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General Topic Profile of Prejudice, Discrimination and Hate Crimes

Love is such a beautiful thing. Just thinking of it can bring thoughts of romance, family or great friendships. The smell of roses or the cologne of a loved one. Walks through the park while birds are chirping. Or walks on the beach as the waves bring in a cool breeze and the sun sets on a beautiful summer day. Good deeds, small gestures or even grand presentations of affection. In general, love bring thoughts of happiness, bliss and joy.

However, as beautiful as love is, hate is equally as ugly, if not uglier. When people think of hate, it usually brings bad thoughts. Strong feelings of disgust, as if the sight of what is hated will drive a person insane. Feelings of hatred can lead to very angry thoughts, which in turn, can put people in mental and physical states that are harmful for them and others. This can lead to thoughts of violence, torture and even death.

An act of love is much more beneficial than an act of hatred. This applies for both the givers and receivers of these acts. However, there is still a large abundance of hatred in our world - way more than there should be, and there is a lot less love than there should be in our world. "A whole lot of people in this world, need a whole lot of Jesus," Gloria Calloway said with sorrow.

Ms. Calloway is a 65-year-old African-American female, who grew up during segregation and the civil rights movement. Therefore, she has seen first-hand what hatred looks like.

Calloway discussed what it was like to go to a "colored" school in times of segregation.

"Everything we had were recycled hand-me-downs from the 'white' school across town. Our books. Our desks. Our chalkboards. Even our sports equipment." She also stated that the worst

part was what happened outside of the school. “If an African-American used anything that wasn’t ‘colored’ property, we could have been hurt badly or even killed. White people would yell racial slurs and threats at us just for walking down the street.” She hesitated, swallowed and then continued with sorrow in her voice, “I was lucky enough to never receive any physical harm, but several people I knew weren’t as lucky.”

In fact, according to [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com), a prejudice is an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought or reason. Therefore, prejudices are the developments of thoughts or feelings based upon someone being different without knowing the other person at all. These prejudices can lead to the action of treating someone unfairly because they are different, also known as discrimination. As defined by [google.com](https://www.google.com), discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age or sex.

Worst of all, discrimination can lead to causing physical damage to a person or their property because they are different. This type of discrimination is known as a hate crime. Per [Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com), hate crimes are any of various crimes (as in assault or defacement of property) when motivated by hostility to the victim as a member of a group (e.g. one based on color, creed, gender or sexual orientation). Some hate crimes are very violent, and can even be fatal.

Ron Ashford is no stranger to prejudice, discrimination and hate crimes, as he is a 49-year-old African-American male who moved from Louisville, Kentucky, to Williamsburg, Kentucky, before he became a teenager.

“ In Louisville, I didn’t have to worry about discrimination that much, but I found out really quick that Williamsburg wasn’t the same,” Ashford said.

Ashford was the victim of a hate crime not long after moving to Williamsburg. It was a warm summer’s eve, right before the sun began to set. Ashford and two of his football teammates had just left football practice - their second practice of the day - and were dripping with sweat. The boys were three of a handful of African-American players on the team, and happened to live on the same street. As such, they had become good friends.

After practice, they decided they would take the back-way home so they could get in the creek to cool off. In fact, they went home this way often after practice. The boys walked at a typical pace, skipping rocks and telling jokes as they leisurely made their way to the creek. “Once we got there, all of us sat down and enjoyed the water for about ten minutes, before any of us even thought about moving,” Ashford said.

After the boys had cooled off they searched for crawfish and played in the creek for 30-45 minutes before they got out of the creek and began to make their way to the street where they lived. About five minutes after starting their journey home, hatred blocked their path in the form of five racist teenagers.

A truck pulled up alongside the boys with five white teenage boys older than Ashford and his friends inside. They were yelling racial slurs at the three African-American boys. Ashford still remembers to this day what the truck looked like. “It was a red Ford with a rebel flag across the back window. It had a broken left taillight and a dent in the hood. There were a few rust spots and they had some tools and a gas can in the bed of the truck.”

Ashford and his friends ignored the racial slurs and kept walking until the truck pulled in front of their path and stopped. The three boys tried to run, but the teenagers in the truck jumped out and grabbed them before they could get away. What happened next was hard for Ashford to talk about, but he pushed on and continued his story.

At first, Ashford and his friends tried to fight back, but the five white teenagers were too overpowering as they physically assaulted and beat the three African-American boys. They punched and kicked Ashford and his friends as they lie on the ground trying their best to block the blows. When the five boys had inflicted what they saw as enough damage, they spouted some more racial slurs and one added a threat before they got back in the truck and laughed while speeding away.

“We were bloody and bruised, but we could still walk,” Ashford said. “They didn’t do much physical damage, but the mental damage was significant.” Ashford paused and then gave a look of disgust as he added, “I remember the driver saying, ‘Since you Coons like water so much, we’ll tie you up in a rebel flag and throw you over the Cumberland Falls if we catch you on our road again!’”

Ashford stated that the five boys lied their way out of any trouble when they were confronted about what they did, using the alibi of being at a different location. Ashford and his friends didn’t go to that part of the creek again until they were older.

Hate crimes can have devastating and disastrous impacts on their victims. In worst case scenarios, the victims of hate crimes are left dead. In less severe situations, hate crimes still leave their victims physically wrecked and emotionally destroyed.

The impacts aren't only felt in the most violent forms of discrimination though. In fact, according to social psychologist, Aneeta Rattan (CNN.com), victims of prejudice and discrimination experience higher levels of chronic stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicide. Rattan also states these victims can experience a lower sense of well-being and self-control, while also having lower IQ test performance. Prejudices can also potentially prevent the development of mutually beneficial relationships, impacting both the victim and the victimizer of prejudices.

Prejudices and discrimination have impacted Jeremy Jenkins as well as other people that he has interacted with throughout his life. "I knew at a very young age that I was sexually and romantically attracted to men," Jenkins said. "I guess other people could sense this too, and a they would make jokes and call me derogatory names." This resulted in Jenkins lying about his sexual orientation for much of his life to prevent further harassment. "I went through a lot of depression because I wasn't being true to myself and who I wanted to be," Jenkins said.

Jenkins also wishes he had more heterosexual male friends. "Just because I'm gay doesn't mean that I find every man attractive," Jenkins said. "I could have some great friendships with straight guys. I love watching football, eating wings and drinking beer. I'm a nice guy and I make a great friend, but because I'm gay, a lot straight men are scared away."

Most people will acknowledge the existence of prejudices and discrimination. However, not many people know how prevalent they are, especially those in the form of hate crimes. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (ucr.fbi.gov), there were 6,121 hate crime incidents involving 7,321 offenses reported in 2016. This included nine murders and 24 rapes. In Kentucky in 2016, there were 206 hate crime incidents. These numbers do not account for all

the hate crimes that go unreported, nor do they account for the discriminatory acts that are deemed not serious enough to be labeled as hate crimes. Also, not accounted for are the hate crimes that get labeled as a different type of crime.