

The Elements of Hate

BY TIM EIGO

Just four days after the attacks on September 11, 2001, Arizona made its own tragic headlines. In a demented attempt to retaliate for the attacks, Frank Silva Roque shot and killed a Mesa gas-station owner. Within a day, news of the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh from India, traveled worldwide. According to the FBI, “He was the first murder victim of the 9/11-related hate crime backlash in America.”

Unfortunately, Sodhi was not the last hate-crime victim to follow on 9/11’s heels. In fact, it’s been reported that the number of hate groups has risen more than 50 percent since 2000.

This past August 12, a panel invited by Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon gathered to address hate crimes. On the panel of “The Elements of Hate” was Rana Sodhi, whose brother perished that day in Mesa.

When Sodhi got the phone call that morning and was told his brother had been shot, he said his first thought was that he had been a robbery victim. The truth rocked his family and the nation. But compassion from friends and strangers made a difference.



Heidi Beirich and Rana Sodhi



Publication tracking hate groups

Hate groups by state



increase” to a “perfect storm” of elements: a faltering economy, increased numbers of immigrants from Latin America, and election of the country’s first African American president. Those in hate groups “are terrified at the direction the country is taking,” she said. “This increase is like a prairie fire that rages across the country.”

Fellow panelist LaShawn Jenkins agreed. As the chair of the Phoenix Human Rights Commission, the Quarles & Brady attorney said that a counter-message must be made, because hate groups are adept at getting media attention.

Also on the panel was Don Logan. In 2004, he and colleagues were injured when he opened a parcel that contained a bomb. As an African American and the head of diversity efforts for the City of Scottsdale, he was the target. (Twin brothers Daniel and Dennis Mahon, reported to be White supremacists, have been charged with the crime.)

Panelists largely were optimistic about the country’s prospects to root out hate groups eventually. Most agreed that younger people exhibit fewer prejudices. “When I start to feel down,” said Bill Straus of the Anti-Defamation League, “I go into a classroom.”

Don Logan admitted he may be less optimistic than his fellow panelists. But he continues to speak out, and he ended by quoting Martin Luther King, Jr.: “The beginning of the end comes the day we remain silent on what matters.” ¹⁷

View the hate group map: www.splcenter.org
 Our 2005 interview with SPLC co-founder Morris Dees: www.myazbar.org/AZAttorney/PDF_Articles/0905Dees.pdf
 The Sodhi family story: www.pbs.org/independentlens/dreamindoubt
 FBI detail on hate crimes: www.fbi.gov/page2/oct03/103003protectrights.htm

“Your support made me strong enough to stand and not leave this country,” he said at the panel. “That support helps me to stay and make this state more livable for the future.”

Fellow panelist Heidi Beirich has made exposing hate groups her business. As director of research for the Southern Poverty Law Center, she described the growth in hate groups, which the SPLC says has now reached a record 926 nationwide; she said that 19 of those are in Arizona.

In a press conference before the panel, she attributed the “horrible

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