

Faces of Hate Hate Crime in Australia

**Edited by Chris Cunneen, David Fraser and Stephen Tomsen;
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Australia has witnessed an upsurge in the incidence of hate crime and hate speech, especially since the rise of Pauline Hanson's racist movement over the past two years. Incidents of public racial abuse and racial vilification have increased significantly during that period, particularly against Asian Australians.

If the Howard Government calls a 'race election' this year, we can be certain that hate crimes — violence and other acts of harassment which are motivated by prejudice or hostility towards a particular group of people — will reach epidemic proportions. The intensifying Asian economic crisis may also unleash a wave of economic migrants seeking to enter Australia, which will fuel even more racism and hatred.

The meteoric rise of nationalism in the lead-up to the 2000 Olympic Games and the racist anti-Aboriginal campaign flowing from the Wik debate are already fanning the flames of racial intolerance. The result is that Australia is becoming a racist powder-keg waiting to go off.

In this context, the first collection of essays on the issue of hate crimes and other aspects of violence or harassment against minorities in Australia could not arrive at a better time. *Faces of Hate* makes a unique and substantial contribution to our understanding of hate crimes based on race, ethnicity, religion and sexual preference.

Its strength lies in its breadth, in that it explores the ugly face of hate not only against traditional victims (immigrants, Aboriginals and Jews), but against others as well (gays and lesbians). It does, however, leave out the issue of violence against women, as well as other forms of hatred (for instance, of the poor by the rich, of workers by the bosses).

While all the contributors provide significant empirical research into hate crimes, a few are particularly noteworthy. Rob White's chapter on immigration, nationalism and anti-Asian racism is one of the most insightful and illuminating contributions.

White focuses on the Left Nationalist arguments concerning the 'invasion' of 'foreign capital' into Australia, and the 'population' debate within the Green movement. He astutely considers the main arguments against immigration (the maintenance of 'social cohesion', the economic impact of immigration and the effect of migrant settlement and a larger population on the environment) and cogently debunks each one.

White also ties the rise of racism to 'the substantial shift in the class composition of recent immigrants and a reorganisation of class relations in Australian society' (p.18), particularly the fact that the need for 'cheap labour' from overseas is diminishing.

He brings to bear the weight of the past — through a politico-historical analysis of racism in Australia — to demonstrate that racism stems from 'the clash of different economic interests, from the rise to dominance of specific conceptions of nationalism and national identity, and from the association of cultural differences and threats to moral wellbeing' (p.29).

The author of *I Was a Teenage Fascist*, David Greason, provides a provocative and fascinating insider's account of Australia's racist far right. A former member of the League of Rights and the 'national socialists', he examines the organisation and aims of the racist far right, from the League of Rights to the gun lobby.

He carefully connects the politics of the far right to Pauline Hanson. But like most of the other contributors, he provides few suggestions about how to respond to racism and hate crimes.

Perhaps the most promising, yet irritatingly disappointing, contribution is by Melinda Jones on the legal response. She sketches out a useful legal roadmap, a 'primer' as she calls it, for how the law might be mobilised against racism on the Commonwealth and State levels.

But she fails to present any critique of these remedies or an assessment of the ineffectiveness of legal mechanisms in fighting racism and hate crimes. And

she presents an extremely cursory analysis of the free speech question, that anti-vilification legislation violates the free speech of racists and other hate-mongers.

Jones creates the false impression that law is a useful anti-racist tool, claiming that 'legal strategies play an important role in addressing hatred' (p.239). But the law in Australia has been notoriously incapable of responding to or reducing the level of racism. And surely much more than a mechanism to address hatred is needed. We need critical analysis and concrete political remedies to eradicate it. But if law is 'part of the solution', as she maintains, then what is the other part? How do we remove the underlying fear that breathes life into racism? Her only suggestion is the tired old hobby-horse of education.

This points to the greatest weakness of *Faces of Hate*: most of its contributors fail to analyse the theoretical basis for racism and hate crimes or discuss how to fight these phenomena. Historical analysis is obviously a pre-requisite. We need to learn the lessons of the politics of hatred from the tragic examples of Nazi Germany, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and the attempted genocide of Aboriginal Australians. If anything, they teach us that we all have a responsibility to take on the vermin of fascism, genocide and racial intolerance.

But while the editors correctly assert that 'violence and harassment which characterise the daily existence of many Australians is an issue that concerns us all and that demands our immediate attention and efforts' (p.14) most of the contributions offer no directions for combating racism and crimes of hate.

Rather, a number of the contributors, particularly Chris Cunneen on the vilification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, dish up a healthy serving of indigestible postmodern jargon. Victims of hate crimes will have little use for this impoverished babble which sheds little analytical light on the topic. However, they will benefit from the ground-breaking empirical research in this collection of essays, which provides helpful ammunition in the battle against racism and hate crimes.

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