Here, then & now

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Joshua Michael Christian Gianitsis

Honors Thesis – University of South Florida Honors College
This project began as a synthesis of my academic passions of psychology and criminology with my creative passion of photography. Crime happens every day in our society, with hate crimes being just a small subset of those crimes. The ability to hate, especially enough to commit some of the acts described in this work, has always surprised and fascinated me. Hate travels far and wide and does not discriminate.

I started this project with the intention of showing a wide variety of hate crimes, victims and situations. I had hoped that this work could help people relate to the plights of others. As the project continued, I found myself connecting with the victims and the crimes.

To stand in a place and know that something terrible has happened, to know that an innocent person has suffered at the hands of hate, is one of the most moving experiences any person can have. Photographing these places brought me closer to them than just reading about them ever could. I wanted this work to be a window for others so that they could understand and relate to what had happened.

Hate is not always blatant; it is not always identifiable. Race is not always a reason for hate. Religion, sexual identity and social status are all causes of hate crimes in a modern world. Here are the places where they were victimized, the stories that then defined them, and the memories they now leave behind.
This map indicates all of the sites I visited during this project.
At two in the morning on February 25, 2009 fourteen shots rang out in a small vacation neighborhood in the panhandle city of Miramar Beach. Daniel Baker fired his rifle into the home of several Chilean college students working through an exchange program. Nicolas Corp and Racine Baldontin were both killed during the attack; three of their friends were wounded. Baker returned home, just a few houses down from where the shooting took place, and waited for police. He had a history of xenophobia and had made threats against Latinos in the past. Baker was sent to a state psychiatric facility for competency tests. He was recently released back to police custody after a determination that he was competent to stand trial. A court date has not yet been set.
Jody Gaye-Bailey and her boyfriend Chris Martin were celebrating a late Valentine’s Day in the early morning hours of February 23, 1999. Jody was driving in Oakland Park, near Miami, when Robert Boltuch pulled his car next to hers at a stop light. Boltuch had been following Jody and Chris for several blocks after telling friends that he wanted to “go out and kill a nigger.” Boltuch fired several shots at Jody and Chris, killing Jody before driving off. Jody was killed because she was African American. Boltuch received a life sentence for his actions.
On March 25, 2002, just 30 minutes before evening prayers were set to start at the Islamic Center of Tallahassee, Charles Franklin drove his truck through the front doors. Franklin left his truck protruding from the building and went to have a drink at a local bar. When arrested, he yelled racial epithets and said he wanted to kill all Muslims. Franklin was sentenced to 27 months in prison for this attack under federal hate crime laws.
Robert Spencer was gunned down at this gas station on January 8, 2001 in Lake County. The investigation showed that David Leo Troutman had shot and killed Spencer before driving down the road to a nearby gas station and fatally wounding himself in the parking lot. Investigators believed that Troutman was mentally unstable and, because of some unknown problem, targeted African Americans.
In Hastings, an African American family was looking to buy a house. While looking at the property with their two teenage children, the family’s would-be neighbor began some simple construction on the side of his property closest to the empty house. Coombs remarked to the son about a house-warming gift for the family before lighting a six-foot-tall wooden cross on fire. The son ran to tell his parents what had happened and Coombs yelled racial slurs after him. Cross burning is a federal crime and the FBI investigated and arrested Coombs. After being charged with a hate crime he took a plea agreement and spent fourteen months in prison. The family chose to remain anonymous for fear of retribution from other members of the community.
In January 1923 the town of Rosewood was abandoned and destroyed. Rosewood was a primarily African American town that sat along the Seaboard Air Line Railway. Following a rape accusation by a white woman against an African American drifter, hundreds of whites living around Rosewood hunted down any African American person they could find and burned down anything and everything in their path. Men, women and children were hurt, mutilated and murdered during this ordeal. Neither local nor state authorities did anything to stop the violence. Following the week-long racial violence, the town was abandoned; none of the original residents returned to rebuild.

The photograph above is of the memorial for the victims of the massacre. The photograph on the next page was taken three weeks later after the sign was destroyed.
William Salas and his son Jesiah were walking back to their car following a Megadeath concert at the Sunrise Musical Theater in Ft. Lauderdale. On August 22, 1997 several members of the World Church of the Creator attacked and beat both William and Jesiah in the theater parking lot because Jesiah refused to accept a racially offensive flyer. The World Church of the Creator has been labeled a white supremacist hate group by the State of Florida. Both father and son were badly beaten and in need of medical attention following the attack. Raymond Leone and Donald Hansard pled guilty to the attack.
Gregory Griffith was beaten to death outside his home in Jacksonville on August 26, 1999. The 48-year-old white, mentally disabled man was attacked and murdered by two African American men: Terrence McCray and Ledel Lawrence. Griffith was not singled out because he was disabled, but because he was white. The two charged with the crime were convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to 48 years in prison. Neither man was charged with a hate crime.
A fire was set at the construction site of a Mosque at 1501 NW Fourth Ave in Boca Raton. A local businessman set a sign at the site on fire. The sign announced that the site would be the future home of the Assalam Center and had an artist's rendering of how the new mosque would look. In the five months since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York the sign had been attacked with an axe and set on fire four times. This arson was the fourth.
On the morning of August 31, 1999, a man called a local radio station in Tallahassee warning students at FAMU that there was a bomb in Lee Hall, the main administration building. A few minutes later a pipe bomb exploded in a first floor bathroom. The bomber told the radio station that he wanted to rid the FAMU campus of African American students. This was the first of two bombings over a three-week time span at the predominately African American campus in Northern Florida. No one was injured in either blast. Lawrence Lombardi was arrested on federal charges of setting off pipe bombs; he received life in prison without parole.
On March 28, 2008 an elderly woman was taking her mentally disabled son and grandson out for a walk in Kaley Avenue Park. Just as they entered the park they were stopped by four young African American men and told to pay a “white person fee.” When the family ignored the four men, all three were viciously attacked. The elderly woman was thrown against a tree and her son was held up with a knife. All four of the accused men were arrested and charged with assault and a hate crime.
Hate crimes are not restricted to members of another race or sexual identity. At times hate can be focused on a member of a different social status. It has only been in the last five years that lawmakers and politicians have started paying attention to this unprotected group of people. Early on the morning of January 12, 2006 Norris Gaynor was sleeping on a park bench in Esplanade Park in Ft. Lauderdale. William Ammons, Brian Hooks and Thomas Daugherty attacked Gaynor with a baseball bat and shot him with a paintball gun. The three teenagers beat Norris Gaynor so badly that he was pronounced dead just a few hours after the attack. All three of the teenagers were sentenced to more than fifteen years in prison. This attack inspired many state politicians to add another group to the list of those protected by the Florida Hate Crime law: the homeless.
A group of artists started purchasing property and beautifying a residential area of Bradenton. This new area is known as the Village of the Arts. This group of artists, along with the entire community, has improved the area by establishing these businesses and services. One block from the Village, on February 23, 2009, Daniel Case was found beaten to death behind Griggs Plumbing, where he had occasionally worked. Case was a homeless Vietnam Veteran who suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Robert A. Ramirez and Luis A. Rincon were charged, convicted and sentenced to harsh prison terms for Case’s murder. A mural is expected to be painted early next year in memory of Daniel Case.
Along the rolling streets of Inverness, Allison Decatrel was killed by a fellow classmate on Halloween Night 1999. Decatrel and friends were all dressed in drag while trick-or-treating. Richard Burzynski, while shouting gay epithets, drove his truck into the group of students, hitting Decatrel in the process. After stopping, Burzynski backed up and over the young girl’s body. A year after the killing, Decatrel’s friends and family gathered at the site of her death and laid a granite stone in the ground in memory of her life. Six months later Burzynski agreed to a plea bargain, which reduced his sentence from life to forty-five years in prison.
25-year-old Ryan Skipper of Wahneta was murdered on March 14, 2007 because he was gay. Ryan was asked to drive two acquaintances around town and, once in the car, he was stabbed more than 20 times and left for dead on the side of the road. William David Brown Jr. and Joseph Bearden were arrested and charged with first degree murder. Both men were later convicted and given life sentences without parole. Brown and Bearden, prior to their arrests, stated that they were “doing the world a favor by getting rid of one more faggot.”
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