognizing that censorship is impractical, one human rights group is marketing a blocking or "filtering" device. Such programs, once installed, either prohibit the computer user from going to a specific site or do not allow access to sites that contain certain key words. First used to restrict access to pornographic material on the Internet, blockers, while they have a role to play, are an overrated "answer" to the problem, at best, and at worst are counterproductive.[xi]

Some minor problems. First, they are not foolproof, as new sites pop up all the time. Second, they do not address the problem of people who are utilizing these web sites to build a hate movement, who obviously would not use such filters. Third, they may block out perfectly unobjectionable material (a program filtering obscene material might prohibit access to a site promoting tourism in "Middlesex County, New Jersey"[xii]), or even material that groups fighting bigotry would want people to see.[xiii]

More significantly, blockers, while perfectly legal, may actually encourage children to contact the very sites they are not supposed to access. For while these programs may be practical for parents of younger children, teenagers will likely be attracted to material simply because it is forbidden. If unable to "hack" around the software at home, they can access hate sites on a friend's computer across the street, or on a terminal in the local library. (Some libraries have installed filters, which is not only a questionable policy, but most likely an unconstitutional violation of adults' right to free speech.[xiv] It makes better sense to have some terminals with filters for parents who prefer that for their children, some without.)

The major conceptual flaw with filters is that they tell parents that there is an easy, technological answer to hate on the Internet.[1] Plug in the program, and your worries are over. In reality, the Internet is changing the way information is accessed throughout society. Even back in 1998, nearly 83 percent of first-year college students – teenagers who were surveyed as their fall semester began – were using the Internet for research.[xv] The ostrich approach simply will not work. If new software is needed, it is to help youngsters learn how better to negotiate this new world of communication,

not to avoid looking at its unpleasant side. As the Electronic Frontier Foundation notes, "no filter can offer the protections provided by education and training."[xvi]

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS

George Vradenburg III cautions that schools must integrate the Internet into their "normal teaching method and [should include] the filters of the teachers and the professors and the like of that school. Or we're going to be raising people who think that, gee, there are a million points of view out there and they are all equal. They are not all equal. There is truth and there is falsity. And I think it is important that schools be a filter for how children regard what they get on the web."

Schools may soon recognize the need to educate both parents and children about the dangers of the Internet. Since children are bound to come across objectionable material while online at school even with filtering software, it is only a matter of time until lawsuits are filed. (There have already been cases of students suspended for sending e-mail with sexually explicit text.[xvii]) These suits, in turn, may prompt schools to educate parents about the hazards of the Internet and seek their approval[xviii] before children are allowed to log on. David R. Foreman of Chesterfield County Public Schools in Virginia compares the Internet to real world field trips. "With all that can go wrong in cyberspace . . .," he notes, "some kind of legally binding permission slip[2] needs to be read and understood by both the parents and the student before embarking on online ventures."[xix]

ENDNOTES

[1] There has been some discussions of "rating" systems of Web sites, much like there is of television and movie programs. Some services offer ratings, but that raises the question of who is doing the ratings, and by what criteria? But even though some sort of rating system may provide some useful information for Internet users and parents of Internetally active kids, it would not solve the problem. The Web is too massive. But see James R. Rettig, "Putting the Squeeze on the Information Firehose: The Need for 'Neditors and 'Netreviewers," [visited December 8, 1998].

[2] According to Classroom Connect an "Appropriate Use Policy" or "Acceptable Use Policy" should "explain what the Internet is, how students and teachers will be accessing it, how it will be used in the classroom, and explain the responsibilities of the students while online. Stress how important it is to have the Internet in the classroom, but also make parents aware of the potential risks of obtaining objectionable material. Then, make it clear that the use of the Net is a privilege and not a right, and outline the penalties and repercussions of violation the AUP. Some schools issue a warning letter to students and parents after the first violation; subsequent violations may be cause for access restrictions or suspensions. Next, consider including a short paragraph about Internet etiquette . . . [and] be sure to explain online security issues, and that it's illegal to hack, or gain illegal entry into, other computers." David R. Foreman, (Classroom Connect) Subject:K-12 Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) Frequently Asked Questions; November 24, 1995, cited in Information Quality: Is There Truth Out There?

[i] Jeff Abramowitz, "How to answer Holocaust-deniers," The Jerusalem Post, May 2, 1997, p. 7. [ii] Reno v. ACLU, supra.

[iii] Becky Beaupre, "Special Report: Hate on the Internet: Extremist groups find forum on Web," The Detroit News, February 13, 1997, p. C1. Internet-related prosecutions in other countries are beyond the scope of this paper because they don't change the nature of what will appear on the Internet. Even if a provider was somehow held liable for what is on his or her server, racists would find other servers to use.

[iv] Gina Smith, Ted Koppel, "Hate and the Internet," ABC Nightline, January 13, 1998, transcript #98011301-j07.

[v] Gina Smith, Ted Koppel, "Hate and the Internet," ABC Nightline, January 13, 1998, transcript #98011301-j07.

[vi] In addition to AOL, other ISPs (Internet Service Providers) reportedly have hate-related policies that regulate what people can put on Web sites or send by e-mail. Among these are IC.Net, Island Net, Pair, Tripod, and GeoCities. Becky Beaupre, "Special Report: Hate on the Internet: Extremist groups find forum on Web," The Detroit News, February 13, 1997, p. C1

[vii] The UIC campus also had a policy for computer use: "Using computers or electronic mail to act abusively toward others or to provoke a violent reaction, such as stalking, acts of bigotry, threats of violence, or other hostile or intimidating fighting words, such words include those terms widely recognized to victimize or stigmatize individuals on the basis of face, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, etc. cetera." "We have video cameras positioned in each of our labs to . . . discourage people from harming the equipment, but also to protect the users of the labs." See Macado Transcript.

[viii] Boei, ibid.

[ix] Take, for example, the "Charlemagne Hammer Skins" homepage. Open it up and you hear machine gun fire and see a masked and armed man standing in front of a swastika. Click on "access for subhumans," and see a concentration camp photo and the warning: "You can be sure that we have a lot of one-way tickets to Auschwitz left." When AOL was told about this site, it was closed immediately. Within days it reappeared through a Canadian server. Peter Ford, "'Cybernazis' Use Web to Reach Into Europe," The Christian Science Monitor, March 26, 1998, p.7.

[x] John Defterios, Jason Evans, "Hate Groups on Web, CNNfn," Digital Jam, February 17, 1998, 19:30pm ET.

[xi] Cyberpatrol – which was installed in the Boston Public Library by mayoral order, over much protest, blocks both text and graphics of "offensive" material such as "violence, profanity, partial nudity, full nudity, sexual acts, gross depictions, intolerance, satanic/cult, drugs/drug cultures, militant/extremist, sex education, questionable/illegal & gambling, alcohol and tobacco." "Cyberpatrol CyberNOT List Criteria," 5/9/96; [visited 12/08/98]

[xii] The IFEA Joint Statement to the National Commission on Library and Information Science notes that "filtering software restricts access to valuable, constitutionally protected online speed about topics ranging from safe sex, AIDS, gay and lesbian issues, news articles, and women's rights. Religious groups such as the Society of Friends and the Glide United Methodist Church have had online resources blocked by these imperfect censorship tools, as have policy groups like the American Family Association." [visited December 22, 1998]

[xiii] Ken McVay tells the story of a "filtering package called cybersitter [which] at one point decided that a Web site called the Auschwitz Alphabet, which basically went from "A" through "Zed" and had a small picture and a bit of text to teach people about Auschwitz, they decided that the pictures were too violent or brutal for children to see, and so they censored them. Now, if you want to ask "so what?," please keep in mind the Boston Public Library uses cybersitter, so the Auschwitz Alphabet, within a matter of seconds, was no longer available to anyone using the Boston Public Library system to learn about the Holocaust. The man who wrote that site, who's a professor of computer science at Rutgers, contacted us and said, 'Will you mirror this site so I can get around this censorship,' and that basically meant that he was asking us to take an exact copy of his site – just as the Nazis do – and put it on our site. And so we said sure. . . and created a mirror. And cybersitter added us to their list, and in one fell swoop they cut out the largest Holocaust information site in the world, that had details about who the players are in the world of extremism in the western world, and none of that information was available. We finally threatened to sue them, but the way we actually beat them was to provide for hackers a way to patch cybersitter so you could get into the list and do it yourself."

[xiv] See: Mainstream Loudoun et al. V. Board of Trustees of the Loudoun County Library, 1998 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 18479 (USDC, ED Vir., Alexandria Division, November 23, 1998) The Court ruled that a general policy putting filtering software on terminals with Internet access, even with a procedure that allowed for petition to remove blocking of particular sites, violated the First Amendment on a variety of grounds, including by failing to be the least restrictive means of achieving a compelling state interest. While noting that it was not ruling on the constitutionality of other options the court pointed out that "filtering software could be installed on only some Internet terminals and minors could be limited to using those terminals. Alternately, the library could install filtering software that could be turned off when an adult is using the terminal." Ibid at 40.

[xv] Willliam H. Honan, "College Freshmen's Internet Use a Way of Life, but Disparities Emerge," The New York Times, January 25, 1999, p. A11.

[xvi] "Joint Statement for the Record on 'Kids and the Internet: The Promise and the Perils," Submitted by the Internet Free Expression Alliance to the National Commission on Library and Information Science on December 14, 1998. [visited December 22, 1998]

[xvii] Stories on WNYW-TV 10-O'clock news December 9, 1998 and WNBC-TV 11:00pm news December 9, 1998.

[xviii] One suggestion is that school board's adopt policy controlling student access to the Internet, covering areas including "contact with objectionable material, contact with questionable material, contact with questionable persons, objectionable behavior, objectionable material, destructive behavior, violation of privacy rights, [and] violation of access rights."Jamie McKenzie, Acceptable Use Policies Defining what's allowed online, and what's not, Classroom Contact Newsletter – December 1994/January 1995; cited in Information Quality: Is There Truth Out There?, [visited December 8, 1998]

[xix] "Information Quality; Is the truth out there?" [visited December 8, 1998], citing LION, Librarian's Information On-Line Network; Filtering the Internet in K-12 Schools and Libraries 4/25/97;

Education

"There's a lingering public perception . . . of the computer's ferocious accuracy: computers don't make mistakes. Couple that with the general public's sense of the Internet as having been developed by the academic-scientific community, under government auspices, as a high-level information source, and you do indeed have some people accepting far too quickly any information that appears on a computer screen simply because it does appear on a computer screen."[i] – Paul Gilster, author of Digital Literacy

"When in doubt, doubt."[ii] – John Henderson Because the Internet is a "virtual" medium, there are no easy guideposts to determine the quality of the information it offers. If you visit the home of a Holocaust denier and then compare his or her collection with that of the United States Holocaust Museum, you can easily gauge the relative credibility of the information. But with web design software it is easy for a one-person "organization" to create a site that rivals, or exceeds, that of the Smithsonian. The web allows haters to maintain an image of sleek credibility.

Librarians and others are beginning to write professional papers about how students should approach information they encounter on the Internet. The same type of evaluation that students should perform on printed material should take place on Internet-accessed information. However, the guideposts are more difficult in this new medium because, despite the old saying, you could tell much more about a book by its cover than you can a web site by its homepage.

Search engines, such as Yahoo!, Excite, Alta Vista, Lycos and others, are an entry point for many into the Internet. Some of these engines are more selective, others are more inclusive. None is the equivalent of a specialized library collection that a professional has culled together.[iii] As one commentator notes, there is a fundamental "difference between search and research."[iv] It is up to the user to check the credibility of the information. In short, we have to teach our children to become amateur Internet librarians. This will become even more important as computers become cheaper and many children, who would otherwise go to the library to find information, will now find it online.

LOGICAL APPROACHES

Rebecca Kleinhandler, a senior at the Berkeley Carroll school in Brooklyn, New York, who researches on the Internet, says she "looks to see if the site is connected to an educational institution."[v] Web sites are organized with the suffixes .org for organization .com for company, .gov for government and .edu for educational institutions, among others. A site that is part of, or linked to, an educational institution, does not necessarily merit the same degree of trust as if it were published in an academic journal with peer review; in fact, some Holocaust deniers on campus have set up their own web pages. But, generally speaking, an .edu suffix is one clue that the information on that site is likely to be credible.[vi]

D. Scott Brandt, technical training librarian at Purdue University Libraries, suggests that students look at a web page for "its critical elements – the header, body and footer – to determine the author and source."[vii] His suggestions are only a

small part of a growing literature devoted to web site evaluation. If students and others learn how to judge and gauge web sites, they will be better equipped to identify and reject hateful sites.

Culled from a variety of sources,[viii] here are key guideposts for evaluating web sites for six major criteria: authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, extent of coverage, and self-selected associations:[ix]

How authoritative is the site?

Is it clear who is sponsoring the page?[x]

Is there a link to a page describing the goals of the sponsor?[xi]

Is there a way to verify the legitimacy of the group, organization, or businesses? For example, is there a phone number or address to contact for more information? (E-mail alone is not sufficient.)[xii]

Is there a statement that the content of the page has the official approval of the organization?[xiii]

If posted by an organization, is it clear whether the page is from the national headquarters or a local affiliate?[xiv]

Is there a statement listing the organization as copyright holder?[xv]

If the author of particular information is listed, what are his or her qualifications?[xvi]

Is the treatment of the subject appropriate for what it purports to be? In other words, if it is a serious research paper (as opposed to an opinion piece) it should outline the methodology used, list sources, perhaps offer a bibliography.[xvii]

Is it well written?[xviii]

What is the purpose of the web Page? Is there information or criticism that should be there but is not?[xix]

Go back and revisit the site. Is it stable, or has it disappeared?[xx]

How accurate is the site?

Are the sources for what is presented as factual information listed so that they can be verified?[xxi] (Tracking sources is potentially easier on the Internet than any other medium, but special care needs to be taken here too.)[xxii]

Is the information free of grammatical, spelling and other typographical errors?[xxiii]

Is the page pulled from a search engine? If so, it can be retrieved out of context. Always check the "home page" to evaluate the site.[xxiv]

How objective is the site?

Is the organization's philosophy clearly stated?[xxv]· If there is any advertising or editorial material on the page.

Is it clearly differentiated from the informational content?[xxvi]

Is the information presented with a minimum of bias?[xxvii]

Is it contradicted, or corroborated, by "expert commentary, peer-reviewed papers, [and] standard references" available on the Internet and elsewhere?[xxviii]·

Backtrack, that is, remove files or folders from right to left one by one until you get to the base URL of the sponsoring entity. This process will let you find related sites and folders.[xxix]

How current is the site?

Are there dates on the page to indicate:[xxx]

When the page was written?

When the page was first placed on the web?

When the page was last revised?

When the research occurred?[xxxi]

Are the links up to date?[xxxii]

Are there any other indications that the material is kept current?[xxxiii]

How thorough is the site?

Does the site seem complete, or is it still under construction?[xxxiv]

Is it clear what topics the page intends to address?[xxxv]

Does it succeed, or has something significant been left out?[xxxvi]

Is the point of view of the organization presented clearly, with arguments well supported?[xxxvii]

With whom does it seek to link?

Web sites should be evaluated independently[xxxviii] (For example, some Holocaust deniers intentionally link to credible sites so as to create the misimpression that they are engaged in a "debate."·

Conversely, if a web site voluntarily links with a problematic site with which it obviously agrees, then the site should be looked at cautiously.

It is also likely that as papers are produced with not only a print product, but also an Internet product in mind, the ease of access by hyperlink to primary sources will provide a good clue of credibility, especially as more and more source material is online. The readers can then check the sources for themselves, independently gauging their trustworthiness. If some sources are not made available, the reader should consider whether it is because the material is not of high quality, because no one yet has an interest in putting it on the Internet, because the writer of the paper (such as this one) has a philosophical objection to facilitating access to particular sites, or because the writer has something to hide? Journalists are facing these same tough decisions too.[1]

SCHOOLS MUST TEACH INTERNET SKILLS

Skills for negotiating the Internet must be taught in schools. The Internet Free Expression Alliance refers to this curriculum as a "'Driver's Ed' program . . . for Internet users." It asserts that "one way to teach these skills in schools is to condition Internet access for minors on successful completion of a seminar similar to a driver's education course."[xxxix] Such seminars could "emphasize the dangers of disclosing personally identifiable information such as one's address, communicating with strangers about one's personal life or about intimate matters, or relying on inaccurate resources on the Internet." Kids should also know that they have a responsibility to insure the accuracy of information. What is sent to the world's largest printing press and rumor mill may develop a life of its own.[xl]

Ultimately, students – who will use the Internet increasingly at younger and younger ages – are going to have to learn the critical librarian-like skills in order to become expert judges of material on this new medium. And while schools are the primary institution that should be teaching children tools to negotiate the Internet, parents have an important role too.

The story of Lee Green is instructive. She wanted to help her niece, a sixth-grader, find material for a report on antisemitism. She plugged with words "Jews" and "expel" in an Internet search engine. Up popped web sites with information about the expulsion of Jews from countries throughout history – and hate sites urging the expulsion of Jews from the United States today. "It's distressing," she said. "It's one thing to read about history, but for a sixth-grader whose eyes are just being opened to hate in the world, I'm not sure I wanted it to be that real for her."[xli]

Despite our wishes, this is the world that is confronting our youngsters: a treasure trove of information: much of it good, some of it hateful. Imagine someone looking at an Internet-based condolence book for assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, which reportedly included a greeting from someone who claimed to be a bomb-maker. "I hope you all die," he wrote. "I hope we get all of you."[xlii] Or imagine the pain of a black teenager viewing one of the graphic "cartoons" in chapter two, supra. How do we help our children avoid these experiences and, when they are no longer avoidable, cope with them constructively?

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

First and foremost, parents have to be involved and help guide their children. Although they shouldn't hover and monitor every keystroke, they should be aware of what their children are accessing, just as they should be aware of what television programs their children watch. One good suggestion is to place the computer in a public part of the house rather than leave it in an isolated corner or in a child's room behind a closed door.

As noted above, for younger children just getting connected to the Internet, filtering software may be an option some parents want for their home computers, just as they might visit "family friendly"[xliii] libraries that either do not offer unfiltered Internet sites, or offer special terminals for children only. Children can certainly be encouraged to use links and sites that trusted professionals have recommended. The Internet Free Expression Alliance suggests "Yaholligans!, Bonus.com, The Internet Kids & Family Yellow Pages, . . . Scholastic Network . . . and sites such as the American Library Association's http://www.ala.org/parents/index.html and http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/ ."

But sooner than most parents would like, children will reach the age when filtering software is counterproductive. Even in the old days parents didn't look forward to sitting their child down and having that "coming of age" discussion. The Internet will force parents not only to have that discussion at an earlier age, but also to be more thorough and less reticent. Now it's not only about the birds and bees, but also about coming across pornography on the Internet, and more. Bestiality too, as well as the real danger of perverts masquerading as children in a "chat room," hoping to lure their prey.[2] Add to that the purveyors of hate and promoters of violence.

We owe it to our children to be as honest and open as we can, to explain to them the meaning of the material they will come across, and encourage them to discuss any questions with us. The more parents bring these subjects into the open the less attractive these disturbing sites will be.

Just as we cannot hide from pornographic material on the Internet, we cannot hide from the hate that is there either. At a minimum it is incumbent upon us, as parents and teachers, that we help our children learn to recognize hate and reject it; and at best how to combat it.

ENDNOTES

[1] See "Net News": "At Internet publications, the questions are often more practical than philosophical. How do you use hyperlinks responsibly – for example, do you link to neo-Nazi or pornography sites if that's what you're writing about? How do you run corrections to stories? How do you put a time stamp on a story that may be continually updated over a period of hours or even days? It may be that in settling these questions, online publications will gain the credibility they undoubtedly crave.[visited December 21, 1998].

[2] Sexual abuse, child pornography, and obscenity are illegal in any medium, and there have been many prosecutions for using cyberspace for distribution of these non-legal materials.

[i]Paul Gilster, author of Digital Literacy, quoted in Keith Ferrell, Truth, Lies, and the Internet,[visited December 8, 1998]

[ii]John Henderson, ICYouSee: T is for Thinking; The ICYouSee Guide to Critical Thinking About What you See on the Web,[visited December 8, 1998]

[iii] Experts see the chaos of the Internet in different ways. In "Putting the Squeeze on the Information Firehose: The Need for 'Neteditors and 'Netreviewers," James Retting contrasts the statements of two experts: Nicholas Negroponte: "[The Internet is] interesting not only as a massive and pervasive global network but also as an example of something that has evolved with no apparent designer in charge, keeping it in shape very much like the formation of a flock or ducks. Nobody is the boss, and all the pieces are so far scaling admirably." (Nicholas Negroponte, Being Digital [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995], p. 81. Contrast this with the views of Michael Gorman: The net is like a huge vandalized library. Someone has destroyed the catalog and removed the front matter, indexes, etc., from hundreds of thousands of books and torn and scattered what remains . . . 'Surfing' is the process of sifting through this disorganized mess in the hope of coming across some useful fragments of text and images that can be related to other fragments. The net is even worse than a vandalized library because thousands of additional unorganized fragments are added daily by the myriad cranks, sages, and persons with time on their hands who launch their unfiltered messages into cyberspace. (Michael Gorman, "The Corruption of Cataloging," Library Journal 120 [September 15, 1995]:

[iv] "Truth Seeking on the Net," [visited December 21, 1998]

[v] Interview with author November 27, 1998.

[vi] But look at the comical sites (of questionable taste) created by Don E. Descy, a professor of Library Media Education, If not for such clues such as pictures of sunbathers and palm trees in Minnesota's January on the "Mankato, MN Home Page," or that of the M. Ludwig Bormann Student Union Tropical Dining Room ("Named after an anonymous benefactor living in South America") on the site of "Mandota University" (where you can get a "B.S in Elementary Circumlocution" or an "O.J Degree in Wife Care and Meat Carving"), the sites look legitimate. See: Information Quality: Is There Truth Out There? [visited December 8, 1998] Hoaxes are easy to perpetrate on the Internet. A hoax about a commencement address supposedly delivered by author Kurt Vonnegut, in which he supposedly told graduates to wear sunscreen, circulated around the Net, fooling even Vonnegut's wife. Some hoaxers convinced many, through e-mails, that they were privy to a murder. Many signed a petition to ban the dangerous substance Dihidrogen Monoxide because it is responsible for thousands of deaths, is the main ingredient in acid rain, causes beach erosion, etc. (Dihidrogen Monoxide is water.) And there have been numerous hoaxes about computer viruses. As one commentator notes, "It's far easier and cheaper to spread a hoax on the Net than it is to stamp out enormous circles in fields of wheat, fake the diaries of Hitler, or copy a Rembrandt. For hoaxers, the Net is a natural." "Net Hoaxes"

[vii] He also encourages students to: Check to see whether the source is a moderated or an unmoderated list, or an anonymous ftp site. Check online directory sources for affiliations and biographical information. Check and compare this source to other sources, both similar and different ones. Check archives of online lists for other works by this author. Check reviews of online lists to assess the scope and purpose of this one. D. Scott Brandt, " Evaluating Information on the Internet,"

[xvii] See criteria under "treatment" at Information Quality: Is the Truth Out There?

[visited December 8, 1998] [xviii] Alastair Smith, VUW Department of Library and Information Studies, New Zealand, "Criteria for evaluation of Internet Information Resources,"

[xix] John Henderson, ICYouSee: T is for Thinking; The ICYouSee Guide to Critical Thinking About What you See on the Web,

[visited December 8, 1998] Henderson gives the following example: "An online movie review should be judged on the same merit as a review in the daily newspaper. But make sure what you are looking at is a movie review or real film criticism. What you are more likely to find on the Web is a blurb about a film supplied by the movie studio producing it or some fan's bubbling praise."

[xxii] See "Truth-seeking on the Net": ". . . Links included on the page where you found the information are a good start, but should never be your sole source of additional research. Remember that the person or institution making the claims chose the links for a reason."

Is the author a known expert in the area?· Author credentials may be evaluated by traditional means, such as checking directories, publications, Who's Who, etc.· Additionally, Internet credentials can be evaluated through personal home page information or institutional directory information. Using programs such as "finger" or "Whois" can also help to track down electronically an author's credentials. If the author is not a name you are familiar with, there are unique verification tools available using the Web:· Was the page linked to another page which you are familiar with? Can you establish a clear relationship or connection between the two sites?· Does the Web site give biographical information, including the author's position, institutional affiliation and address?· If an e-mail address [is] included, can you connect the individual to an institution using this?
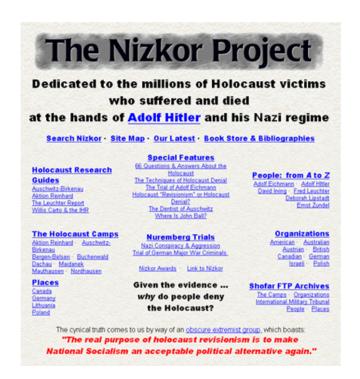
On-Line Approaches

"My whole agenda is to try and remove their market, as it were. They have an agenda to sell. If, by demonstrating that they are lying about a specific issue, I can remove a few hundred people from their potential market place, then I've done them some harm." – Ken McVay, Project Nizkor In 1956 Ken McVay stole his father's car and ran away from home. Apprehended, he spent his 16th birthday in a Bellingham, Washington, jail. He was given a one-way, non-refundable bus ticket back home to California and $10. He spent the money on books about World War II, and for the next ten years continued to read avidly about this subject.

In 1992 McVay was living in British Columbia and had just closed down an unsuccessful business. He was an Internet service provider before there was much need for one, and when his business failed he was left with a UNIX machine, eight telephone lines, and free time. He started looking through some USENET newsgroups and came across a young man named Dan Gannon from Portland, Oregon. Gannon was putting material from Holocaust deniers on the Internet. McVay, remembering his reading about World War II, knew that Gannon's material was inaccurate. "I found it pretty offensive," McVay says, "because it wasn't just Holocaust denial, it was coupled with a really ugly brand of antisemit[ism]." McVay started calling Gannon names like "Nazi pig," and soon he was getting notes, primarily from Jewish professionals, who said "thank you very much for caring, but if this is the best you can do, please go away, because these guys love to push emotional buttons, and once those buttons have been pushed, then nobody wants to talk about the Holocaust." McVay learned. "That's the whole point," he says, "because they can't afford to talk about the facts. All they can do is deal in innuendo."

So McVay started researching, and bit by bit, collected information from history books and original sources. In six years he collected over a million pages of text, and put thousands of these on the World Wide Web.

PROJECT NIZKOR

So began Project Nizkor[i], one of the better models of fighting hate on the Internet. As you can see, the site is designed to provide accurate information about the Holocaust and to expose the deniers and their agenda.

The Nizkor Project

Dedicated to the millions of Holocaust victims who suffered and died at the hands of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi regime

Search Nizkor · Site Map · Our Latest · Book Store & Bibliographies

Holocaust Research Guides
Auschwitz-Birkenau
Aktion Reinhard
The Leuchter Report
Willis Carto & the IHR

Special Features
66 Questions & Answers About the Holocaust
The Techniques of Holocaust Denial
The Trial of Adolf Eichmann
Holocaust "Revisionism" or Holocaust Denial?
The Dentist of Auschwitz
Where Is John Ball?

People: from A to Z
Adolf Eichmann · Adolf Hitler
David Irving · Fred Leuchter
Deborah Lipstadt
Ernst Zündel

The Holocaust Camps
Aktion Reinhard · Auschwitz-Birkenau
Bergen-Belsen · Buchenwald
Dachau · Maidanek
Mauthausen · Nordhausen

Nuremberg Trials
Nazi Conspiracy & Aggression
Trial of German Major War Criminals

Nizkor Awards · Link to Nizkor

Organizations
American · Australian
Austrian · British
Canadian · German
Israeli · Polish

Places
Canada
Germany
Lithuania
Poland

Given the evidence ...
why do people deny the Holocaust?

Shofar FTP Archives
The Camps · Organizations
International Military Tribunal
People · Places

The cynical truth comes to us by way of an obscure extremist group, which boasts:
"The real purpose of holocaust revisionism is to make National Socialism an acceptable political alternative again."

"The problem with Holocaust denial," says McVay, "is that it attempts to cloak itself in a veneer of respectability [but] Holocaust deniers have no particular interest in being truthful. They routinely misrepresent text. They routinely provide text out of context." McVay gives an example of a tape that Ernst Zündel sells, which promotes a fraudulent document created by a convicted forger which refers to a military unit which did not exist. By exposing this lie McVay demonstrates that Zündel is "a man who peddles hate for profit. . . . My favorite term for that is taking away their market. If you can educate the public with respect to this kind of duplicity, then the Holocaust denial aspect of it will take care of itself."

How effective is this strategy of going toe-to-toe with the deniers? Does it change any minds? There is no way to know. No one has documented how many people who would otherwise have gone deeper into the orbit of Holocaust denial were persuaded otherwise by Nizkor, let alone if any hard-core deniers had their mind changed.

While Nizkor undeniably unravels the deniers' webs of deception, it also provides deniers something they desperately seek: the appearance of debate. Holocaust deniers do not fully expect to persuade people to their point of view just yet; they merely want to suggest that there are two schools of thought on the subject: the "revisionists" and the "exterminationists." As we saw in Chapter Two, one of their major organizations even calls itself CODOH, for "Committee For Open Discussion of the Holocaust Story." CODOH links itself to Nizkor and other such organizations, under labels of "Pros" and "Cons." While the information Nizkor provides is invaluable, and on balance is a positive vehicle for countering the deniers on the Internet, it nonetheless provides the deniers what they want most: the allusion of a "virtual debate."

HATEWATCH

HateWatch is another well-designed site. As its name implies, it is "a Web based organization that monitors the growing and evolving threat of hate group activity on the Internet." The project's director, David Goldman, asks visitors to "please keep in mind one fundamental point. That both progressive organizations and racists agree that the Internet is the greatest thing to happen to hate. . . . After visiting HateWatch, I hope that you will want to join us and participate in fighting this most dangerous cultural poison." [ii]

HateWatch offers a public forum for people to discuss hate sites and bigotry online,"[iii] as well as a comprehensive and up-to-date library of "Hate in the News."[iv] It also sorts "hate by category": white supremacy, racist music, racist skinheads, neo-nazism, antisemitism, Holocaust denial, Christian Identity, black racism, antigay, anti-Christian, anti-Muslim, anti-Arab. There are descriptions for each site and hypertext so that you can visit by the click of a mouse. It also cleverly uses "frames" so that, even while visiting hate sites, your screen's borders remind you that you are inside a site dedicated to fighting bigotry.

HateWatch's extensive list of hate sites rivals that of Stormfront's. That raises the question whether, if you have the real thing, why do you need another organization that is a virtual bibliography of hate? While HateWatch's mission is clear – combating online hate – does this approach make any more sense than, say, Jerry Fallwell setting up a site that allows visitors to click onto child pornography, or the Christian Temperance League establishing a site linked to distillers worldwide?

What's more, two can play this game. When HateWatch started registering URL's so that hate groups could not buy up some names that would be attractive to them, the hate groups responded in kind. HateWatch is HateWatch.org. Someone else registered HateWatch.com, and used it as an attack on not only HateWatch.org, but also on other groups, including Planned Parenthood, the Anti-Defamation League, the Nizkor Project and others (including some other hate sites). They warned readers to "watch for the key word 'tolerance' [sic] it means they want to force their agenda upon others . . . ."

But the bottom-line question is whether the Internet is a better place because it contains sites like Nizkor and HateWatch? The answer is an unqualified "yes." Both are good starting gates to a world of useful data that not only puts hate into context, but also provides other important information. If Holocaust denial didn't exist, Nizkor would still be one of the best places – on or off the Internet – to get information about the Holocaust. And HateWatch not only does a public service by listing and commending Internet companies that have a "no hate page" policy,[v] but it also is a bridge to organizations large and small that combat hatred all across the world.

When people ask me for advice when the Ku Klux Klan is planning a rally in their town, I tell them to treat this expression of hate as an opportunity – an opportunity to educate, to build community, to create structures against hatred that did not exist before. This is what these online sites are doing in cyberspace.

Like it or not, hateful material is now available in an almost unavoidable way. Just as parents needed to find meaningful things to tell their children during the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s, they must adapt in order to help their children navigate the "information revolution" of the 2000s. Nizkor, HateWatch, and other such sites will help by not only showing them how to expose the haters and deconstruct their ideologies and theologies, but also to demonstrate that good folk are active on the Internet too.

Using the Internet to fight Hate in the Real World
"It is terribly traumatic to be a victim of a hate crime. It is doubly traumatic to suffer the crime, then feel alone. CUAH.ORG supports victims in two ways: 1) forwarding messages of support sent via this Web site and 2) giving financial support." The state of Oregon is over 97,000 square miles, roughly two-hundred fifty miles from top to bottom and almost four hundred miles from side to side.[i] In 1993 its Rural Organizing Project wanted to find a better way for people spread across the state to work together to fight an antigay and antilesbian ballot initiative. The Project decided to use the Internet.

By 1994 it had linked together about 60 different rural communities. Not only was communication increased, but the participants also developed a great sense of intimacy because the Project was very selective of who could become part of the group. People could go to that site if they had a crisis. As Bill Wassmuth, executive director of the Northwest Coalition For Human Dignity describes it, the site proved critical when a couple of women were murdered in southern Oregon by a person who hated them because they were lesbians. That confusion and crisis allowed people throughout the state to come together on the Internet, to find support, information, and the networking they needed.[ii]

EYES ON THE MILITIA MOVEMENT

In early 1995 the Pacific Northwest faced another problem. As discussed earler, the militia movement had grown exponentially in 1994. In February, there had only been one group, in Montana. By the end of that year most Northwest states (and twenty states overall) had militia groups. Expert observers of the far right were not certain what was happening, or why. The Northwest Coalition convened a two-day meeting of these experts from around the country to trade information and compare impressions. Among them was Leonard Zeskind of the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights, who observed that some of the militias' ability to craft an anti-federal government ideology came from the void left by the collapse of the "evil empire" of the Soviet Union. Old anticommunist conspiracy theories were now being recast with the U.S. government as the new evil entity. Many participants were also able to document the white supremacist pedigree of militia-movement leaders, as well as specific threats against, and attacks on, county clerks, judges, Bureau of Land Management officials, and others. One county recorder had even been pistol whipped, had a gun dry-cocked at her head, and had a pipe bomb put under her vehicle. The wife of one wildlife refuge manager had to move 100 miles away with her four children after threats to throw their twelve-year-old son down a well. Other government employees were sending their kids away too, and reading memos about how to dive under a desk while grabbing a phone, what areas to avoid, and the need to travel in pairs and stay in radio contact.

In the weeks and months following that meeting, the experts remained in contact through a listserv. Members of the group who had information or wanted to share an impression, ask a question or raise a concern merely had to send an e-mail and everyone else on the list automatically saw it. This cheap, quick and confidential communication allowed the group to monitor the continued explosive growth of the militia movement collectively, with 160 eyes all together instead of two by two.

It was precisely because we could monitor the Internet-based activity[iii] of the militias and their supporters on the various newsgroups that the experts expected some form of terrorism would occur on April 19, 1995. That was the second anniversary of the fiery end of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco Texas, an image that figured prominently in militia ideology. Logging onto the Internet not only enabled us to take the pulse of those preaching domestic terrorism, but it also let us see the world through their eyes. That frightening picture prompted American Jewish Committee to issue a special report on April 10, 1995 entitled "Militias: A Growing Danger." A covering memo to that report not only emphasized the possibility of attacks on government, but also specifically noted the heightened risk of just such an attack on April 19, 1995.[iv]

A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AGAINST HATE

After the Oklahoma City bombing, hate groups expanded their Internet-related organizing to the World Wide Web. The first forays into the Web by civil rights groups have been either in reaction to hatred on the Web or as advertising adjuncts to their real-world programs. Few have begun fully to explore the opportunities the Internet offers. One exception occurred in Colorado.

In late 1997, a group of racist skinheads[1] shot and killed a police officer in Denver. A few days later they carved graffito into the carcass of a pig and dropped it off at a police station. Then they approached a black man waiting at a bus stop and began harassing him. A white woman tried to intervene. The skinheads shot. The black man was killed. The good Samaritan – a single mother – was paralyzed. Arrested, a skinhead explained how he "walked through town with my gun in my waist, saw the black guy and thought he didn't belong where he was at. How easy it would be to take him out right there. Didn't seem like much to me."[v]

Horrified, thousands of people of good will showed up when the city leadership held a "stamp out hate" rally. But for Anita Fricklas of the American Jewish Committee and Marlene Hines of the Mountain States Network project of the Northwest Coalition, a one-day event was not enough.

They remembered a Pennsylvania group and its "Project Lemonade." Faced with a Ku Klux Klan rally a few months before, people in a small town decided to do more than speak out: they'd make sure the KKK rally was counterproductive. They made a "lemon" into "lemonade" by seeking pledges: the longer the rally lasted, the more money people would give. The First Amendment protected the KKK's right to speak, but the good people in Western Pennsylvania insured that that speech was not "free."

Coloradans United Against Hatred

Fricklas and Hines brought this community organizing technique to the Internet. Coloradans United Against Hatred (CUAH.ORG) became the first Internet site dedicated to using the new medium to fight hate crimes. Click onto the "stamp out hate" logo at www.cuah.org, and you will enter a virtual community designed to fight hate in Colorado. Not only does the site list information about hate and hate crimes, resources, community groups, and events statewide, it also lets them send supportive messages to victims of hate crimes, and join together in support of hate crimes legislation by clicking on an e-mail option and sending messages to legislators. Most importantly, it allows people revolted by hate crimes to do something: make the "project lemonade" pledge. People electronically promise to pay a certain amount in the event of significant hate group activity (e.g. a KKK rally), a hate crime against property (e.g. a church burning or cemetery desecration), or a hate crime against people. Because CUAH.ORG is a virtually paperless organization with little overhead, nearly all of the money goes directly to fight hate: half to victims of hate crimes, half for community education programs such as police training and school events. The mere existence of this site may make hate groups think twice about holding events in Colorado and will add a "cost" to any hate crime, whether or not the culprits are arrested. Most significantly, people of good will in Colorado can now use the Internet to build a sense of community, much as the isolated members of hate groups have used the new medium to feel connected. Now, when a Coloradan hears of a bone-chilling hate crime, there is something to do, along with his or her neighbors, that only requires turning on the computer (CUAH.ORG sends updates and important information directly to anyone who requests it).

What makes CUAH.ORG succeed is that, while it is Internet-based, it never forgets that it functions in a real community. Its work fighting hate crimes is also promoted at press conferences, in letters to real and "virtual" media, on bus benches, on milk cartons.

This integration of the Internet into organizations that fight hate is key. The Internet will change the way these groups work and communicate just as the telephone, copying machines, word processors, faxes and cell phones did. As Dan Yurman, an Internet expert from Idaho, correctly points out, there is a Darwinian aspect to these changes. Either groups will understand and embrace this new and ever-advancing technology as an integral aspect of their entire operation, or they will lose ground to others.

If you need any more proof of the potential power of this new medium as a tool for democracy and freedom, people around the globe are going to prison for using it.[vi] Lin Hai was jailed in China for giving 30,000 e-mail addresses to a prodemocracy newsletter.[vii] And in Burma, mere possession of a modem is a serious crime.

ENDNOTES

[1] Skinheads are young people who shave their heads and share a culture of Doc Marten boots, "oi" music, and a penchant for violence. Although skinheads began in England in the 1960, they sprung up in the United States in the 1980s, and number about 3,500. Most profess racist and antisemitic beliefs.

[i] See AAA Oregon/Washington Tour Book, circa 1998 and 1991 (for comparison).

[ii] Wassmuth quotes from session on "Hate and The Internet," American Jewish Committee annual meeting, May 1998.

[iii] Lin Collette of Brown University, in a paper entitled "Studying Cyberia: Adventures in Conducting Research on the Internet," October 12, 1997, tackles some of the ethical issues of monitoring information on the net.

[iv] The report also relied upon other Internet-based information, including regular reports of the "Western Lands Gopher," established by Dan Yurman in Idaho.

[v] "Denver Skinhead Says it 'didn't seem like much' to Kill Black Man," The Dallas Morning News, November 22, 1997, p. 4A.

[vi] The complex debate about "encryption" is beyond the scope of this paper. While there is an understandable need for a means for government to uncode encrypted communications by terrorists who use encryption, human rights groups in repressive countries also rely on encryption for their survival.

[vii] "American Association for the Advancement of Science Human Rights Action Network,"

Conclusion
"We've been living in denial [about hatred] until now . . . [b]ut there's absolutely no way to get rid of it on the 'net so, for the first in our history, we have to deal with it, we have to do something. . . . Unfortunately, for most of us, we don't want to do that. We want the government to do that, or big brother. It's this issue of living in denial that makes the Internet so different." – Ken McVay[i] From the 1930s until the last few decades, the civil rights movement's traditional strategy for combating hate and hate groups was one of "quarantine." The idea was to avoid giving hate groups the publicity that inevitably resulted from speaking out about them. You monitored their public statements and newsletters and tried to encourage the media and others to ignore them whenever possible. If a Klan group held a cross burning and no one noticed, it was almost as if it never happened, the thinking at the time went.

In the 1980s and 1990s, however, a general agreement arose that hate should not be ignored, but exposed and combated. There is still a tactical balancing to be done, however. Sometimes a hateful speaker will come to a campus or community and protests, "teach-ins," statements from leaders, and other activities – such as "project lemonade" – will be an appropriate response. But there are times when a hateful event is poorly planned and advertised and perhaps ten people will show up unless the good folk make an issue. Exposing the haters in this circumstance might actually help them.

Likewise, when communities organize to take on a hateful talk radio program,[ii] they must research many factors including the ownership of the radio station, its signal power, its advertising, and its competitors, among others. You want to think through the leverage points before you act. The last thing you want to do is create a media star out of a small-time bigot on a station with the wattage of a nightlight.

NEW COMPLEXITIES

The global nature and increasing multimedia capability of the Internet makes the strategy of combating hate and hate groups more complicated. As we saw with Project Nizkor, responding to hate on the Internet with accurate information is a double-edged strategy. It debunks the deniers but it also gives them what they want – the illusion of a "virtual debate." In this new world of the Internet, there are too few tools yet invented to measure, weigh, and balance the various considerations. While the strength of a radio signal is a discernible quantity, the draw of a particular Web site is not so easy to ascertain; even if it claims a certain number of "hits," those numbers easily can be manipulated.

What's more, exposing a group for its real world activities (when the KKK holds a rally, when a Nation of Islam leader comes to a campus) means that some will turn to the hate group's web site in order to find out more information. On one hand, that is an excellent outcome – people can see bigotry firsthand. On the other, without the guarantee of any intermediary to explain how the hate groups manipulate data, quote out of context and otherwise distort information, hatred can be hidden behind the seemingly logical and unremarkable. If the hate site is also slick, it may attract new recruits, or at least make the visitor question the judgment of the group which exposes it.

Some civil rights and other groups are now avidly monitoring the Internet in order to quantify and expose hate groups. But to expose each and every group, each and every lie – to create a virtual "truth squad" – while an intriguing thought, is an impossibility. Whole agencies would have to stop doing anything else but monitoring the 'net, researching lies, and posting exposés, hoping that the accurate information would be noticed, and if noticed, believed.[iii]

More troubling, devoting so much effort to refuting hate on the Internet does three other destructive things: it lets the haters define the agenda; it restricts actions against hatred to the medium of the haters' choosing, and it takes away resources from other important parts of the real world battle against bigotry.

One good impact of the Internet may be to push communal defense and civil rights organizations to reinvent themselves in revolutionary and difficult ways. They must understand the impending information revolution, the changes it will bring, and adjust accordingly. For example, the quarantine strategy of the 1930s and 1950s, and the "exposure" strategy of the 1980s and 1990s, were both dependent on the outside media. In the former case, the media would be encouraged not to report on hate groups. In the latter, the media would take the civil right's groups work and give it a much wider audience. Sometimes, of course, as was the case with Louis Farrakhan and David Duke, major newspapers and broadcast networks would profile the haters in order to increase ratings, and would do so without having fully researched or digested the material available to discredit them. But all the action took place within media where editors, producers, news directors and others made choices and looked to outside groups for information.

While the Internet will certainly not make newspapers and television programs obsolete, it will – for the first time in history – remove the filter of the traditional forms of media between hate groups and the rest of society. It is as if all retail stores suddenly vanished and all goods and services were immediately available from venders wholesale. Outside groups might want to position themselves between the consumer and the producer in order to provide accurate information (filtering software does this), but more likely than not, such a strategy would be seen as intrusive in a medium where instantaneous access to information and the ability to interact are main attractions.

SEVEN CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS

Make no mistake, there is still an urgent need to monitor and expose hate groups and the ideological movements to which they belong. But now that this strategy has a new double-edged sword (free publicity for the haters), it has to be used more intelligently, especially as the Internet grows more multimedia in the years ahead with advanced audio and video capability.

First, civil rights organizations must make sure they do not provide hate groups any more free advertising than is necessary.[iv] Second, while still continuing to rely on the media to get out messages about hate, they must find new ways to get information to the people who need it without that intermediary – above and beyond the passive hope that Internet surfers will stumble on the civil right's organization's own web pages. CUAH.ORG, for example, does this with people in Colorado who care about hate crimes, finding these people by advertising in the real world, then regularly sending them updates through e-mail. Civil rights organizations should be much more energetic using the Internet (with listservs and other means) to get information directly to opinion makers such as academics, government officials, and others.

One of the best ways to fight hatred on and with the Internet would be a proliferation of sites that do what CUAH.ORG does – provide an easy place to build community and share information to combat various types of hatred. There are many reasons why human rights groups would be hesitant to create such sites: to do so is outside their culture; they don't have the staff; they are used to programming being run by professionals and the democratic nature of the Internet is frightening; a web site might draw attention away from the other work of the organization, etc. But just as real-world retailers and brokerage firms have learned that they must use the Internet intelligently to compete and survive, so must groups that have a political, social, or moral agenda.

Third, Internet Service Providers must develop a common standard for acceptable practices for people using their services. While haters will still find ways to have access to the Internet, their use of ISPs that allow bigotry will help students and others have an important guidepost – if it's on AOL or another provider that has an antihate policy, it is more likely to be accurate information than if it is on an ISP known for hosting hate groups. In other words, the industry needs to work harder to divide itself between those ISPs that want their customers to know that there is some quality control on their sites, and those that are the virtual equivalent of a plain brown mailing wrapper.

Fourth, law enforcement needs to become more aggressive at prosecuting hate crimes on the Internet. While most expressions of hatred will not be criminal, some – such as in the Machado case – will be. People need to know that threats that would be criminal in the real world will also be prosecuted in the virtual world. As Internet usage grows, so will its use as an instrumentality of crime, including terrorism. Law enforcement officials need new training to insure they are prepared adequately to investigate and prosecute appropriate cases.

Fifth, the media has to develop standards for reporting on hate and hate groups that have Internet sites. Most importantly, it should not provide links to sites of hate groups; rather, it should explain that the news organization, while reporting on a hate group, does not want to do anything to promote it (just as it would not provide a link to a child pornography site about which it was writing).

Sixth, civil rights organizations must confront the liberal mantra that is too often an excuse for inaction: "the way to fight bad speech is with good speech." While good speech is always helpful, such platitudes are not, for they envision a world in which all scales are equal and questions of politics and power have no place. History is too full of examples where "good speech" didn't stand a chance. The scales are not level on the Internet because it is a virtual medium. As we saw, the real world Library of Congress and a real world adolescent skinhead can create the illusion of "equality" on the World Wide Web. One more antihate web site as the answer to one more hateful web site does little, except to create the impression of a sporting event and, for fund-raising purposes, that "somebody did something."

Seventh, and most important, because the Internet means that people will be trading information increasingly without the "filters" of the media – or of the civil rights organizations that monitor hate groups – people will need to learn how to recognize and fight hatred directly – individually and collectively. This is a cultural and educational challenge more than a monitoring one. And it is the civil rights groups that must take the bold leap and focus not so much on laws or other methods that sound good at first blush, but rather on setting the agenda and energizing educational, academic, Internet, and other groups to coalesce around the goal of insuring that students have the skills to use the Internet intelligently. In other words, because the Internet democratizes information and misinformation alike, people will need skills to recognize hazards on the information superhighway. Rather than trying to be the traffic cop hoping to catch the occasional scofflaw or erecting road blocks, civil rights organization would do better to encourage – and help develop – universal Internet drivers' education.

When asked to define obscenity, former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said that he knew it when he saw it. If we make it a priority to teach Internet skills to our children, they will be better equipped to recognize, and reject, hatred – not only on the Internet, but also in the real world.

ENDNOTES

i] Quote from American Jewish Committee annual meeting session on "Hate on The Internet," May 1998.

[ii] See Kenneth S. Stern, "Hate on Talk Radio," American Jewish Committee, New York: 1991

[iii] There has also been the suggestion, endorsed by search engines such as Yahoo! and Excite, that sites should rate themselves, much like television

and movies are now rated. But while such a system might provide some useful information, it would not be effective for a variety of reasons. First, there are a limitless number of sites, unlike television stations. Second, sites could not be trusted to accurately appraise themselves. Third, hate groups would almost never agree to such a rating (white supremacists claim they don't hate blacks, it's just that they love whites so much). Fourth, ratings may actually attract youngsters to problematic sites.

[iv] Unlike HateWatch, for example, CUAH.ORG does not link to any hate group; its director notes that it was not set up to facilitate business for bigots. And this paper, as you noticed, does not provide links or full URLs for hate groups. Of course most savvy Internet users would know how to find these groups in a flash using a search engine. But the point is not one of "hiding" these sites as much as making a statement that people of good will should not help promote hatred, even unwittingly, unless there is no other alternative to accomplishing some larger, off-setting, goal.