

Hate.com

Hate groups lure recruits online.

By Stacey Shackford

The Internet has the potential to change our world for the better by informing and connecting people in a way that no other technological innovation can.

However, as surfers connect online, building a global community, the dark side of the Internet is gaining ground.

From the Ku Klux Klan to the American Nazi Party to sites that advocate rape, murder and racism, the Internet is a breeding ground for hate. Many of these organizations lure visitors with seemingly benign web sites that don't reveal their violent underbelly until you get three or four pages deep.

Online hate ranges from groups of Holocaust deniers to truly frightening propagandizers like the Christian Holocaust, which advocates the killing of all Christians to ensure "a clean genetic slate for future of the human species." The American Nazi Party and the American Skinheads sites are not far behind in recruiting visitors to join their "battle."

Mark Potek, spokesman for the Montgomery, Ala.-based Southern Poverty Law Center (splcenter.org), says the Internet has made it easier for anyone to preach intolerance and reach a vast audience. In the past, a Klansman would have needed to put out a substantial effort and a lot of money to produce and distribute a pamphlet that might reach 100 people, says Potek. But today, that same Klansman can

These organizations lure visitors with seemingly benign web sites that don't reveal their violent underbelly until you get three or four pages deep.

put up a slick web page and potentially attract millions, with little money or effort.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of extreme hate sites grew from 254 in 1999 to 305 in early 2000. Other organizations, like HateWatch (hatewatch.org) or the Simon Weisenthal Center (weisenthal.com) estimate the overall number of sites with hate content to be between 500-800.

Tracking Hate

HateWatch was formed in 1996 to monitor and catalog hate groups that use the web to recruit and organize, and maintains a lengthy list of hate sites. It also features interviews with leaders of hate groups who admit that the Internet has been a boon for them.

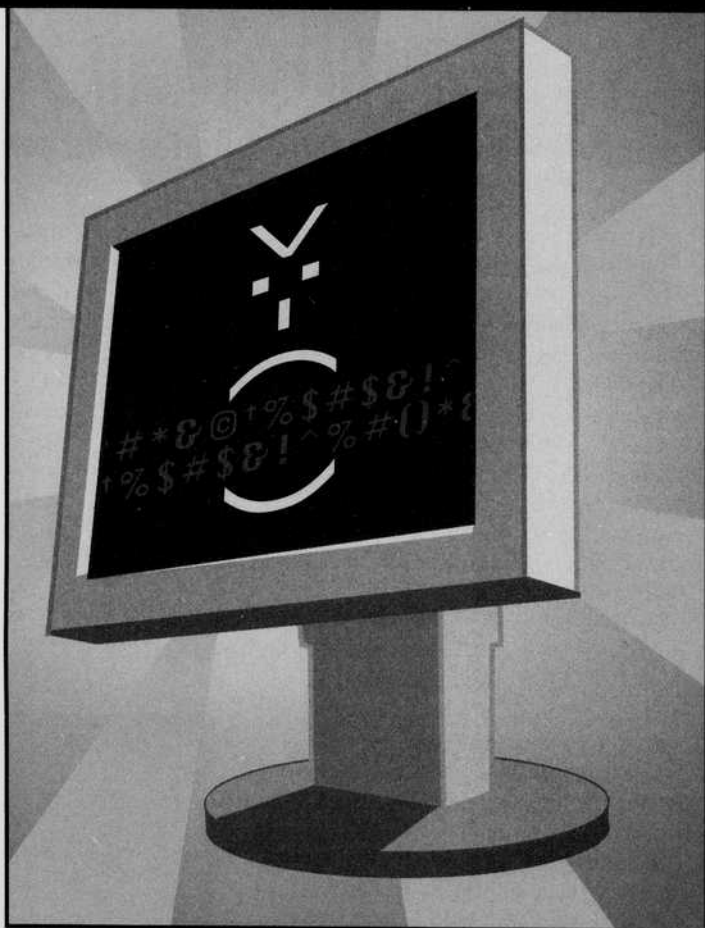
The proliferation of hate online has attracted the attention of civil rights activists and academics alike. At Emerson College in Boston, Prof. Robert Hilliard, author of the book *Waves of Rancor: Tuning in the Radical Right*, is teaching a seminar called Hate.com, which will examine how hate sites market to youths and other potential recruits.

The bad news about hate online: such speech cannot be controlled.

Stopping Hate

According to the Anti-Defamation League (adl.org), Internet speech that is merely "critical, annoying, offensive or demeaning" enjoys constitutional protection. Only when the activities of online hate groups rise to the level of criminal conduct by directly inciting illegal action or including speech that is a direct, credible threat against a specific target, can they be prosecuted.

There have been a few incidents of college students who were convicted of civil-rights violations for sending threatening e-mails to minority groups at their schools. A California State University at Los Angeles student, Kingman Quon, was sentenced to two years in jail for e-mailing threatening messages to Hispanic students and professors last year. A year before, Richard



Jason Fairchild

Machado was convicted of sending threatening e-mails to 60 Asian students at the University of California at Irvine.

The good news: just as most Internet users tend to withdraw from social activity, many individual haters who retreat to the Internet are not actively engaged in the movement in other ways, the SPLC reports. That means that although the propaganda they are spreading may be offensive to many, less people seem to be acting on it outside of cyberspace.

And a new campaign, United Against Hate (unitedagainsthate.org) is trying to get legislation passed that would strengthen the federal hate crimes statute to ensure less people participate in hate crimes, both on- and off-line. •

civilrights.org

antiracist.com—an informative Canadian site with lots of links

ih2000.net/ira/ira2.htm#terror—more great links