



Montana Human Rights Network

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Hate Crimes Stories from Montana Communities

This is by no means a comprehensive list of bias-based crimes committed in Montana. The purpose of this list is to provide a few examples of bias-based crimes that have happened in Montana. In some cases, hate crimes charges were not filed based on the discretion of local law enforcement or because the current statute wouldn't allow charges to be filed that way.

1996

The Metropolitan Community Church in Great Falls was defaced with spray-paint. Swastikas, a five point star with a circle around it, and 666 were painted on the church building. The church was home to a predominantly gay and lesbian membership, and the Rev. Gina Hartung had recently spoken out against the "Defense of Marriage" Act.

1997

A gay man was assaulted with an ice pick by his roommate in Missoula. The roommate had attempted to convince the victim of becoming a heterosexual. The attacker was charged with felony assault.

1998

A gay man in Helena was sent threatening anti-gay mail framed in Bible passages.

1999

A gay man in Roundup was harassed by a bar employee and attacked by a patron. The assailants directed numerous anti-gay epithets at him. The bar employee called him a child molester in addition to anti-gay slurs. The patron pushed and shoved the victim and put his cigarette out on the victim's arm. In 1997, the same gay man received threats about his home being blown up and that a drive-by shooting would "blow off his head because we don't want your kind here."

Floyd "Todd" Tapson perpetuated an attempted murder and rape of a disabled woman. He abducted the 22-year-old woman who was mentally disabled, sexually assaulted her, drove her to a remote location, and shot her in the face. The woman survived the shooting and was able to identify her attacker. Tapson had worked in a number of group homes in North Dakota,

Minnesota, and Maryland where disabled people had vanished. In 2003, he was sentenced to 75 years in prison. Calling Tapson "a cold-blooded, would-be killer" and "a grave risk" to women with disabilities, District Judge G. Todd Baugh ordered the maximum sentence sought by Yellowstone County prosecutors.

On the evening of July 29, an assailant gunned down David Solomon in front of his wife and 4-year-old son. Solomon was black. Douglas Allan Zander, the man arrested and convicted, for the murder, is white. Although the Powell County Attorney's office initially claimed there was no indication that the shooting was racially motivated, Zander told investigators he did not know Solomon, had no prior contact with him, and he intended to "probably kill" Solomon because he was black. The *Missoulian* reported that Zander told investigators his girlfriend had left him for a black man.

2001

A 22-year-old student at Carroll College was hit in the head with a bottle and beaten in his dorm by other students. They scrawled "Die Fag" on his body with a magic marker. The victim withdrew from school 14 days after the attack and, out of fear, didn't report it until 7 days after the attack.

In early November, a jury convicted six members of the Montana Front Working Class Skinheads under federal hate crimes law. The individuals went to federal prison on charges stemming from "Park Patrol," a term referring to the group's attempt to make Billings' Pioneer Park a whites-only location.

2002

An anti-gay arson in Missoula destroyed the home of Carla Grayson and Adrienne Neff, a lesbian couple in a legal dispute for domestic partner benefits from the University of Montana.

For months, individuals from India were targeted with various forms of harassment in Helena. Many of the incidents involved vandalism to vehicles, and one of these cases led to hate crime charges against a Helena man. The Lewis and Clark County Attorney charged Michael Eugene Dignan with malicious intimidation or harassment relating to civil rights. The charges stated that Dignan scratched the paint off of an Indian person's car and spread feces on the door handles. When confronted by police, Dignan mentioned he believed the Indian was Hindu. Because the crime was perpetrated based on the target's religion, hate crimes charges were filed.

2004

Two separate people were arrested and charged with hate crimes in Park County. Vincent Murders was charged with trying to strangle an African-American man during an altercation outside the Mint Bar in early August. During the fight, Murders allegedly made threats specific to the victim's race. The second incident happened in July at Chico Hot Springs. Authorities arrested Daniel Kreiger for hitting and verbally abusing four people from Ireland. Montana's

hate crimes law applies to these two instances, since it covers crimes committed against people based on a victim's race and national origin.

2005

Two men, assumed to be gay although they were not, were attacked by a group of at least five young men in Missoula after the attackers shouted anti-gay comments at them.

The anti-gay harassment of a University of Montana student reached its worst in early October. The student locked himself in his dorm room for two days, not even venturing out for food. This was the result of ever-escalating anti-gay harassment. The student received threatening notes slid under his door. One stated, "The only good fag is a dead fag," while another referenced Bible passages used by some Christians to demonize homosexuality. He was forced to call 911 and campus security when people began pounding on his door and screaming, "You fu***** fag, we're going to get you," and "[You'll] have to come out sometime."

2007

On the night of Feb. 14, a 14-year-old mentally disabled student went on his first-ever outing with friends and attended a basketball game in Butte. That night, outside a convenience store, assailants snapped a mousetrap on the student's clothed buttocks and penis and laughed as the distraught student lost his balance and fell backward down an embankment. The Butte-Silver Bow Sheriff said that investigators, who consulted with the county attorney, found no criminal activity and no charges were filed.

On March 16, a Columbia Falls man was attacked and brutally beaten in his driveway. The man's jaw, nose, eye sockets and ankle were shattered. His nostril was ripped, two bones in his feet were broken, his palate was cracked, and his septum damaged. This man was assaulted because his attacker found out he was gay.

In Missoula, Daniel Lemay and Christopher Newrider were charged with aggravated kidnapping, felony robbery, and aggravated assault for the brutal attack on Steven Paul Richey. Richey suffered a collapsed lung and numerous broken bones after being hogtied, punched, and kicked by Lemay and Newrider, whom yelled anti-gay epithets during the attack. Although Missoula Police Detective Dean Christenson investigated the possibility that this was a bias-based crime, the county attorney said they would be unable to prosecute it as a hate crime because of the current law.

While at the Stillwater Bar near Whitefish, a middle-aged man was assaulted by men who assumed he was gay. According to the targeted man, the assault was initiated by three men who directed anti-gay and sexually derogatory comments towards him. The bartender stepped in and attempted to protect the victim, because she thought they were going to kill the perceived gay man. The victim suffered severe trauma resulting in damage to his brain, eye socket, left ear, jaw and stomach. He also suffered from post traumatic stress disorder and is unable to perform his job. The assault has also caused his wife extensive stress.

Billings police responded to a fight in which a gay man was assaulted outside of a Billings bar. Both witnesses and the responding police officer considered the attack to be motivated by anti-gay bias. None of the witnesses or the victim could provide enough of a description of the attacker to the police to generate any suspects. The victim was treated for his injuries at the Billings hospital.

A Colorado man was in Miles City delivering a corpse for his mortuary business. He had some drinks at a local bar and was subsequently followed outside by a man he had been speaking with in the bar. The man began beating the victim, until the victim was able to crawl under his vehicle and the bar manager came outside. The victim sustained a broken nose, chipped teeth, three broken ribs, a bruised lung, had scars remaining on his head, and suffered mental distress after the incident.

A 22-year-old male UM student was beaten up by four men on the campus footbridge. The victim was repeatedly kicked in the chest and back after being shoved to the ground, while his assailants screamed anti-gay slurs.

Jess Keith was attacked by four women following a Montana Grizzly football game. Her attackers called her a "dyke" at the Press Box restaurant and later ambushed her in a parking lot as she walked to the Missoula Club. Keith reportedly heard one of the attackers yell, "There she is," as they piled out of the car and punched her in the face, knocking her to the ground. They then proceeded to kick her repeatedly in the back and stole her wallet before driving away.

2008

On April 13, a woman was attacked in Butte because of her skin color. The woman, an Iraq War veteran stationed in Idaho, was in town visiting family. While walking through a neighborhood, she was assaulted after three attackers used a racial slur and told her to leave the neighborhood. She was hit between 12-20 times in the head and body. She suffered a black eye, bruises, and injuries to her ribs.

Three men from Marion were charged with violating the state's hate crimes statute for their roles in attacking migrant workers: Edward Hubbs, Daniel Devine, and Karl Trent. Police reports stated that two pickups and a car pulled into the Moose Crossing campground about 10:00 p.m. on a Saturday night. Somewhere between seven and 10 men got out and started yelling racial slurs and throwing bottles into the campsites. When they found the migrant workers they were looking for, they started knocking them down one by one until the migrants fought back. Witnesses said the migrant workers did nothing to provoke the attacks. One of the attackers had a rifle and fired five or six shots into the air.