

Hate Crimes Against Latinos on the Rise – 2008

The most recent Federal Bureau of Investigation Hate Crime Statistics report shows a significant increase in hate crimes committed against Latinos in the United States between 2004 and 2006.¹

According to the report, *Hate Crime Statistics, 2006*, Hispanics constituted 62.8% of victims of crimes motivated by a bias toward the victims' ethnicity or national origin. In 2004, the comparable figure was 51.5%. As the data below show, there has been a steady growth of anti-Hispanic hate crimes since 2004, with the number of victims increasing by 25%:

- 2006: 576 anti-Hispanic crimes against 819 victims
- 2005: 522 anti-Hispanic crimes against 722 victims
- 2004: 475 anti-Hispanic crimes against 646 victims
- 2003: 426 anti-Hispanic crimes against 595 victims
- 2002: 480 anti-Hispanic crimes against 639 victims

Moreover, these statistics do not include those crimes that go unreported by illegal immigrants due to their fear of discovery by police officials.

Anti-Latino Hate Crimes: Specific Incidents, 2004-2007

In a recent article entitled *Immigration Backlash: Violence Engulfs Latinos*, Brentin Mock of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) catalogued many of the crimes committed against Latinos since January 2004.² A selection of these crimes is reprinted or summarized below:

Oct. 8, 2007

Omaha, NE (68101)

Eduardo Garcia wakes up to find his truck and his wife's car set ablaze. Two other cars are also vandalized and have the words "white power" and a swastika spray-painted on them. No one is immediately arrested.

Sept. 30, 2007

Avon Park, FL (33825)

José Gonzales returns home to find his car and garage destroyed by a fire set by an arsonist who also spray-painted "F--- Puerto Rico" on the garage walls. Gonzales, a U.S. citizen and a mechanic, loses all of his tools in the fire. No arrests are made in the town, which is famous for its passage of harsh anti-immigrant laws.

Aug. 23, 2007

Montgomery County, VA (25136)

Victor Hernandez, a Honduran immigrant dishwasher, is walking home from work when he is kicked into unconsciousness by teenagers who rob him of \$160. The two teens arrested tell police they were "amigo shopping" – seeking vulnerable Hispanic workers to rob. *The Washington Post* reports "alarmingly common" anti-immigrant crimes in the

area of Washington, DC, and its Virginia suburbs. Police from Montgomery County, Virginia and neighboring counties tell the newspaper that the majority of local robbery victims since 2006 have been Latino.

Aug. 12, 2007

West, TX (76691)

A Latino man is struck in the face several times after getting into a hostile exchange of words outside a convenience store with a group of white men and women who later tell police that they are affiliated with Aryan Nations, a neo-Nazi hate group. The victim, who has not been identified publicly, fled but is attacked a second time later the same night by several assailants who beat, stomp, and cut him. The alleged leader of the attacks, Stephen Ray Chapman, is arrested and charged with engaging in organized criminal activity and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Aug. 8, 2007

Garden Grove, CA (92840)

Felipe Alvarado, an immigrant working as a janitor at a fast-food restaurant, is taunted with racist threats and then attacked by three men, one of whom is carrying a loaded gun. James Joseph Kelly, Justin Louis Mullins, and Cheyne Danica Wilson are arrested and charged with felony assault with hate crime enhancements for allegedly beating Alvarado after yelling, among other things, "Go back to Mexico, you wetback!" Wilson is also charged with illegally possessing a handgun.

May 10, 2007

Dunlap, TN (37327)

Frankie Bowman, who in 2005 launched an unsuccessful petition drive to prevent a Mexican nightclub from moving into his neighborhood, is arrested for offering an undercover Tennessee Bureau of Investigation agent \$2,500 to burn down Mexico de Noche. Bowman, 52, allegedly told the agent he didn't care whether the building was empty or occupied when the fire was set. He faces trial on charges of solicitation to commit aggravated arson.

Mountain Minuteman founder Robert Crooks emails a video to several prominent anti-immigration activists which appears to show a Minuteman tracking a group of Mexicans through a gun's night-vision scope. In the video, an unidentified man can be heard calling the Mexicans "cockroaches" and then firing off a shotgun. "This video shows how to keep a Home Depot parking lot empty," Crooks writes in his cover email, snidely suggesting that recipients know how to "Talk the Talk" but not "Walk the Walk" of effectively fighting illegal immigration. A few days later, a very similar night-vision video surfaces, this one purporting to show a Minuteman hitting a lone Mexican with a sniper shot. Crooks, who initially denies making the videos but then admits it, later says that the second video was faked. Although state and federal law enforcement officials look into the incident, no victims are found.

May 4, 2007

Gaithersburg, MD (20877)

A long-established day-labor center for Latino immigrant workers is set on fire, causing about \$2,000 in damage. The center is run by Casa de Maryland, an immigrant assistance organization that has been the subject of many protests and threats. Without any evidence or rationale to support his allegation, Brad Botwin, director of an anti-immigration group called Help Save Maryland, tells *The Washington Post* that the laborers may themselves have started the fire.

May 1, 2007

Washington, DC (20001)

Tyler Froatz Jr., a member of the Herndon (Virginia) Minutemen, is arrested after a physical confrontation with human rights activists at a rally. When apprehended by police, he has in his possession several knives, a flare gun, and a stun gun, and police find a loaded rifle in his vehicle. Days later, investigators search Froatz's apartment and find an additional 15 guns, a Molotov cocktail, a grenade, and large amounts of ammunition. Initially jailed on weapons and assault charges, Froatz, 24, is released to his parents in New Jersey a month later to await trial.

April 18, 2007

Flagstaff, AZ (86001)

James Wesley Cheek submits a comment to the *Arizona Daily Sun* threatening to attack a Cinco de Mayo event in a manner similar to the Virginia Tech University rampage just a few days earlier which left 32 people dead. FBI agents arrest Cheek for sending a threatening interstate communication and find that Cheek possesses a collection of firearms and has distributed fliers for the Ku Klux Klan.

Feb. 23, 2007

Wright City, MO (63390)

A Latino immigrant is attacked and robbed by three men yelling, "Immigration enforcement!" who barge into his mobile home armed with a piece of lumber. The immigrant suffers injuries to his right eye and nose. Ryan Scott Harlan, 18, eventually pleads guilty to first-degree burglary and second-degree assault and is sentenced to 15 years in prison. Richard Bryant Lindaman, 17, pleads guilty to the same charges and is sentenced to eight years. The third suspect, Christopher Michael Skelton, is still awaiting trial at press time.

Feb. 7, 2007

Casper, WY (86001)

Richard Serafin, who has identified himself as "commanding officer" of a unit of the "Central Wyoming Militia," is arrested after illegally selling a short-barreled AR-15 semiautomatic rifle to an undercover agent for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Earlier, he told the agent that he planned to travel to the Arizona border to harm immigrants and boasted that "there may be fewer illegal Mexicans" after his trip. Serafin pleads guilty to possessing two illegal firearms – two short-barrel AR-15s – and is later convicted in federal court of possessing firearms to further a crime of violence. He faces a minimum of five years in prison and up to \$500,000 in fines.

Nov. 18, 2006

San Diego, CA (92101)

Latino workers Estanislao Gonzales and Robert Peña are allegedly assaulted by San Diego Minuteman John Monti at the Rancho Peñasquitos day-labor center during a Minuteman surveillance operation. Prosecutors say that Monti started the fight after grabbing one of the laborers and chasing him into the street. But jurors later acquit Monti of three counts of battery and one count of filing a false police report.

Oct. 23, 2006

Annapolis, MD (21401)

Hose Aldana and Wilfredo Rodriguez are stabbed and called ethnic slurs by two white men in a pickup truck, according to police. But county police officer Sara Schriver tells local newspapers that since Latinos are technically classified as white, the attack wasn't racially motivated.

Sept. 17, 2006

Laguna Beach, CA (92651)

A truck driven by two men reportedly hits two Latino workers at a day-labor center, and one of the workers is also assaulted. The men in the truck, Artem Soloviev and Dennis Katpilniy, came to the center offering work, but Soloviev ends up in a scuffle with the workers, apparently after they decline his terms. Although witnesses say Soloviev and Katpilniy shouted racial epithets at the workers during the fight, no charges are filed and Soloviev and Katpilniy are released. "We investigated it top to bottom, having collected third-party and the actual defendants' statements, but we did not have enough evidence to support the case," Susan Schroeder, of the Orange County's District Attorney's office, says later.

Sept. 10, 2006

Hampton Bays, NY (11946)

Carlos Rivera, a construction worker from Honduras, is stabbed multiple times outside a bar by Thomas Nicotra and Kenneth Porter, who yell racial epithets during the attack. Nicotra and Porter, who witnesses say also yelled racial slurs at other patrons a night earlier, are both charged with felony robbery and assault with hate crime enhancements. Porter is sentenced to one year in Suffolk County Jail for first-degree assault after testifying against Nicotra. Nicotra is sentenced to nine years in state prison after finally pleading guilty to first-degree assault and robbery.

Sept. 9, 2006

Rockfield, KY (42274)

A cross is burned on the front lawn of Nelson Espinoza's house in a Louisville suburb next to a sign reading, "My country maybe, my neighborhood NO WAY!!!" Espinoza, a native of El Salvador, lives with his wife in the United States as part of a legal temporary worker program. Almost a year later, the investigation remains open. "We suspect it was probably just kids from the neighborhood," says Warren County Sheriff's Deputy Daniel Alexander.

Aug. 20, 2006

Hahnville, LA (70057)

Two men, one from El Salvador and the other described by St. Charles Parish sheriff's deputies as "Hispanic," are shot in the legs by Mark Gautreau as they fish in a floodway near Lake Pontchartrain. Witnesses say that Gautreau announced he was going to "shoot some Mexicans" before breaking into his own truck (he had locked himself out) to pull out a shotgun and fire at the anglers, who are 500 feet away. Gautreau is booked on two counts of first-degree attempted murder as a hate crime. The case is later dismissed when the victims and witnesses fail to appear for court.

July 30, 2006

Bradenburg, KY (40108)

Jordan Gruver, a 16-year-old boy of Panamanian descent, is attacked by members of the Imperial Klans of America (IKA) who are recruiting for the IKA at the Meade County Fairgrounds. Unprovoked, the Klansmen call the far smaller Gruver a "spic," then beat him severely, leaving Gruver with two cracked ribs, a broken left forearm, and jaw injuries requiring extensive dental repair. Two Klansmen, Jarred R. Hensley, 24, and Andrew R. Watkins, 26, plead guilty to second-degree assault and are each sentenced to three years in prison. The Southern Poverty Law Center files a lawsuit against the attackers which is later amended to add IKA, its national leader Ron Edwards, and another high-ranking IKA official.

July 25, 2006

Albertville, AL (35950)

The windows of six businesses owned by Guatemalans or Mexicans are shot out early in the morning, while white-owned businesses on the same street in this northern Alabama town of 17,000 go untouched. A year later, the crime is still unsolved. Albertville police say the attack wasn't racially motivated, although many observers, pointing to which businesses were targeted, suspect otherwise. "We have sporadic, random incidences of windows shot out," says Chief Detective J. T. Cartee.

July 20, 2006

Dayton, TN (37321)

Gilberto Mejía, owner of the Mexican grocery store Carnicería Los Primos, is verbally assaulted by anti-immigration activist June Griffin, who barges into the store and tears down a Mexican flag. Griffin then allegedly harasses Mejía and leaves threatening phone messages, which Mejía saves for police.

"It was an act of war," says Griffin, who has unsuccessfully run for the U.S. House of Representatives as a Republican. Charged with civil rights intimidation, phone harassment, theft and vandalism, Griffin is released after witnesses fail to turn up at a court hearing.

"I'm not ashamed of anything I did," Griffin tells *The Herald-News*.

June 15, 2006

Yonkers, NY (10701)

Miguel Vega, a native of Peru, is walking down the street where he lives when he is attacked and murdered by five men who also steal his wallet. The killers – Abraham Ghaly, David Bendezu, Alexander Mitchell, Joel Lopez, and Rodolfo Ponciano – are charged with murder and robbery. Bendezu, Mitchell, and Lopez have their murder charges upgraded to hate crimes after an investigation finds that they specifically sought a Mexican to rob that night. All five plead guilty and are sentenced to between five and 15 years.

June 12, 2006**Rocky Point, NY (11778)**

Two Mexican men fishing at a jetty are asked for their green cards and then beaten and robbed by four teens – William Foley, Nicholas Provenzano, Daniel Sturgis, and Jesse Ward – posing as federal agents. The teens rob money from the victims while accusing them of stealing jobs from U.S. citizens. All four are charged with felony robbery and assault as hate crimes. Sturgis eventually pleads guilty to third-degree assault as a hate crime and second-degree robbery and is sentenced to two years in state prison. Provenzano is convicted of charges related to the attack, but his sentencing is deferred. Foley and Ward are charged as juvenile offenders.

May 4, 2006**Southampton Village, NY (11968)**

Jonathan Cedillo is having lunch near a 7-Eleven when cabdriver Robert Rossetti slaps his sandwich from his hand and begins calling him derogatory racial names. Rossetti then begins ramming into Cedillo, who has American Indian and Mexican ancestry, with his taxi. Cedillo's right knee is injured. "He was cursing at me, telling me I'm an immigrant and to get out of this country," Cedillo tells reporters. Rossetti is later convicted of misdemeanor aggravated harassment.

April 29, 2006**East Hampton, NY (11937)**

Three Latino teenagers are lured into a shed by a neo-Nazi skinhead (also a teenager) and then threatened and terrorized with a chainsaw and a machete. The victims are held for 90 minutes while the skinhead and his friends yell racial slurs, including "white power!" and "Heil Hitler!"

"This is how you run across the border," one of the skinheads shouts as he chases the Latino youths around with the running chainsaw. The skinhead is later charged as a juvenile with reckless endangerment and menacing.

April 28, 2006**Salt Lake City, UT (84101)**

A West High School student identified only as Felipe is attacked while walking to school by two white men who he says call him a "stupid wetback" and tell him, "Go back to your country, you don't belong here." He survives the assault with a black eye, cut lip, and head swelling, reports the *Deseret Morning News*. The boy is not a documented

citizen, according to his mother, who tells reporters, “The fact that you’re an immigrant here doesn’t mean they get to do that.”

April 22, 2006

Houston, TX (77001)

David Ritcheson, 16, is attacked by racist skinheads at a house party after supposedly trying to kiss a white girl. David Henry Tuck breaks Ritcheson’s jaw, knocking him unconscious, while screaming, “white power!” and calling Ritcheson a “spic” and “wetback.” Keith Robert Turner joins in, and the two attackers burn Ritcheson with cigarettes, kick him with steel-toed boots, attempt to carve a swastika into his chest, pour bleach on him, and finally violently sodomize him with a patio umbrella pole. It takes 30 surgeries before Ritcheson, confined to a wheelchair and wearing a colostomy bag, is able to return to school.

Tuck is later sentenced to life in prison. Turner gets 90 years.

A year after the attack, Ritcheson, who up to that point has not been identified in press accounts by name, goes public and speaks out to the U.S. House of Representative’s Judiciary Committee. In wrenching testimony, the boy recalls the horrific experience for lawmakers deliberating over strengthening federal hate crime laws. “With my humiliation and emotional and physical scars came the ambition and strong sense of determination that brought out the natural fighter in me,” Ritcheson testifies. “I am glad to tell you today that my best days still lay ahead of me.”

Less than three months later, the teenager commits suicide, jumping from a cruise ship into the Gulf of Mexico. Before his death, he assisted the Anti-Defamation League in creating an anti-hate program at his alma mater, Klein Collins High School.

April 3, 2006

Tucson, AZ (77002)

One of the founding members of the Minuteman movement, Laine Lawless, exhorts the leadership of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement (NSM) to launch a campaign of violence and intimidation against Latino immigrants. “Steal the money from any illegal walking into a bank or check cashing place. ...Discourage Spanish-speaking children from going to school,” Lawless writes in a private email to Mark Martin, “SS commander” of the NSM’s western Ohio chapter. “Be creative. ...Create an anonymous propaganda campaign warning that any further illegal immigrants will be shot, maimed or seriously messed-up upon crossing the border.”

The goal? “Make every illegal alien feel the heat of being a person without status.”

March 30, 2006

North Bergen, NJ (07047)

After a series of pro-immigrant marches and demonstrations bring out hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their supporters in cities across the country, an acerbic neo-

Nazi radio host makes an appeal for people to carry out the mass murder of any “illegal aliens” sighted.

“All of you who think there’s a peaceful solution to these invaders are wrong. We’re going to have to start killing these people,” Hal Turner writes on his website. “I advocate using extreme violence against illegal aliens. Clean your guns. Have plenty of ammunition. Find out where the largest gathering of illegal aliens will be near you. Go to the area well in advance, scope out several places to position yourself and then do what has to be done.”

Oct. 16, 2005

Sacramento, CA (95814)

Six people are injured by three white men who crash a private party with the intent of “beating up Mexicans,” according to police. One of the assailants uses brass knuckles after shouting racial epithets and “white pride.”

Sept. 30, 2005

Tifton, GA (31793)

Six Mexican immigrants – Mateo Gomez, his son José Luís Tías, Felipe Mauricio Esparza, Guadalupe Sanchez, Armando Perez Martínez, and Mauricio Florindo – are murdered, and at least five others are badly injured, when a group of African Americans rampage through four trailer parks known for housing immigrant workers. The parks are also known for home invasions; more than 20 homes there have been invaded in the months prior to the murders.

Three suspects – Jennifer Wilson, Stacy Sims, and Jamie Underwood – are arrested and charged with six counts of murder each. Sims and Underwood are also charged with rape and aggravated assault. District Attorney Paul Bowden announces that he will seek the death penalty.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation’s Vernon Keenan tells CNN that the victims “are easy targets because they do not speak English. They’re undocumented workers. They keep cash on their persons [and] in their homes. And they are reluctant to report crimes to law enforcement.”

When Tifton’s mayor Paul Johnson decides to display the Mexican flag over City Hall out of respect and sympathy for the victims, callers to a local radio station bristle with anger and resentment.

July 15, 2005

Keansburg, NJ (07734)

Octavio Vivanco is riding his bike to his restaurant job when Joshua Ramgoolam and James Schmidtberg chase him down and punch him in the face. About 15 minutes later, Rosalino Novorrete is attacked by the same duo, this time with a plastic baseball bat, as he rides his bike to work. According to Monmouth County Prosecutor Luís Valentín, Vivanco and Novorette were attacked “solely because of their Latino ethnicity.”

Ramgoolam later pleads guilty to second-degree bias intimidation, third-degree aggravated assault, and third-degree weapons possession for unlawful purposes. Schmidtberg is found guilty of the same charges, plus fourth-degree weapons possession. Both are sentenced to five years in state prison.

July 12, 2005

Patchogue, NY (11772)

A 61-year-old Ecuadorean immigrant is badly beaten by three white men as he pushes a shopping cart through the streets collecting cans. Before the attack, the man was asked if he had a green card. “Then they started pummeling him,” Suffolk County Hate Crimes Detective Robert Reecks tells reporters. The man, whose name is not made public, suffers a broken eye socket and facial bruises.

May 7, 2005

Maryville, TN (37801)

A Mexican grocery store is vandalized by five white men who shatter windows, damage a refrigerator, and spray-paint neo-Nazi symbols, causing more than \$17,000 in damage. Two men – Thomas Lovett and Jacob Reynolds – eventually plead guilty and are each sentenced to six months in prison.

Dec. 29, 2004

Redlands, CA (92374)

Two Latino men and a Latina woman are beaten and kicked in the parking lot of a strip club by a “gang of about 10 skinheads,” as later reported by the *San Bernardino County Sun*. The neo-Nazi skinheads yell racial slurs at their victims, prompting the Redlands police chief to declare that hate crime charges will be pursued if and when the perpetrators are caught.

Jan. 9, 2004

Dateland, AZ (85333)

Pedro Corzo, a Cuban-born regional manager for Del Monte Fresh Produce, is gunned down by two Missouri residents – 16-year-old Joshua Aston and his 24-year-old cousin Justin Harrison – who traveled with Aston’s younger brother, 15-year-old Nicholas Aston, to a remote section of southern Arizona with the specific intent of randomly killing Mexicans. The brothers shaved their heads before embarking on their odyssey. Corzo was ambushed after he stopped at a roadblock that the group constructed from boulders. Joshua Aston, the ringleader, is later tried as an adult and receives two life sentences for the murder. Harrison also is sentenced to life. Charges are eventually dropped against the younger Aston brother.

Sources:

¹ “2006 Hate Crime Statistics,” U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2007, <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2006/index.html>.

² Brentin Mock, “Immigration Backlash: Violence Engulfs Latinos,” Intelligence Project, Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007,
http://www.splcenter.org/intel/news/item.jsp?site_area=1&aid=292.