

Speaker: Hate is on the rise in America

Outreach director for Southern Poverty Law Center speaks at LCSC Center for Arts & History tonight



Lecia Brooks

More Information

Active hate groups in the West in 2013

California: 82

Idaho: 17

Washington: 16

Montana: 12

Nevada: 10

Oregon: 9

Utah: 2

Jennifer K. Bauer/Lewiston Tribune

America's hate and fear measurably grew with the election of the country's first black president.

Since President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, radical anti-government, or patriot, groups increased by 500 percent. The year of the election there were 149. In 2012, the number was 1,360.

The Southern Poverty Law Center tracks radical anti-government groups along with hate groups, and organizations with beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people. The number of hate groups has grown by 67 percent since 2000, according to the center's statistics.

Demographic shifts in society, economic insecurity and the election of a black president are some of the reasons for increases, said Lecia Brooks, director of outreach for the center.

"Some folks are just not handling it well," she said.

Brooks will speak about the state of intolerance in the U.S. at 7 tonight at the Lewis-Clark State College Center for Arts & History as part of events around its exhibit "Speaking Volumes: Transforming Hate."

The Montgomery, Ala., center employs researchers, investigative journalists and people in the field to locate these groups, Brooks said. They are not hard to find "because they're always recruiting new members."

In 2012, there were 1,007 active hate groups in the country. The center breaks them down by state in a yearly "Hate Map." Idaho has 17, including a Moscow chapter of Crusaders for Yahweh, a pro-white Christian identity group linked to neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan.

Radical anti-government groups began forming in large numbers after Ruby Ridge in Idaho and the Waco Branch Davidian siege in Texas. Fueled by conspiracy theories, these groups see the federal government as the primary enemy. Many are not racist. Instead, they warn of impending government violence and gun control. Of the 1,360 groups recognized in 2012, 344 were classified as militias. In the immediate area, this includes the Palouse Lightfoot Militia of Moscow and Pullman; and Police and Military Against the New World Order in Kamiah. Other patriot groups listed by the center are the John Birch Society of Clarkston and Debt Free Sovereign Trust of Eastern Washington.

The center works to educate people and help communities develop tolerance. The first step is acknowledging these groups exist and talking about it, Brooks said.

"These groups are allowed to fester within a community because folks don't know what to say," she said.

People are often concerned about an individual's right to express an opinion, she said, but individuals must speak up and stand together against them.

"We know that this generation is far more accepting and tolerant than any other generation as far as race but we still have large swathes of the country where there's a lack of a lot of diversity. It's important for students in school to be educated about different (races and cultures). We can't wait until they go to college and meet somebody."

The truth is more people go to segregated schools now than before Brown v. Board of Education, Brooks said. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the 1954 landmark case that state law establishing separate public schools based on the race of students is unconstitutional.

"Personally I made a commitment to live a purposefully integrated life. I'm African-American. It's no easier for me than it is for you," she said.

In an area with little diversity dominant groups need to seek out, connect with and invite minorities in and create partnerships, she said.

In her talk, Brooks will also highlight the center's case in Coeur d'Alene against the Aryan Nations and the community's current efforts to rebuild in the wake of controversy. She will spend the day today visiting with students at Lewis-Clark State College before her free talk at the center at 415 Main St., Lewiston.

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