

Considering Hate: Violence, Goodness, and Justice in American Culture and Politics

By Kay Whitlock, Michael Bronski

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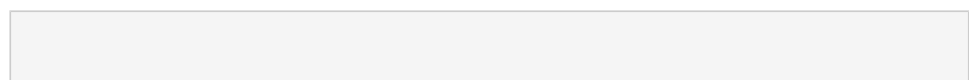
A provocative book about rethinking hatred and violence in America

Over the centuries American society has been plagued by brutality fueled by disregard for the humanity of others: systemic violence against Native peoples, black people, and immigrants. More recent examples include the Steubenville rape case and the murders of Matthew Shepard, Jennifer Daugherty, Marcelo Lucero, and Trayvon Martin. Most Americans see such acts as driven by hate. But is this right? Longtime activists and political theorists Kay Whitlock and Michael Bronski boldly assert that American society's reliance on the framework of hate to explain these acts is wrongheaded, misleading, and ultimately harmful.

All too often Americans choose to believe that terrible cruelty is aberrant, caused primarily by "extremists" and misfits. The inevitable remedy of intensified government-based policing, increased surveillance, and harsher punishments has never worked and does not work now. Stand-your-ground laws; the US prison system; police harassment of people of color, women, and LGBT people; and the so-called war on terror demonstrate that the remedies themselves are forms of institutionalized violence.

Considering Hate challenges easy assumptions and failed solutions, arguing that "hate violence" reflects existing cultural norms. Drawing upon social science, philosophy, theology, film, and literature, the authors examine how hate and common, even ordinary, forms of individual and group violence are excused and normalized in popular culture and political discussion. This massive denial of brutal reality profoundly warps society's ideas about goodness and justice.

Whitlock and Bronski invite readers to radically reimagine the meaning and structures of justice within a new framework of community wholeness, collective responsibility, and civic goodness.



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Editorial Review

Review

“A very provocative and enjoyable academic read. This well-researched volume successfully provides intriguing and challenging ideas while remaining clear and concise. Recommended for those interested in the evolving roles of prejudice and violence and the effects on our justice system.”

—*Library Journal*

“Writers and activists Whitlock and Bronski explore what, exactly, motivates brutality, especially in the U.S. But instead of just blaming the same old culprits, the authors of *Considering Hate* bring readers along on a journey to challenge the so-called conventional wisdom around discrimination, harassment, government surveillance, the criminal justice system, and violence. If the words, ‘Steubenville,’ ‘Stand Your Ground,’ ‘Ferguson,’ ‘Eric Garner,’ or ‘NYPD’ ping some real feelings in you, this book is worth a read.”

—*The Advocate*

“*Considering Hate* is a wonderfully vigorous and delightfully empowering book that shatters any simplistic notions of hate and violence with a new visionary paradigm of how we pursue goodness and justice with imagination, empathy, and courage. Don’t miss it!”

—Cornel West

“By disrupting the punishing impulse of law and order politics, *Considering Hate* encourages us to move beyond fear and exclusion to imagine social justice as a communal process. Synthesizing philosophy, social criticism, cultural analysis, and scholarship on community accountability, it proposes nothing less than a paradigm shift, moving us beyond simplistic notions of hate and love or good and evil.”

—Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, author of *The End of San Francisco*

“*Considering Hate* is a provocative, deeply humane, and necessary book for all of us who want to reduce violence and create justice without resorting to supremacist ideas and notions of vengeance. Its unflinching eye, large-sighted vision, and limitless heart provide nourishment for mind, heart, and spirit. Read it!”

—Sister Helen Prejean

“Whitlock and Bronski challenge us to deepen the conversation to include the meaning of civic goodness, collective responsibility, and the pursuit of justice.”

—*Spirituality & Practice*

About the Author

Kay Whitlock is a writer and activist who has been involved with racial, gender, queer, and economic justice movements since 1968. She is coauthor of the award-winning *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States* and cofounder and contributing editor for the weekly Criminal Injustice series at CriticalMassProgress.com. She lives in Missoula, Montana.

Michael Bronski has been involved in gay liberation as a political organizer, writer, and editor for more than four decades. The author of several award-winning books, including *A Queer History of the United States*, he most recently coauthored “*You Can Tell Just by Looking*”: *And 20 Other Myths about LGBT Life and People*. Bronski is Professor of the Practice in Activism and Media in the Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Harvard University and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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From the Introduction

Do all humans hate? If hate is employed to navigate danger, is it hardwired in human identity? The answer is unknowable. We cannot extract human emotions from the cultural contexts in which they are named. What interests us here is how the concept of hate has evolved and how it functions today. The question is not so much why individuals and entire communities may have this feeling, but how they use it and how it constructs, through language and symbols, the material world and human actions in it.

One of the most noted “hate crimes” in recent US history was the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard. On October 7, 1998, Shepard, an openly gay, twenty-one-year-old, middle-class, white University of Wyoming student, was robbed and beaten to death by Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, two methamphetamine-addicted, economically disadvantaged men his own age. The murder was immediately characterized as a hate crime even though Wyoming’s penal code had no such classification. There was no evidence that Shepard was murdered because he was gay, although this may have played a part in his being selected as a robbery victim. Labeling it a “hate crime,” the media highlighted issues of anti-gay violence. At the same time this classification obscured the issues of class, poverty, and gender that also defined the murder.

Many in the United States are wedded to using hate to explain our personal interactions and political ideologies. Society has created a “hate frame” in order to explain violence, seek justice, and attempt to understand human goodness. What would it look like to disentangle hate from justice and replace the language of hate with that of goodness?

Compare the Matthew Shepard case to the noted 2012 rape that took place in Steubenville, Ohio. On August 12, 2012, Trent Mays and Ma’lik Richmond, two high school football players, were accused and, months later, convicted of sexually assaulting a highly intoxicated sixteen-year-old female student from a neighboring high school at a large, out-of-control party. Fellow students witnessed the assault, disseminated photos on social media, and openly discussed it. The media coverage was filled with outrage, but the words *hate* and *hate crime* were never used. News reporting and commentary highlighted issues of teenage drinking, male sports culture, and the desensitizing impact of social media. There was some media discussion of the prevalence of rape and sexual violence in the United States, but almost no attempt was made to contextualize the assault as an example of the socially accepted hatred or animus toward women.

The language of hate, or its absence, shapes how so many individuals and institutions understand and order the world. It prioritizes events, actions, people, groups, and beliefs. It helps define the self in relationship to righteousness, fairness, and justice. Society labels certain illegal acts as hate crimes because, morally and legally, it has been decided that they were motivated by a clear animus against a specific person or group because of their religion, race, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, disability, or ethnicity. Members of the media ask, Why did the 9/11 hijackers hate America? News stories describe anti-gay slurs in high school hallways as “hate speech.” Yet society does not generally define violence against women as motivated by hate. Nor do most people think of New York’s stop-and-frisk policing policy—overwhelmingly aimed at young men of color—as motivated by hate. We want to examine what individuals and groups mean when they use the word *hate*. What are the personal, social, and cultural impacts and consequences of the language of hate? How does hate work?

Users Review

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