

objectives

AFTER COMPLETING THIS LESSON, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Understand how people talk about an “epidemic of hate” in the United States;
- Understand how the U.S. crime problem has been portrayed; .
- Describe and discuss official sources of crime data in the United States; and
- Describe and discuss official sources of hate crime data in the United States.



*Please do the following
required reading for Lesson
Three:*

- *The Real Story of the U.S. Hate Crime Statistics* by William Rubenstein
- *Racial Harassment and the Process of Victimization: Conceptual and Methodological Implications for the Local Crime Survey, Chapter 4 of Hate and Bias Crime: A Reader (BP)*
- *Improving the Quality and Accuracy of Bias Crime Statistics Nationally: An Assessment of the First Ten Years of Bias Crime Data Collection, Chapter 5 of Hate and Bias Crime: A Reader (BP)*

How do people talk about hate crimes in the United States? You may recall some of the language presented in Lesson One:

- *The National Law Journal* noted that the 1990s may go down in history as the "decade of hate - or at least of hate crime"
- U.S. Representative Biaggi argued during a congressional debate on hate crime, "The obvious point is that we are dealing with a national problem and we must look to our laws for remedies" (Congressional Record 1985:19844).

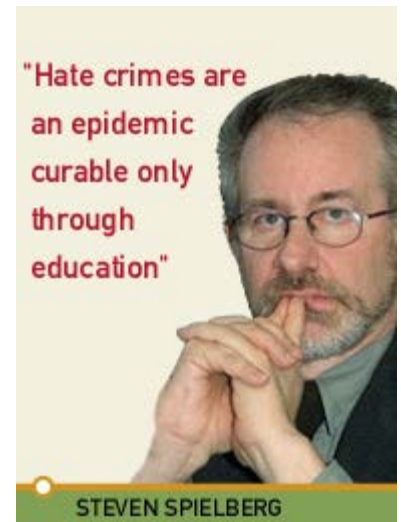


[And for a more recent article, see this NY Times article](#)



It is not uncommon to hear that hate crimes have reached "epidemic" proportions:

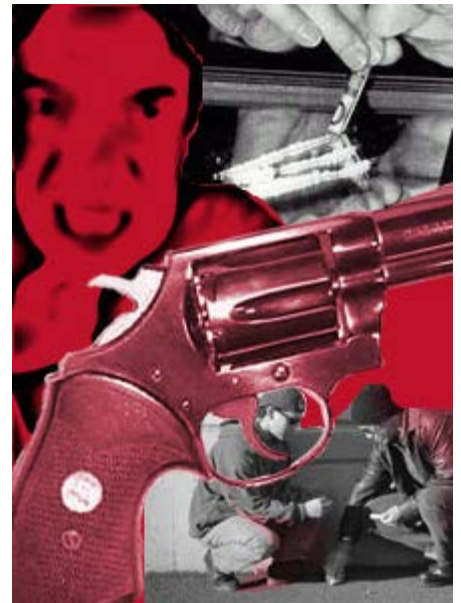
- Director Steven Spielberg told the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee that "hate crimes are an epidemic curable only through education."
- California's Lieutenant Governor Leo McCarthy declared that "there is an epidemic of hate crimes and hate violence rising in California"
- Mississippi State Senator Bill Minor warned, "This is the type of crime that easily spread like an epidemic"; and
- A journalist from the *San Francisco Chronicle* declared that "hate motivated violence is spreading across the United States in epidemic proportions" (cited in Jacobs and Henry 1996: 367-368).
- More recently, celebrity DJ Sam Ronson spoke out about hate crime to a younger audience, stating that "It's frightening that when I hear a story [about hate crime] I am not as shocked by it as I should be - purely due to the fact that these incidents... are not isolated."



How can we assess the veracity of these comments? How do we know if something is reaching "epidemic proportions"? To do so, we might think in terms of the "epidemiology" of crime.

The term epidemiology is usually associated with public health studies of the extent, distribution, and various characteristics of various forms of physical illness or disease. Similarly, we can speak of the epidemiology of crime in general or any given type of crime in particular. As noted in the *Journal of the American Medical Association's* presentation on the epidemiology of STDs, we might ask similar questions about the number, spatial location, socioeconomic characteristics, and so on.

Crime is an empirical - that is, observable and quantifiable - phenomenon, but it is not easily measured. It is especially not easy to arrive at an epidemiology of crime in general and, by extension, hate crimes. To further complicate the issue, our understanding of crime in general and hate crime in particular is not always grounded in "the data." Accordingly, let's consider how people understand crime.



Based on the factors introduced in the JAMA article (extent, distribution, characteristics), consider how you would begin to discuss an epidemic of hate crime. Make sure that you fully understand what is meant by the term epidemiology and how it can be applied to the study of crime before moving on.



How can we think about popular portrayals and understanding of “the crime problem” in the United States? To answer this question, let’s consider two pieces of work.

Katherine Beckett’s work on “Setting the Public Agenda: ‘Street Crime’ and Drug Use in American Politics” is insightful. In this work, she begins with the observation that “crime and drug use have received unprecedented levels of political and public attention in recent decades.” Her question is, “Why?” How can the growth of public concern regarding these problems be explained? And, to what degree does the explanation rely upon a growth in the crime rate and the drug use rate?



To answer this question, she collected systematic data on the changing contours of public concern about crime, the crime rate, media coverage of the crime issue, and anti-crime initiatives. This enabled her to examine the relationship between concern about crime, the crime rate, the media, and legislative action. Her findings are revealed in a series of figures, including:

- [Public concern about crime from 1964-1974](#)
- [The crime rate from 1964-1974:](#)
- [The amount of media coverage of crime from 1964-1974: and](#)
- [The volume of anti-crime initiatives undertaken at the state level from 1964-1974.](#)

Critical Thinking

Take a moment to consider what these slides seem to reveal. What do they reveal when examined simultaneously?



Beckett did a similar analysis on illegal drug use to further illustrate how the growth of public concern regarding this particular type of crime can be explained. To answer this question, she collected systematic data on the changing contours of public concern about the drug issue, the incidence of drug use rate, media coverage of the drug issue, and anti-crime initiatives around that drug issue. This enabled her to examine the relationship between concern about the drug issue, the drug use rate, the media, and legislative action.



Her findings are revealed in the following series of figures:

- [Public concern about drug use, from 1985-1992:](#)
- [Drug use rate from 1985-1992:](#)
- [The amount of media coverage of the drug issue from 1985-1992; and](#)
- [The volume of anti-drug initiatives undertaken at the state level from 1985-1992.](#)

Critical Thinking

Again, take a moment to consider what these slides seem to reveal. What do they reveal when examined simultaneously?



How can we explain the relationship between public concern, drug use rate, media coverage, and state initiatives? Which of the four sources seem to be driving the others? Discuss what order of events you think is occurring and why. What seems to be the least likely explanation or sequence?

To participate in the discussion, select OUTLINE from the TOOLS menu. Once you are back at the OUTLINE, select the appropriate FORUM from this lecture.



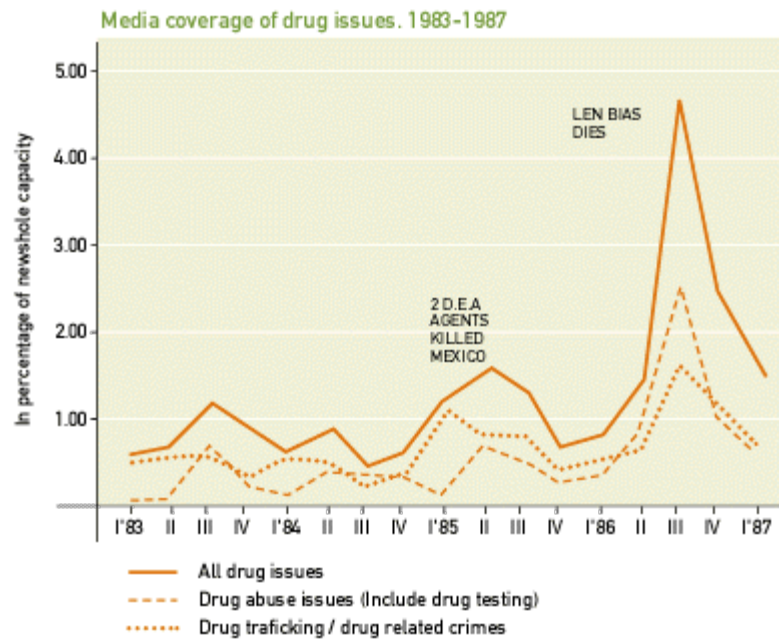
Finally, to evaluate the relationship between public concern and state initiative, Beckett examined several cases in which public opinion grew dramatically to determine whether shifts in state initiative followed or preceded changes in the level of public concern.

Her examination of these cases reveals two things:

- In each case, public concern and state initiative move largely in parallel directions.
- In each case, however, a drop in the level of state initiative toward the end of the cycle is NOT explicable in terms of a preceding drop in public concern - these drops in stated initiative are, however, followed by DECLINING levels of public concern.

Another study that emphasized the power of the media to shape public perception of crime problems is James D. Orcutt and J. Blake Turner's work on "Shocking Numbers and Graphic Accounts: Quantified Images of Drug Problems in the Print Media." In this study, they were interested in understanding how - upon what basis - the media constructs drug problems as epidemic and, in particular, *Newsweek* declared "A Coke Plague Among High School Seniors in the U.S."

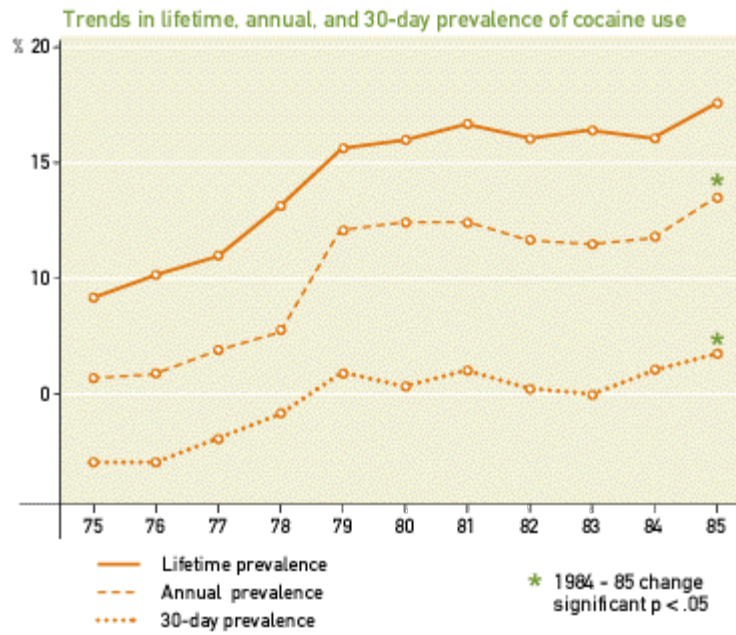
Orcutt and Turner rely on a content analysis of media coverage of drug issues to show that media coverage of drug problems generally and cocaine use specifically reached epidemic proportions in 1986.



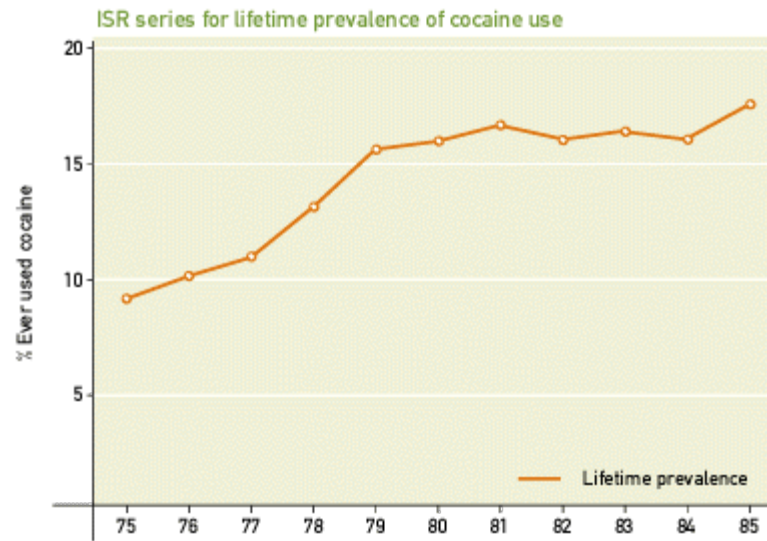
With this media trend in mind, they then focused their attention on the 1986 *Newsweek* story that reported "a coke plague" in U.S. high schools. In particular, they used this cover story to understand how journalists and graphic artists in the national print media used statistical results from annual surveys of student drug use to construct quantified claims about a cocaine epidemic and other drug problems in 1986 and in subsequent years.

They discovered that a series of "editorial and creative decisions" allowed the media to transform a modest yearly changes in time-series data into dramatic graphic image of a "coke plague."

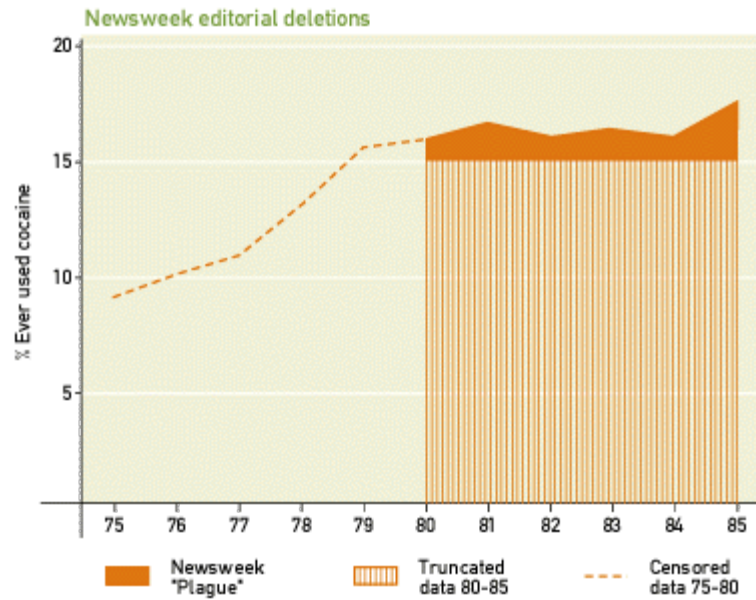
- The media did, indeed, rely upon solid social science evidence from the Institute for Social Research on "Trends in Lifetime, Annual, and 30-day Prevalence of Cocaine Use."



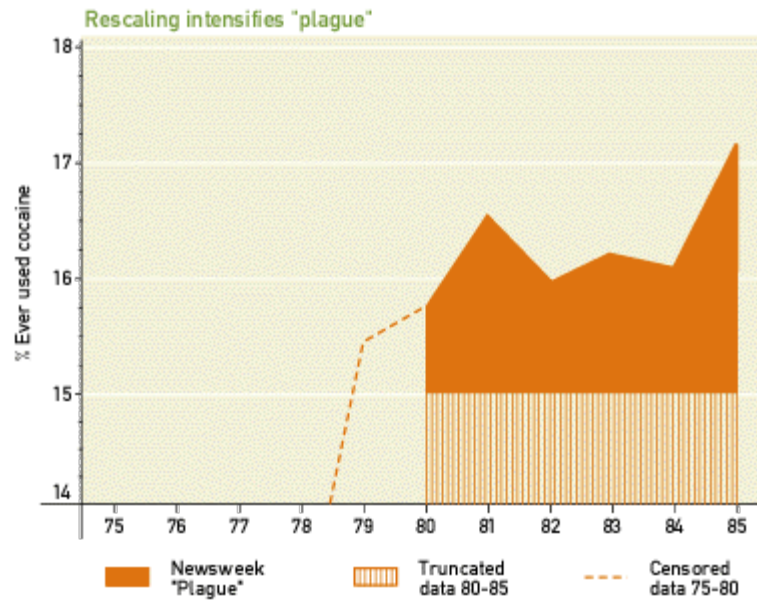
- However, they chose to use the "lifetime prevalence measure" rather than the other measures to illustrate the problem. Thus they chose the measure that, by definition, reports the highest usage.



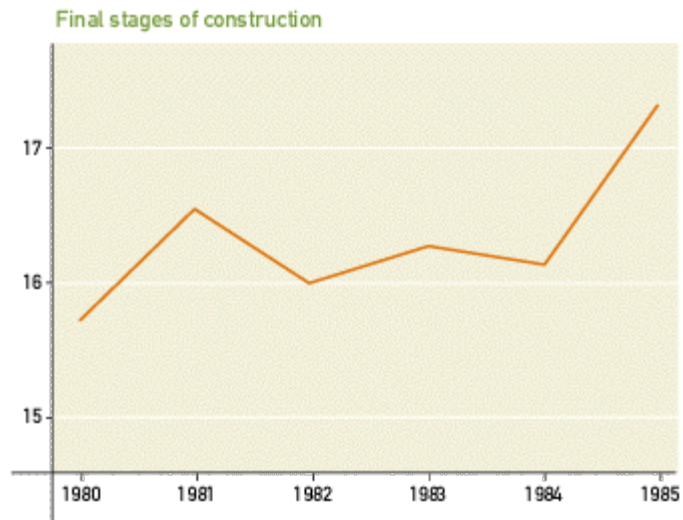
- Then the media chose data from 1980-1985 for "illustrative purposes," when they actually had access to a larger timeline of data (from 1975-1985). That is, they both truncated the data (from 1980-1985) and censored the data (from 1975-1980). This essentially allowed *Newsweek* to forego revealing a "leveling off" of a previously sharp incline in the slope of the timeline.



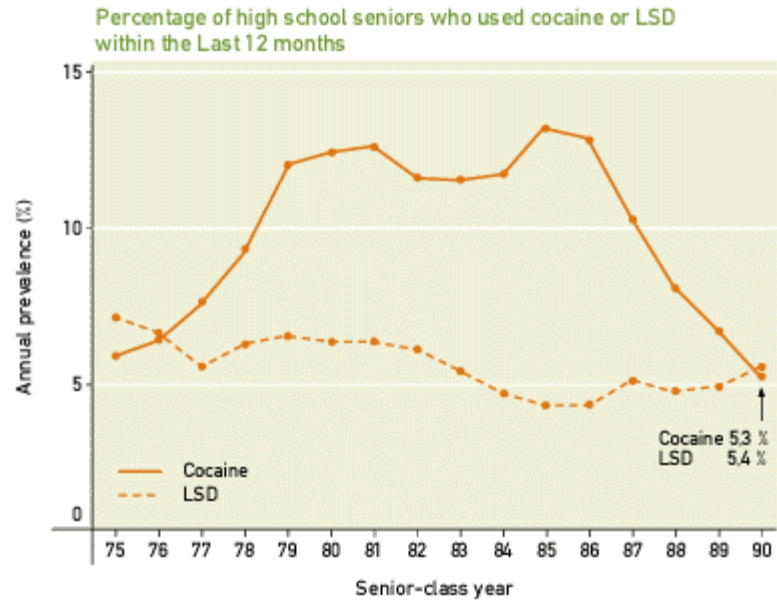
- Next, the graphic artists elongated the y axis of the image, which exaggerated the appearance of increase reported by the y axis.



- Finally, the media positioned the image at an angle designed to make the 1% increases look like sharp increases, and put a title on the image that was clearly misleading - even as the data reported in the article are accurate.



Notably, this *Newsweek* report is at odds with the social science researchers who collected the data: they report the opposite of a "coke plague." Years later, the *Newsweek* report proved alarmist when the use of cocaine among high school kids declined dramatically (in a statistically significant manner).



Data aside, sometimes [Newsweek gets it wrong.](#)

Critical Thinking

Take a moment to consider what Beckett's work, Orcutt and Turner's work, as well as Newsweek's coverage of the "chances of getting married" tells us. In the next section, you will be required to critically assess some provocative assertions made about hate crime based on official data.



Our understanding of crime is often less informed by data and more informed by the media or political and legislative activity. Even when the media present credible social science data on crime, drug use, and so on. It is often done in ways that are misleading. Thus, as we approach understanding hate crime as an empirical phenomenon, we need to let go of media portrayals and, at least for the time being, consult official data on hate crime in the United States. As we do, we need to be prepared to be critical consumers of such data.

Where do we get official data on crime in the United States? There are two main sources of official data: *The Uniform Crime Report* (UCR) and the *National Crime Victimization Survey*.

Click [here](#) to learn more about these two sources of official data.

We are constantly bombarded with reports of the crime rate rising, falling, remaining stable, and so on. Usually, these trends are derived from the *The Uniform Crime Report* (UCR), which is an annual publication dating back to 1930.

In 1929, seven offenses were chosen to gauge fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime: the violent crimes of murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault; and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. Arson was added as the eighth index crime by Congressional mandate in 1979.

These eight crimes are known as the Index Crimes, and they serve as our "Crime Index." Rate changes in these offenses are the primary measure used to determine whether crime is rising, falling, or remaining the same. The UCR reports these figures in aggregate statistics or total counts (losing any details associated with individual incidents).

Interestingly, hate crime is reported with these [Index Crimes](#).

Carefully examine the following pages: [Overview and disclaimer about the UCR](#), [Methodology 2007](#), and the [UCR website](#). You should take some time to familiarize yourself with the information provided in the UCR website.



Visit the [CIUS website](#) and find your hometown. Look up crime statistics for your hometown and the town you currently live in. Note each of the index crimes for each place. How do they compare? What comparisons might you draw between these two places? Is your presence or absence in any way responsible for these differences?

To participate in the discussion, select OUTLINE from the TOOLS menu. Once you are back at the OUTLINE, select the appropriate FORUM from this lecture.



Despite the wealth of information provided by the UCR, it suffers from some limitations. The most fundamental limitation is that the UCR only represents crime "known to the police." This limitation is often referred to as the "dark figure in crime" or the "tip of the iceberg." The UCR statistics are based on police department counts of citizen's complaints about being victimized, and to a lesser extent, the number of crimes witnessed by police. Thus the UCR report depends heavily upon the process by which crime-related complaints are made.

The UCR systematically excludes crime not known to the police (some consider this to be the iceberg). Moreover, it is prone to excluding other types of crimes.

For example, Black's now classic work found that a number of extra-legal variables affect whether or not police take a report on a crime that has been detected. He found that:

- The police officially recognize proportionately more legally serious crimes than minor crimes;
- The complainants' manifest preference for police action has a significant effect upon official crime reporting;
- The greater the relational distance between the complainant and the suspect, the greater is the likelihood of official recognition of the complaint; and
- The more deferential the complainant toward the police, the greater is the likelihood of official recognition of the complaint.

In contrast to the UCR, the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) captures "crimes not known to the police." Developed in 1972, the NCVS is sustained by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and is the nation's primary source of information on criminal victimization.

Each year, data are obtained from a nationally representative sample of approximately 100,000 persons from 50,000 households. The survey enables the BJS to estimate the likelihood of victimization by rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, theft, household burglary, and motor vehicle theft for the population as a whole as well as for segments of the population such as women, the elderly, members of various racial groups, city dwellers, or other groups. The NCVS provides the largest national forum for victims to describe the impact of crime and characteristics of violent offenders. Interviews in the form of inventories are conducted in these homes every six months with all persons over 13 years old.



RELATED TOPIC

Learn More!

[Examine victimization trends from 1998 to 2005.](#)

Critical Thinking

Why does the NCVS exclude murder and arson from the list of types of victimization?



Like most sources of data, the NCVS also suffers from limitations, including the following:

- It neglects a wide range of crimes, such as consumer fraud, illicit drug use, vandalism, and so on;
- It is vulnerable to subjects' recall;
- It is vulnerable to subjects' honesty; and
- It is vulnerable to subjects' conceptualizations of crimes being asked about.

The UCR and NCVS both serve as measures to inform us about crime trends in the United States. Discuss how likely it is that these estimates arrive at different conclusions about U.S. crime patterns. How does the information reviewed in this section support your opinion?

[Read this article](#) to become further informed on this topic.

To participate in the discussion, select OUTLINE from the TOOLS menu. Once you are back at the OUTLINE, select the appropriate FORUM from this lecture.



Read "[The Color of Crime](#)." Then, as a critical consumer of data, answer the following questions:

1. Where did the data come from - what is the source?
2. In what manner are the data presented?
3. How accurate and dispassionate do you consider the author's findings based on the data?

Now read "[Coloring Crime](#)," a response to this article published in the *Southern Poverty Law Journal*. Answer the same questions about this piece:

1. Where did the data come from - what is the source?
2. In what manner are the data presented?
3. How accurate and dispassionate do you consider the findings based on the data? How can such disparate conclusions be drawn from the same data?

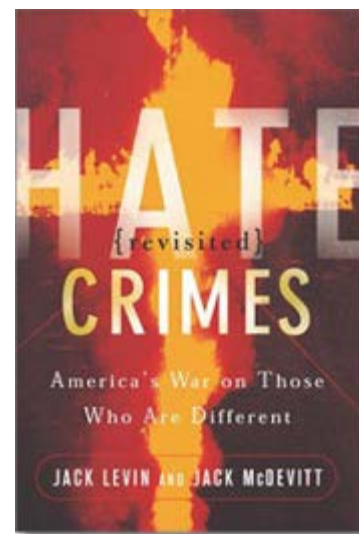
Where do we get official data on hate crime in the United States?

Our primary source of information about national hate crime trends comes from the UCR data. In 1990, the FBI began collecting statistics on hate crime incidents through the Hate Crimes Reporting Program. Participation in the program is voluntary and, although most police agencies participate, the vast majority of these consistently report that no hate crimes have occurred in their jurisdiction.

[Examine the city level figures.](#) This document also contains information on the history and methodology of the program. You should be familiar with these.

According to McDevitt et al., "Although there are some common factors that affect crime reporting overall, several caveats exist for hate crime reporting specifically. Barriers to accurate hate crime reporting generally fall into one of two broad categories: individual (victim) inhibitors and police dis/incentives. The process of hate crime reporting (from the incident to the documentation in the UCR statistics) can be conceptualized as a series of seven key decision points":

1. Victim understanding that a crime has been committed;
2. Victim recognition that hate (of the victim's real or perceived minority status or attribute) may be a motivating factor;
3. Victim or another party solicits law enforcement intervention;
4. Victim or another party communicates with law enforcement about motivation of the crime;
5. Law enforcement recognizes the element of hate;
6. Law enforcement documents the element of hate and, as appropriate, charges suspect with civil rights or hate/bias offense;
7. Law enforcement records the incident and submits the information to the Uniform.



Consider the trends in UCR estimates of hate crime incidents since data collection began in 1991.

Please examine the most recent [FBI](#) data on hate crime in the United States. As you do so, make a note of interesting findings, patterns and trends.

*To participate in the discussion, select **OUTLINE** from the **TOOLS** menu. Once you are back at the **OUTLINE**, select the appropriate **FORUM** from this lecture.*



Examine the data: Discuss the factors that may contribute to the state of California reporting nearly 22% of all the hate crime incidents nationally. What are some possible reasons that Alabama and Hawaii are absent from this list?



To participate in the discussion, select OUTLINE from the TOOLS menu. Once you are back at the OUTLINE, select the appropriate FORUM from this lecture.



With these limitations in mind, it becomes clear why alternative sources of data are often utilized to better inform discussions about hate crime trends on national, state, and local levels. Some of these data sources include: the California Attorney General's Office; the Human Rights Commission; the Attorney General's Civil Rights Commission of Hate Crime; the Orange County Human Relations Commission; nonprofit organizations, community groups, and social movements; the Anti-Defamation League; and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Additionally, the NCVS has been experimenting with a hate crimes supplement to include in their annual survey.



Exercise: Examine and Compare the Data

The International Commission on Human Rights needs your help. Knowing that you took a Master's level course on hate crime and that you are now an expert on hate violence in this country, they have contacted you and requested a report on the trends reflected in the [Uniform Crime Report](#) and the [California State Attorney General's report](#). After informing them that the data are sparse and often contradictory, you assure them that there are nonetheless some identifiable patterns of victimization and perpetration.

With this in mind, identify three patterns revealed in the UCR report and three patterns revealed in the Attorney General's report. Then briefly describe what the [National Crime Victims Survey](#) reveals about hate crime in the United States. To facilitate your thinking, see the analysis on page 13 of [this article](#).

To participate in the discussion, select OUTLINE from the TOOLS menu. Once you are back at the OUTLINE, select the appropriate FORUM from this lecture.



After reviewing all of the sources of hate crime data presented in this lesson, what are your thoughts about hate crime as an epidemic in this country?



To complete your thinking, consider "[Scorekeeping Versus Storytelling: Representational Practices in the Construction of 'Hate Crime'](#)" by Lawrence T.

Nicholas, James J. Nolan III and Corey J. Coyler. This recently published work systematically compares "realities" produced by official data and "realities" produced by the media. Which "reality" do you buy and why?

To participate in the discussion, select OUTLINE from the TOOLS menu. Once you are back at the OUTLINE, select the appropriate FORUM from this lecture.



summary

IN THIS LESSON YOU LEARNED:

- That you can use your understanding of epidemiology and a critical review of the relevant data to assess assertions that hate crime is an epidemic.
- In assessing whether an epidemic is occurring, you should examine the extent, distribution, and various characteristics of various forms of hate crime. It is important to look at multiple sources of data that employ different methods and possibly different objectives for collecting data.
- You can critically analyze the U.S. crime problem based on official sources of data as well as various media interpretations of the problem.
- Our official source of information on U.S. hate crime incidents comes from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR). It is important to understand that media and news account may not consider the totality of the data nor the context, limitations, or other data sources in presenting their interpretations.
- The limitations of our official sources of U.S. crime data include the following: (1) They only represent crimes reported or known to the police; (2) the victim must recognize that a crime has occurred; (3) only the most serious offense within any incident is counted (hierarchy rule); (4) there is an inability to compare jurisdictions due to variations in administrative policies; (5) record-keeping practices vary; and (6) the degree of adherence to UCR varies.
- Unofficial sources of data on U.S. hate crime incidents include the California Attorney General's Office; the Human Rights Commission; the Attorney General's Civil Rights Commission of Hate Crime; the Orange County Human Relations Commission; nonprofit organizations, community groups, and social movements; the Anti-Defamation



League; and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Additionally, the NCVS has been experimenting with a hate crimes supplement to include in its annual survey.

