The Swastika Counter Project

COMMUNITY RESPONSE REPORT

Documenting Community Responses to Swastika Incidents (January 2016-January 2021)

Report by Kelly L. Wheeler and Laurie E. Gries

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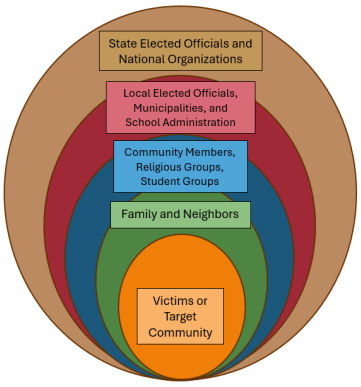
ABSTRACT

To better understand how visual signs contribute to contemporary antisemitism in the United States, ***The Swastika Counter Project (SCP)*** *tracked the circulation of swastikas between January 2016 and January 2021, the time period when Donald Trump came to dominate American politics. Based on a five-year public humanities project implemented by a team of interdisciplinary scholars with expertise in visual communication, critical geography, and social justice education, this report identifies how communities responded and identifies important takeaways for various stakeholders. This report specifically offers 6 recommendations for constructive community response.*

STAKEHOLDERS



When communities responded to swastika incidents between January 2016 and January 2021, certain stakeholders commonly played a role in those responses (See Figure 1). Often the closer the stakeholder was to the victim/targeted community, the stronger the activity and response.

Figure 1: Graph of various actors who commonly responded to swastika incidents

STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

Community stakeholders responded with a variety of actions to support victims and the community as a whole.

Action	Examples
Letters/Statements	Letters sent to parents by school administration, statements made by public elected officials
Clean up/Cover up	Painting over, placing materials over, or scrubbing off swastikas
Creation of New Curriculum, Policy, Committee, or System	School assemblies, courses, educational materials, reporting procedures, disciplinary policies, sensitivity training, task force committees
Public Gatherings	Rallies, parades, diversity celebrations, community protests, vigils, demonstrations
Disciplinary Action	School context: suspension, community service, written apology. Community context: fines, denial of service, expulsion, arrest, jail
Victim Support	Extra security measures, mental health counseling, community support groups
Outreach	Outreach to social justice organizations (such as ADL, SPLC), religious figures (such as Rabbi), Holocaust centers and survivors, and local law enforcement.

Figure 2: Table identifying various actions taken by community stakeholders in response to swastika incidents

These stakeholder actions can be organized into five categories of activity: Limited Response, Engaged Speech, Direct Victim Assistance, Community Activism, and Systemic Action.

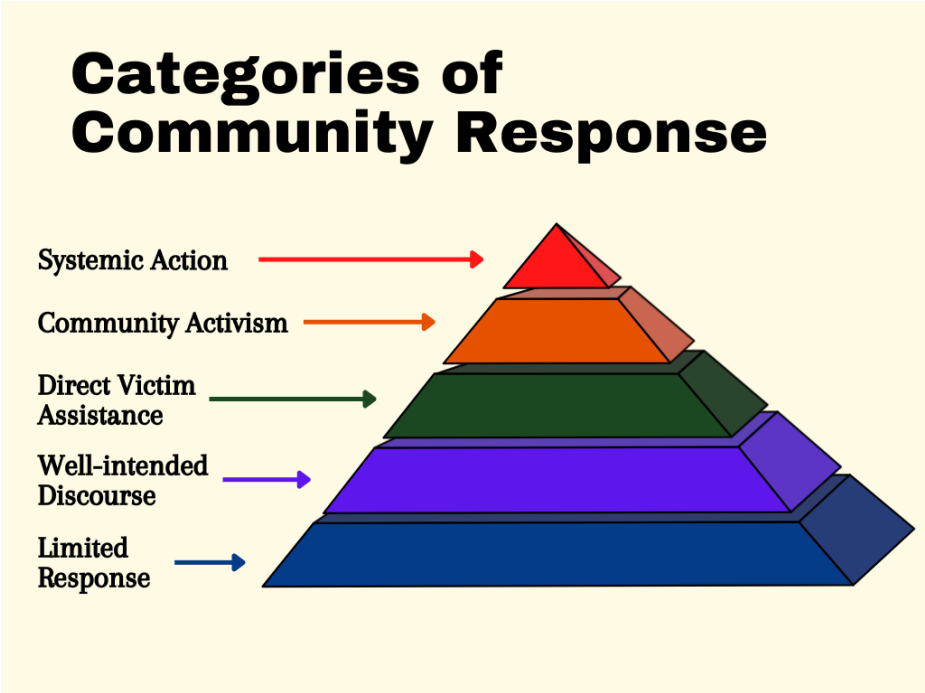


Figure 3: Figure demonstrating the various categories of stakeholder actions.

Limited Response: Stakeholder actions that initially react to incidents but do not attempt to coordinate sustained community action and/or instigate systemic social change

Well-Intended Discourse: Stakeholder actions that report incidents, identify community, condemn perpetrator actions, and sometimes articulate victim support and/or forward calls to action

Direct Victim Assistance: Stakeholder actions that solely focus on supporting the well-being and/or property of targeted individuals

Community Activism: Stakeholder actions that assemble community members to protest, show solidarity, and articulate commitments of action

Systemic Action: Stakeholder *actions that consider* underlying issues contributing to antisemitism, racism and other oppressions and work with colleagues to educate, enact policy change, and/or generate new structures and systems within an institutional context.

OBSERVATIONS

Based on data collected for the Swastika Counter Project (henceforth referred to as SCP) and Kelly Wheeler's close analysis of community responses to swastika incidents, stakeholder actions vary in their ability to provide meaningful support for individuals and communities impacted by swastikas. In this section, we note important observations of community responses to help clarify the kinds of actions that community stakeholders took between January 2016 and January 2021 in response to a wide range of swastika incidents.

LIMITED RESPONSES AND WELL-INTENDED DISCOURSES

Of the typical actions taken, limited responses and well-intended discourses are the most frequent kinds of response to swastika incidents, yet they are also most likely to run the risk of making the most insignificant impact. Limited responses include single actions that react to swastika incidents in ways that offer minimal direct support to individual victims and/or targeted communities of swastikas and fail to address larger systemic issues underlying a swastika's presence within a community.

Limited responses that are commonly taken include, but are not limited to, taking a photo of a swastika incident and posting it to social media, reporting a swastika incident to a local paper, investigating a swastika incident, or even disciplining or arresting a perpetrator. Another popular limited response is the immediate painting over or covering up of swastikas that surface on private and public property–an action often performed by city officials, clergy, or individual residents to prevent the witnessing and trauma associated with swastikas for other community members.

Such limited responses are well-intended and ought not to be condemned. Communities need to expose swastika incidents; they need to locate and prosecute perpetrators; and they need to cope in ways that are meaningful to them. Yet while documenting, reporting, removing, and taking disciplinary action are necessary responses to swastika incidents, when such action is taken *in isolation*, the potential for community redress is severely compromised. These actions, when implemented alone (or in hiding), especially run the unintentional risk of preventing or hindering conversation around swastika incidents, silencing victim/targeted community voices, and failing to address underlying issues that contribute to the harmful act of spreading swastikas.

Well-intended discourse is another popular kind of response that is important, yet restricted in its meaningful impact. Well-intended discourse is enacted when stakeholders respond to swastika incidents in speech or writing for a particular audience or the public at large. This discourse may surface in news reports, social media posts, letters, emails, and/or public statements. Such discourse is useful for acknowledging that swastika incidents took place, for condemning perpetrator actions, for articulating verbal support for victims, and for forwarding calls to action. Yet, this "go to" response to swastika incidents can be limiting when delivered as

one-way communication not followed up by critical engagement and sustained action among community members, especially when swastika incidents happen repeatedly within a community or region. News reports, for instance, often simply deliver general facts of the incident, framing a swastika incident as an act of vandalism or graffiti. Findings from SCP demonstrate that swastikas are not innocent in their placement or consequentiality, going so far as to not only make direct threats to Jewish and other minoritized people and communities but also to destroy property, which negatively impacts the well-being and security for community members. While exposing swastika incidents through social media and local, national, and international outlets is important, well-intended reporting discourse needs to be harder hitting, calling out the violence for what it actually is. As one Los Angeles community member whose restaurant was hit with a swastika said, while defacing property is nothing new and is always "ridiculous," promoting fear and violence by carving a swastika is "much more malicious" than common tagging.

In addition, letters and statements issued by school administrators, elected officials, and police officers often forward (and perpetuate) bad apple and us/them or outsider/insider arguments that neglect to acknowledge that the perpetrator is one of their own community members and that this incident is one of violence and harm as well as a part of larger systems of oppression and violence. A significant risk of such "us/them" or "insider/outsider" dynamic is that the well-intended discourse may shut down conversation around harm done to historically underrepresented groups targeted by swastikas. The perpetrator may be still held culpable, but shutting down conversations around diversity and inclusion would be a missed opportunity for a community to understand how it may or may not have contributed to the perpetrator's actions. The community also may miss an opportunity to formulate how they might prevent future incidents of harm. A community's examination of their systems, their role in community culture, and their support or lack of support or inclusivity could be an opportunity for community development and growth, and preventing that conversation by setting up an either/or dichotomy sets the community up for further incidents.

Important to also note is that "thoughts and prayers" are also a common means of well-intended discourse. In response to a swastika incident that took place in Indiana, for instance, former vice president of the United State, Mike Pence issued the following statement on Twitter (now X): "Sickened and appalled by the cowardly act of vandalism at Congregation Shaarey Tefilla; a beautiful synagogue in Carmel, Indiana where I have many good friends. Those responsible must be held accountable. These vile acts of antiSemitism must end."[1] Such a response, designed to be supportive, should be expected from our local, state, and national leaders. However, such typical kinds of response run the risk of lacking embodied support beyond the utterance or written word. While some elected officials may be genuinely heartfelt and earnest in their sympathy, sympathy does not take away the harm done to targeted individuals/communities nor does it prevent future harm from happening. Too often, then, "thoughts and prayers" runs the risk of standing in for real

[1] https://www.ktvq.com/cnn-affiliate/2018/07/29/anti-semitic-graffiti-found-on-carmel-synagogue/

constitutive action and enabling community leaders to proceed as usual without having to engage in tough conversations around diversity and inclusion and their roles in the systems that uphold structures, which continue to support inequity and discrimination.

DIRECT VICTIM ASSISTANCE AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Based on Wheeler's analysis of community responses reported in the SPC data set, direct victim assistance and community activism seem to offer more meaningful support for victims and targeted communities than limited responses and well-intended discourse when enacted in isolation. Direct victim assistance is defined as a response in which stakeholder actions focus solely on supporting the well-being of individual victims and targeted communities. These actions may take the form of helping a community member not only clean up after a swastika incident at their home or place of business but also offer various kinds of support. SCP data indicates that such support sometimes happened through social media but in several cases, community members showed up in force at a community member's business to communicate sympathy and reinforce their solidarity. In Denver, for instance, when the car of a transgender woman was spray painted with swastikas and very graphic, homophobic, and threatening phrases, the woman told local reporters that later that day, she found "encouraging sticky notes on her car reading, "You are loved," and "I am deeply sorry…love and peace wins always!'"[2] As another example, in response to a swastika incident in Cinciannati, community members contributed to a Go Fund Me account to help an inter-racial couple help offset the costs to pay for the damage caused when someone broke into their home, trashed their belongings, and spraypainted swastikas and the phrase "White Power" all over the walls and furniture. It was reported, to their surprise, that the "fundraising effort raised $67,655 — nearly 34 times its initial $2,000 goal."[3]

Direct victim assistance in educational contexts was also common. Assistance sometimes took the form of individual counseling, as happened on many college campuses where counselors and sometimes local religious leaders were brought in to help. Other times, space was opened up for groups of students to process the harm they felt and express concerns for their and others' safety. For example, in response to a swastika incident that took place at Columbia University in New York in 2020, the university offered traditional counseling services in person but also offered online/virtual options for convenience and safety. Direct victim assistance in higher education settings also took the form of escorting individuals across campus at night and implementing other security issues. For instance, in response to a swastika incident on their campus in Norton, MA, Wheaton College stepped up security by

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[2] https://www.denver7.com/news/local-news/transgender-womans-car-vandalized-with-hate-speech-pro-trump-message-in-denvers-capitol-hill

[3] https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/12/14/arrest-made-swastika-vandalism-interracial-couples-home-ohio/95454240/

conducting extra patrols in and beyond the building where the swastika incident took place.[4] The University of Nevada in Reno, NV and Duke University in Durham, NC, on the other hand, installed security cameras after their swastika acts. Such direct victim assistance for students is especially crucial for acknowledging the seriousness of swastika incidents, addressing the personal harm that swastikas often generate, and helping to ensure that students feel safe during an era when swastika incidents are happening frequently on campus in addition to other common violent instances such as bullying and school shootings.

Another means of stakeholder actions in response to swastika incidents is community activism where community members gather in public spaces to hold vigils, protests, and demonstrations. In response to several incidents where swastikas with racial slurs happened at a high school in Montvale, NJ, for example, students organized and invited local religious members and other community members to a rally against hate that featured a video of Holocaust survivors, a walkout to the football stadium, and a choir singing John Lennon's "Imagine."[5] In Sammamish, WA, community members organized what they called the Klahanie Peace Assembly after a local family's automobile was defaced with a swastika and a racist slur.[6] Noting that "EVERYONE BELONGS HERE" and that "No one should feel othered," the rally was organized to "re-establish solidarity as a community and take a stand together that Hate Has No Home Here."[7] They created a wall of peace for community members to write thoughtful and peaceful sentiments to their neighbors, and the city went so far as to proclaim the day of rally to be "Wear Blue for Kindness Day"-- "a day to wear blue, a color of peace, and to perform random acts of kindness, look out for those who are lonely and reach out to make new friends."[8]

Such means of community activism is often constructive as it enables community members to assemble, express care, enact resistance, show solidarity, and articulate commitments of further action. Community events also afford community building, bonding, and healing. In addition, community events send messages of intolerance and resilience to local perpetrators, such as in Springfield, TN, when neighbors protested against a local resident belonging to the National Socialist Movement who had hung Nazi flags in his yard, or in Lauderdale, MN, when community members protested the actions of a local male "history buff," who claimed not to be a Neo-Nazi but to "just liked" the design, colors, and patterns of the [Nazi] flag.[9] While some like the history buff from Lauderdale took their flags down because they "didn't want any more headaches,"[10] others doubled down. In Indianapolis, for example, one

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[4] https://turnto10.com/news/local/wheaton-college-investigating-incidents-involving-swastikas

[5] https://dailyvoice.com/new-jersey/pascackvalley/police-fire/swastikas-racist-graffiti-spread-from-pascack-valley-hs-to-hills/745334/

[6] https://www.king5.com/article/news/racist-graffiti-again-shows-up-in-klahanie/281-d1402729-11b8-4d77-b73d-ffa1a184484b

[7] ibid

[8] ibid

[9] https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2016/06/30/lauderdale-nazi-flag/

[10] ibid

local man who identifies as a collector and calls the Nazi flag a “war trophy,”[11] hung the Nazi flag outside his home in response to recent removals of Civil War statues around the country. In response to his community members’ protest on social media, he resisted, saying that it was "a matter of proving a point.” "Symbols,” he said, “aren't racist. People are.”[12]

As evident in the Indianapolis case, community activism may not always result in outcomes a community may desire; however, generally, direct victim assistance and community activism do go far in helping victims feel authentically supported. As Aaron Moreno noted in response to a swastika spree involving swastikas and the word “Hitler” surfacing on a variety of businesses in Los Angeles in December of 2016, "The effects of the symbols are lon[g] lasting” in that symbols inflict deep “psychological and emotional harm” on individual victims.[13] And as Marcelle Wood, chair of the Ledyard Democratic Town Committee, noted in response to a February 2020 swastika incident that took in place in their community, “Hate speech and crimes not only cause many community members to feel angry, frightened, or unsafe, especially marginalized citizens, they damage the whole community.”[14] The responses a community takes, then, are important for not only generating a strong sense of security and belonging for individual victims but also for community repair. Taking time and energy to enact physical, material, emotional, and perhaps even financial support through direct victim assistance and community activism especially demonstrates to victims that communities are vested in them as humans and provides meaningful evidence that community members are actively working to make private and public spaces in their entire community more safe and inclusive.

Yet, while direct victim assistance and community activism are always important and typically very appreciated, it should be noted that these means of response, when enacted alone, can also, like limited responses and well-intended discourse, do little to actually address the deeply systemic problem of swastika incidents. Swastika incidents are not isolated acts of violence with isolated repercussions. As documented and explained by SCP, swastikas participate in antisemitic and racist acts of violence that contribute to white nationalist efforts and longstanding systems of oppression that both perpetuate and uphold white supremacy.[15] These systemic issues run deep within and across cultures in the United States, and as such, any effort to prevent further harm promulgated by swastikas must also run deep. Stakeholders who want to address antisemitism, racism, and white supremacy within their communities and across the nation must then ask: What more can we do in response to swastika

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[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GYULDk2Zb4

[12] ibid

[13] http://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/Caught-on-Camera-Swastika-Tagging-Spree-in-Downtown-Los-Angeles-404214346.html

[14] https://www.theday.com/article/20200210/NWS04/200219951

[15] On the SCP data advocacy website, see the Summary of Findings and the webpage devoted to the links between antisemitism, white nationalism, and white supremacy for a deeper understanding of this argument.

incidents to disrupt systems of oppression that are both explicit and implicit in contributing to community harm?

WORKING TOWARD SYSTEMIC CHANGE

According to the SPC data, stakeholders who are invested in contributing to systemic change often work with colleagues to educate, enact policy change, and/or generate new structures and systems within an institutional context. Sources in the SPC dataset, for instance, report how school administrators sometimes form or engage committee task forces to develop trainings and longitudinal approaches to address antisemitism. In response to a swastika incident at Purdue university in Indianapolis, IN for instance, administrators accelerated recommendations from their Diversity and Inclusion Task Force and created a new position on campus to engage conversations about difficult societal issues such as antisemitism and how to create social change.[16] At Colorado State University, on the other hand, one of SCP's advisory board members worked to establish a presidential task force on Jewish inclusion and the prevention of antisemitism.[17] While this community response is not in the SCP dataset, this task force exemplifies how a school campus can create systems and structures to address new policy needs, curricular adjustments, and prevention mechanisms to support community members through meaningful and measurable actions.

Administrators also developed new policies or structures for reporting and/or responding to hate acts on campus, such as when administrators at Macalaster College formed what they called a "Bias Response Team" to deal with incidents of hate after swastikas showed up in the library on their campus.[18] In addition, data demonstrates that in response to some swastika incidents on their campuses, schools are working with local Jewish religious figures and anti-hate organizations to develop new curricula. When a swastika surfaced in a bathroom at Wellesley Middle School in Wellesley, MA, for instance, the school principal reached out to community partners at a local synagogue to help reconsider the antisemitic curriculum delivered in their social studies classes. The school administration, it was reported, also explored educational opportunities from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL),[19] which has many resources for helping students understand the historical and contemporary dimensions of antisemitism as well as a database of hate-symbols that includes not only long-circulating symbols such as the swastika but symbols that have been recently invented to spread hate and uphold white nationalism and white supremacy.

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[16] http://fox59.com/2016/03/08/swastikas-found-at-uindy-purdue-university/

[17] https://formerpresidentmcconnell.colostate.edu/presidential-task-force-on-jewish-inclusion-and-the-prevention-of-antisemitism/

[18] https://themacweekly.com/74995/news/swastikas-found-in-library-college-responds/

[19] https://theswellesleyreport.com/2019/10/wellesley-schools-grapple-with-bathroom-swastika-athlete-called-racial-slur/

Such responses, if carried through, have potential for meaningful social change in that schools are taking responsibility for addressing antisemitism within their institutions. They are also recognizing how they are complicit in this socio-cultural problem if they do not take concerted action to educate and enact policies that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and directly address hate and antisemitism. Such actions to work toward systemic change are crucial, in that in too many communities, swastikas are repeatedly showing up in educational settings and public areas. In 2019 alone, for instance, 19 swastika incidents occurred over the year at three local schools in New Rochelle, NY[20] while over six swastika incidents took place within a four month span in Summit, NJ.[21] If such communities really want to stop the circulation of swastikas, community stakeholders must get serious and consistent with their responses, recognizing that such incidents are not isolated events and that addressing systemic underlying issues is key to responsible and effective change. As Dr. Laura Feijóo, the superintendent in New Rochelle at the time, said, "acts of hate" are happening during a time when national tensions are escalating; antisemitism is on the rise both locally and nationally; and many communities–African American, Latinx, LGBTQ, Jewish and Muslim–are being "exposed to vitriol" and "targeted in deplorable ways."[22] To address such rise in antisemitic incidents, she insisted that "As we work to address [swastika incidents in our schools] by identifying those responsible so that they may face appropriate consequences, we [must] remain committed to addressing the underlying social and emotional issues that would cause a student to act out in this disturbing fashion."[23] SCP praises such commitment and advocates for even more action to address the systemic problems that enable antisemitism and swastika incidents to flourish.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY RESPONSE

SCP's analysis of community responses indicates that despite such recognition by stakeholders such as Dr. Feijóo, there are no consistent protocols for responding to swastika incidents within and across communities. As such, and as evident in conversation with local community members, many stakeholders struggle to identify best paths forward to both address and prevent future swastika incidents. In light of this predicament, SCP offers the following six recommendations based on Dr. Kelly Wheeler's ongoing research into community responses to swastika incidents that were reported by sources in the SCP dataset:

1. Practice Care with Naming and Framing of Swastika Incidents

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[20] https://talkofthesound.com/2019/12/10/four-more-swastikas-found-at-new-rochelle-high-school-19-and-counting/

[21] https://www.tapinto.net/towns/summit/articles/sixth-hate-symbol-incident-reported-as-another-swastika-found-at-summit-middle-school

[22] https://talkofthesound.com/2019/12/13/new-rochelle-schools-superintendent-address-interreligious-council-on-swastika-incidents/

[23] https://talkofthesound.com/2019/12/13/new-rochelle-schools-superintendent-address-interreligious-council-on-swastika-incidents/

2. Center Victim Concerns and Practice Active Listening
3. Examine and Rethink Police Response Roles and Practices
4. Step up Political Leadership and Work toward Criminal and Restorative Justice
5. Intensify Education about Antisemitism, Swastikas, and Other Hate Symbols
6. Coordinate Stakeholder Actions across the Community

1. Practice Care with Naming and Framing of Swastika Incidents

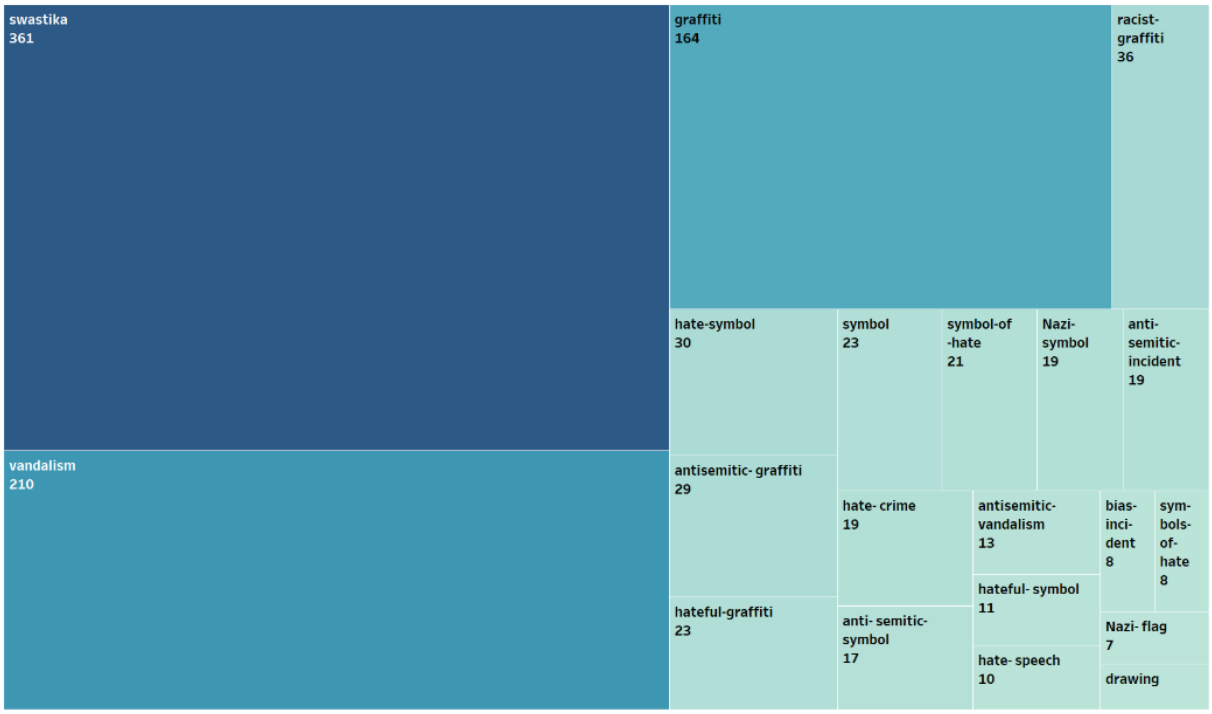

Figure 4: Common Frames used by reporting sources to describe appearances of swastikas in the United States (January 2016-January 2021)[24]

The SPC data discloses that swastika incidents that occurred between February 2016 and January 2021 were documented by multiple online sources including local, national, educational, and religious sources, and occasionally on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. As you can see in the graph above, the names used to report swastika incidents in publication outlets varied from "bias incidents" to "symbols of hate" to "Nazi symbols," among others. Over 60% of the time, however, swastika incidents were identified simply as "vandalism" or "graffiti"

[24] Common Frames refer to words or phrases found in data set five or more times that are used in reporting sources to identify appearances of swastikas and shape readers' interpretation of the event. Data Source: http://theswastikacounter.org

or sources simply noted that there was a swastika and/or that an incident had occurred. And swastika incidents were only identified as “racist” and “anti-Semitic” messages in less than 20% of all documentations.

In light of this trend, SCP recommends reframing swastika incidents in order to ensure that swastika incidents are taken seriously and responded to accordingly. Naming and framing are rhetorical and political acts; the names assigned to events of violence, as well as the frames we use to think about them, shape how events are conceived, remembered, and responded to. As such, especially when responding to incidents of hate, antisemitism, racism, and other acts of oppression, community stakeholders must be careful not to perpetuate systems of oppression that their very work aims to confront. Addressing antisemitism in the contemporary United States (and beyond) demands an ethics of acute naming in which acts of violence are consistently and accurately historicized and located in longstanding systems of ongoing injustice.

To more deeply understand why acute naming of swastika incidents is so crucial, it is important to recognize that when we refer to swastikas as graffiti and vandalism, or even as mere “incidents,” we often fail to call out the symbol for its residual role in the longstanding interconnected violences of antisemitism, white supremacy, white nationalism. We also tend to sanitize its lingering impact. As Carolin Aronis argues, when we describe swastikas as graffiti or vandalism, we neglect to frame them within a language of violence and exclusion.” “For Jews,” she explains, a swastika "is not only expressing hate or dislike, it’s calling for murder" (2022; see also Aronis and Aoki, 2024). In light of this fact, SCP does not want to tell community stakeholders what precise language to use.[25] SCP also encourages community stakeholders to keep in mind that swastikas have and do circulate as sacred and benevolent symbols for certain community members. However, SCP does, like Aronis, highly recommend using language that emphasizes the swastika’s violent functions in contexts when individuals and communities are being affronted and harmed by its unexpected emplacement.[26]

Acute naming is important–whether community stakeholders are reporting about swastika incidents in local media outlets, responding to them in public facing letters and statements, or educating individuals and communities about their historical and contemporary manifestations. SCP analysis of community stakeholder responses to

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[25] We struggled ourselves as to what language to use for the SCP advocacy project. Our research began with an inquiry into how swastikas were circulating and to what effect, recognizing that some swastikas may indeed be circulating as benevolent symbols as certain versions of them have circulated for thousands of years. Our research findings indicate that in the United States, between 2016 and 2020, swastikas can circulate in benevolent ways, however, no matter their intentions, swastikas are always causing affront and harm. We chose to start our research with an open-stance and thus decided to adopt the phrase “swastika incidents” while always emphasizing their offending, threatening, and violent function.

[26] As acknowledged on our data advocacy website, SCP does recognize that certain versions of the swastika are intended to circulate as benevolent signs. However, SCP data suggests that in the contemporary United States, most communities are taken aback by swastikas that surface in the communities as they are most often interpreted to be inappropriate and offensive, if not also discriminatory and threatening.

swastika incidents in genres such as public statements written by school administrators, elected officials, and others does reveal that unlike reporting sources, a plethora of words and phrases have been used to mark the embodied harm that swastika incidents cause. Examples include phrases such as “vile and cowardly acts,” "hate speech," “hate-symbols,” “hateful acts,” “horrendous act act-of-hate,” “appalling display of hate and intolerance,” “horrific display of hate,” and “a symbol of hatred and genocide.” These examples of acute naming get closer to emphasizing the violent functions of swastikas. Still, SCP recommends thinking deeply about not only the valence community stakeholder’s want to communicate and the values they want to uphold but also the associations they want to make to the swastika, whether that is hate, intolerance, bigotry, bullying, antisemitism, racism, harm, and/or genocide. Community stakeholders should also be conscious of how they name swastika incidents as “hate speech,” “hate symbols,” and “hate crimes” because states, cities, and nations vary in their definitions of these terms as well as enforcement policies and laws.

Whatever the language chosen, SCP recommends making a choice that emphasizes how, no matter their intentions, swastikas are perceived by most people in the United States, but especially Jewish and other minoritized people, as a threat to the harmony and safety of individuals and the community as a whole. Swastikas thus do more harm than just property damage; they are often direct threats to people’s bodies, identities, affiliations, beliefs, and values.

To help with naming and framing, SCP offers the following questions that community stakeholders can ask when deciding what to call swastika incidents:

- How are swastikas linked to historical acts of oppression and violence?
- How do swastikas do more than just property damage and transgression in public and private spaces?
- How do swastikas make specific targeted community members feel?
- How do swastikas contribute to current and multiple intersecting means of discrimination and oppression that matter to our community as a whole and especially those who are underrepresented and typically targeted by swastikas?
- How do swastikas in the context of our community undermine our held values and the safety of those who inhabit it?
- How do the names we give to swastika incidents uphold our own values, commitments, and investments?

2. Center Victim Concerns and Practice Active Listening

Community stakeholders, whether or not they belong to communities targeted by swastikas, must be careful not to assume that they know what is best for addressing

the harm experienced by recent victims of swastika incidents as well as those who have historically been directly targeted by antisemitic acts. Spending time actively listening to recent and past victims of antisemitism can help stakeholders refrain from jumping to conclusions about best practices for response while also helping to acknowledge, lift up, and act upon targeted community voices in meaningful ways. According to Doane and Varco (2020),[27] active listening is less about listening to a person and more about *listening for*—listening, specifically, *for knowledge* and *for understanding*.

In the case of swastika incidents, listening for knowledge entails listening for details of a swastika incident-the who, what, why, where, when. Listening for knowledge also includes listening for feelings that victims experience and observing what their bodies are experiencing as they describe such feelings—their moods, gestures, tones. But listening for knowledge also entails listening for themes that come up within an account, and importantly for addressing antisemitism, across accounts. From such themes, one is able to better identify valuable lines of response for a particular incident and context. Listening for understanding can also be incredibly helpful in that this type of listening involves asking questions to learn more about a victim's or targeted communty's experiences, needs, and ideas for moving forward. What is being targeted by a swastika actually like for a person, especially one who belongs to a community that is often targeted by antisemitism, racism, and/or other acts of oppression? What socio-contextual influences (economics, policies, values, norms, racisms, material obstacles, etc.) are impacting their experiences? What challenges are they facing in dealing with this incident? What resources do they feel they need to help them cope personally?

In our research for SCP, we noticed that school administrators often reach out to the Anti-Defamation League or local rabbis, and even in one or two cases, local Holocaust survivors for guidance on how to respond. When coupled with listening for knowledge and understanding in conversations with victims, such active listening can help discover and generate resources that might help the community not only provide more impactful direct assistance to victims but also help address antisemitism at large to prevent further harm. Conversations might circle, for instance, around security and preparation, so that vulnerable populations are protected when/if something were to occur in the future, or they might also circle on education or policy change in order to help revise and/or generate new structures and systems that benefit targeted groups within the larger community. Such active listening and conversations when followed through with meaningful actions, can better support victims, demonstrating that they are heard and are a valued part of the larger community. These actions, in turn, can help increase the trust and relationships among community members and can help discover and develop valuable actions that, in the long run, contribute to better health, safety, and support of the entire community as a whole.

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[27] Doane, Gweneth Hartrick and Colleen Varcoe. How to Nurse: Relational Inquiry in Action. LWW (2nd Edition), 2020.

As an example of how such active listening can help individuals and communities respond to swastika incidents, consider the following account reported __in the *Mac Weekly* at Macalester College. According to a report by Abe Asher,[28] the administrators' initial response was to simply "'note and document' all hate markings and include them in publicly available security alerts, but not publish notices of them in the *Mac [Weekly]*."[29] In response to that decision and the proliferation of more antisemitic and racist acts on campus, political science professor Althea Sircar wrote an open letter published in the *Mac Weekly* calling for the college to engage in a "rigorous and sustained critique of and opposition to hateful words and actions." Within a week, the open letter received more than 600 signatures from students, staff and faculty, moving the college to form the Bias Response Team.[30] Realizing how important active listening was, the Dean of Multicultural Life Marjorie Trueblood explained it was important that they "...take into consideration what we're hearing from our community members and figure out how to proceed." Trueblood and the Associate Chaplain for Jewish Life, Rabbi Emma Kippley-Ogman, thus organized a gathering with nearly 60 students and staff members to discuss how to "best activate opposition" to swastikas and other hate symbols moving ahead.[31] Rather than proceed on their own accord, administrators met with students and staff and listened for knowledge and understanding to figure out the best ways forward for their own community.

3. Examine and Rethink Police Response Roles and Practices

SCP data discloses that local police are often called upon to investigate swastika incidents. In our data set, deferring to police involvement was, in fact, the most common response. Police were tasked with investigating the material manifestations of swastikas on private and public property, schools, and government buildings. As one would expect, police took down information and statements, looked for witnesses or viewed security footage, set up a hotline sometimes for information leading to the arrest or a reward, covered up/cleaned up the swastika, and/or prevented individuals from entering the space that contained the swastika. In taking these actions, police treat swastika incidents as crimes of property and investigate them as such.

Based on these findings, SCP recommends four main lines of action. First, that police reflect on their current investigative actions, especially if repeated swastika incidents keep happening within their jurisdiction. SPC data shows that in many cases, arrests are rarely made because culprits are rarely identifiable. This situation begs a whole suite of questions: Is this rarity due to an actual lack of evidence or a lack of concerted investigation? If the former, what can law enforcement do to

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[28] https://themacweekly.com/74995/news/swastikas-found-in-library-college-responds/
[29] ibid
[30] ibid
[31] ibid

gather more evidence? If the latter, what is the cause of minimal investigation—a lack of resources or lack of taking swastika incidents seriously? This latter question is extremely important in that, as mentioned above, SPC data shows that swastika incidents are most often framed as graffiti and/or vandalism in reporting outlets.[32] How does such framing impact how police react and investigate? Considering the harmful, if not violent, nature of swastika incidents, how much energy should police put into investigating those incidents? Local police especially need to be asking, in other words, how their own investigative actions, or lack thereof, might be complicit in the continued circulation of this harmful antisemitic sign?

Second, SCP recommends that the police openly and critically reflect on the trends of their investigative practices to determine how unintentional bias and discrimination might be at play. Which swastika incidents are police responding to? Where are these incidents happening? Who is being targeted? When police are responding, which communities in one's jurisdiction, and the state as a whole, seem to attract higher rates of police response? For example, do police in a given locale respond more quickly depending upon the targeted community/individual's race, religion, or sexuality? Which kinds of cases involving targeted individuals/groups are resolved and/or the perpetrator is caught? In looking at general trends and responses in the SPC data set as well as their own data records, police departments may discover how they can generate more equitable policing practices and intensify police efforts in and for communities that have perhaps gone too ignored.

Third, SCP recommends for police to reexamine their role within the community to see how they might move beyond a purely reactive, investigative role to better serve community needs. Police might reflect, for instance, on how they can do more to center victim needs and practice active listening with targeted individuals and communities, school administrators, local Jewish synagogues and community centers, and anti-hate activist organizations. Particular questions police officers can ask include:

- What are the various and distinct community stakeholder's needs, and what are their various and distinct expectations?
- How can police actions strengthen their relationships with the targeted communities and the community at large?
- How might they more actively participate in various community stakeholder actions?

SCP data does indicate that police participated in cleaning and covering up swastikas in communities with some police officers placing plastic bags over swastikas or cordoning off areas to prevent individuals access and viewing of swastikas. Police also provided extra security and increased patrols on campus as well as escorted students across campus at night who felt unsafe. SCP encourages police officers to keep working directly with victims and targeted communities to find other ways they can offer sustained support and assistance.

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[32] See The Swastika Counter Project Report.

Fourth, SCP recommends for police to work with local elected officials to create task forces that are specifically designed to address antisemitic acts such as swastika incidents. In 2018 in New York, for instance, The Hate Crimes Task Force was created to "address the increase in bias-motivated threats, harassment and violence throughout New York State."[33] This task force is run by the State Police but works in close concert with the State Division of Human Rights and the Division of Criminal Justice Services as well as local enforcement officers and prosecutors to not only investigate and monitor Hate Crimes and violations of Human Rights Law but also prevent them. How might other states and communities follow their lead so that swastika incidents can be better documented, penalized, and, perhaps, most importantly staid off before community harm is done?

4. Step up Political Leadership

Elected officials have been tasked with representing their constituents and their constituents' best interests—not their own personal interests. SCP data discloses that elected officials often make public statements condemning swastika incidents. A sample response to a swastika incident was delivered by Mayor Jim Founts in September of 2020 in Warren, MI.

> I'm outraged and upset by a cowardly act of what appears to be a racially motivated attack on a home and vehicle of an African American family in Warren. This attack occurred yesterday evening. This is completely unacceptable and will NOT be tolerated in our city. The Warren Police Department and Commissioner Bill Dwyer are on the job and will conduct a complete investigation. Those found responsible for this crime will be brought to justice.[34]

Such well-intended discourse is meaningful and important, especially in that the Mayor acknowledges the direct connection between the swastika incident and racially motivated bias, and the mayor asserts not only intolerance for such action but a strong commitment to criminal investigation. Yet sources in the SCP dataset reveal few instances when elected officials move beyond such statements of concern, condemnation, and the overture of taking further action.

Based on these findings, SCP recommends three lines of action for elected officials. First, as with the police, SCP encourages elected officials to self-reflect and critically examine their response practices. Some possible questions for elected civic leaders to ask themselves might be:

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[33] https://www.ny.gov/programs/hate-crimes-task-force

[34] https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.wxyz.com/news/warren-family-says-theyre-not-going-anywhere-after-tires-slashed-swastikas-painted-on-truck&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1723662501818784&usg=AOvVaw0-aeI0pVibOLsdPxZ-xwbo

- What assumptions do elected officials make about both victims and perpetrators of swastika incidents?
- How do elected officials tend to respond to hate acts? Do these responses tend to correlate with the election cycles?
- Do they tend to respond to swastika incidents that take place in certain locations over others? That target certain people over others?
- When elected officials do write and/or orally respond to swastika incidents, what names and frames do they tend to use?
- How do they position themselves, their communities, and/or the perpetrator when they do address issues?
- When are elected officials present and active in the community beyond speaking engagements?

Second, and related to the last question, SCP recommends for elected officials to move beyond well-intended discourse to center victim concerns, engage in more active listening, and generate more actionable lines of support. SCP especially recommends that elected officials create and commit to specific lines of action to prevent further and future harm to constituents caused be antisemitic acts such as swastika incidents. In September 2020 in Seaford, NY, for instance, Councilman Christopher Carina announced the following:

> The unfortunate reality is that this antiSemitism still exists across our nation and we must always be vigilant and never let our guard down. As co-chair of the town's Graffiti Task Force, I will work with my fellow Town Board colleagues and members of the community to address these hate crimes. The Town Board has already doubled fines for graffiti. In response to the discovery of the antisemitic vandalism at the town park, Supervisor Clavin, myself along with the Town Board, immediately directed the Parks and Public Safety Departments to enhance patrols and perform additional check-ups and inspections of equipment at parks facilities.[35]

Such leadership demonstrates an elected official taking seriously the charge of representing their constituents and instigating action to keep them safe. Elected officials taking such action need to make sure they follow through on such verbal commitments, and citizens need to hold those leaders accountable for what they say and push leaders to create even more moments, opportunities, and places and spaces for inclusive community building.

5. Intensify Education about Antisemitism, Swastikas, and other Hate Symbols

According to SPC data, K-12 and higher education institutions are frequently targeted by swastikas; as such, school administrators play an important role in responding to

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[35] https://patch.com/new-york/wantagh/antisemitic-vandalism-found-seaford-during-jewish-holiday

swastika incidents within communities. SCP data demonstrates that administrators often lean on well-intended discourse and disciplinary action to respond to swastika incidents within their schools. Due to the limitations of these response types noted above in this report, SCP recommends a multi-pronged educational approach in which schools, local community leaders, and activist organizations come together to educate not only students but also parents and other community members about the links between antisemitism, white nationalism, and white supremacy and the role that swastikas and other hate symbols play in perpetuating such interconnected systems of oppression. This recommendation may not sit well with states and communities currently banning or seeking to constrain education that focuses on race, gender, power, and history; however, especially when students are involved in the circulation of swastikas, responses to swastika incidents must include an educational component to prevent further harm to individuals on and off school campuses.

SCP data reveals that there are many paths for developing educational responses to swastika incidents that prove useful to helping students better understand why the circulation of swastikas is unacceptable and to be avoided due to their largely harmful effects in the United States. Much of this education is devoted to helping students gain a deeper understanding of how swastikas are part of a longstanding effort to discredit and annihilate Jewish people with a particular focus on their historical role in the Holocaust. For instance, in a particularly disturbing swastika incident that took place in Orange County, CA, students played a drinking game called "Swastika Pong" and posted a photograph of themselves playing the game and giving a Nazi salute on social media. While the students were off campus at the time, school administrators took serious action by arranging for Rabbi Reuven Mintz of the Chabad Center for Jewish Life and a visiting Auschwitz survivor, Eva Schloss, to speak to students, parents, and staff members in order to "put a face on the pain inflicted by Nazi Germany on millions of Jews and others" so that students may more fully understand the devastating impact of their actions.[36] This means of Holocaust education was particularly important, Schloss is reported as saying, because after talking to some of the students involved in the swastika incident, she was "surprised to learn that some students in the area didn't understand the pain they would cause."[37] This is not to say that students did not know about the Holocaust; indeed, a student from the school is reported as saying that the "junior class recently wrapped up a lesson on the Holocaust as part of the history curriculum, adding that it's unlikely the students in the photos were unaware of any offense the Nazi pose might cause."[38] But the SCP argues that sometimes the disembodied education about the Holocaust offered at schools across the United States does not help students develop the empathy needed to refrain from spreading swastikas and other symbols of hate. SCP thus recommends for administrators and teachers to supplement Holocaust

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[36] https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-newport-nazi-party-anne-frank-20190307-story.html

[37] ibid

[38] https://www.npr.org/2019/03/04/700168758/nazi-saluting-teens-provoke-outrage-in-california-after-photos-flood-internet

education with teachable competencies of empathy, which Michele Borba argues should include, among others, emotional literacy, perspective taking, self-regulation, and moral courage.[39]

SCP also recommends for administrators and educators to take responsibility to work with local community leaders to offer educational opportunities for the community as a whole. In New Rochelle, for example, the path to deepening education about antisemitism, swastikas, and other hate symbols was demonstrated through two different actions. Initially, it was reported that the District would hold assemblies and develop lesson plans intended to "further develop a better understanding of the deep significance of [swastikas and other hate] symbols and the harm caused by all acts that promote racism, discrimination, and exclusion."[40] Yet, it was reported that they also planned to take a step further by partnering with a local Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center to create a workshop that would help adults in the community better understand how "to impact the tone and tenor of our children's dialogue." "We are role models for our children and students," Dr. Feijóo insisted, "and we must help them navigate these tense times, both locally and nationally."[41] SCP encourages more such educational collaboration in order to ensure that all community members are working in solidarity from different angles to not only prevent more swastika incidents from happening but also to help the communities that have already been targeted cope in healthy and constructive ways.

Both school and public educational efforts can especially lean on organizations such as the Anti-Defamation league to help students and community members identify and understand how swastikas are just one of many symbols used by contemporary groups to distribute white nationalist and white supremacist propaganda. SCP data discloses that swastikas often circulate alongside numbers such as 88, which stands for "Heil Hitler" and 14, which, as the ADL explains, is a reference to the popular white supremacist slogan: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."[42] In addition, it would behoove both students and the community as a whole be critically informed about contemporary hate groups,[43] their propaganda campaigns,[44] and their hate flyers that commonly circulate both on and off campuses in the United States.[45] Educationally equipped with critical awareness, communities

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39 https://www.uwlax.edu/globalassets/academics/grad/professional-studies-in-education/certificates/borba-empathy-education-handouts-july2018.pdf

40 https://talkofthesound.com/2019/12/13/new-rochelle-schools-superintendent-address-interreligious-council-on-swastika-incidents/

41 ibid

42 https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/14-words

43 See https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map

44 See https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/phrc/documents/U.S.%20White%20Supremacist%20Propaganda%202021.pdf

45 https://www.splcenter.org/flyering-map

can be better prepared to both recognize and resist rhetoric of antisemitism, racism, and white nationalism in their local communities.

6. Coordinate Stakeholder Action

In addition to all the recommendations made above, SCP holds that Coordinated Action among multiple community stakeholders seems to hold the greatest promise to addressing the systemic contributions of swastika incidents. Coordinated Action occurs when various stakeholders align efforts and tactics to enact active listening and from there find ways to directly support victims, discipline perpetrators, stimulate community dialogue, address systemic issues, call for political leadership, *and* instigate actual change within a community and/or institutional context to prevent further incidents and harm. In response to a swastika incident at an educational institution, for instance, police may be called into not only investigate the incident but offer extra security; administrators may work on establishing a new task force committee to establish disciplinary protocol; rabbis may be called in to help educate student perpetrators; counselors may be leveraged to offer direct victim support and/or lead student groups to enhance feelings of safety, belonging, and inclusivity; teachers may work to develop new curricula focused on visual signs of hate; and directors of a local human rights center may work to provide public education on contemporary antisemitism. Our limited data does not fully disclose how such coordinate action takes place in communities impacted by swastika incidents. However, communities like Boise, ID demonstrate that when community stakeholders come together, a community's response can do much to align various stakeholder actions and help those targeted by swastikas feel more safe in the spaces where swastika incidents occurred.

Boise experienced a swastika incident during COVID in December of 2020 when the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial was defaced with stickers containing swastikas and the words "WE ARE EVERYWHERE," a popular phrase used by white supremacist groups to signify their presence and make implicit threats to Jewish people and other members of minoritized groups.[46] In response to this incident, various community stakeholders mobilized and coordinated multiple actions in which diverse individuals from across the community could participate in solidarity to address this particular antisemitic act and prevent future ones. Based on Wheeler's in-depth case study of this multifaceted and community wide response in Boise, SCP makes three recommendations for enacting coordinated stakeholder action to generate an impactful and sustained response to swastika incidents.

[46] https://localnews8.com/news/2020/12/09/idaho-anne-frank-memorial-defaced-with-swastika-stickers/

1. *Coordinating Stakeholder Action to Investigate and Prosecute Swastika Incidents as Hate Crimes*

SCP recommends that police, elected officials, and other community stakeholders work together to investigate and prosecute swastika incidents as hate crimes whenever possible. This demands that police work with local prosecutors to intensify their investigative efforts to locate evidence that proves motivation based on bias. In order to prove an act such as a swastika incident is a hate crime, it must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the act was motivated by bias and/or intolerance based on the victim's perceived or actual race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability.[47] Such proving of bias and intolerance is often difficult to substantiate, especially if swastikas do not surface on the location of a property owned, run, or predominantly attended by a Jewish or other minoritized population and/or if swastikas are not accompanied by a racist, antisemitic, or homophobic slur or direct threat of violence. Consequently, swastika incidents are often pursued as traditional criminal offenses such as vandalism. In light of this predicament, SCP argues that when swastikas appear in communities, community stakeholders must press for these incidents to be investigated as possible hate crimes and must pressure local police and prosecutors to locate evidence of bias and intolerance that will stand up in court beyond reasonable doubt.[48] This may take additional time and effort by various community stakeholders, but when swastika incidents are prosecuted as hate crimes, it sets a precedent for how future incidents can/should be handled; it signals that swastika incidents will not be tolerated within a community; and it often results in more intense sentencing.

Coordinated Action among community stakeholders in Boise during the height of the COVID pandemic illustrates how naming, framing, and investigating swastika incidents as hate crimes can lead to constructive community action. Immediately after swastikas surfaced on the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial,[49] Boise Chief of Police Ryan Lee and his officers began working with the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights Executive Director Dr. Dan Prinzing and other community leaders to remove the nine offending swastika stickers and to gather evidence and orchestrate a sustained investigation into the "hate crime." When interviewed by Wheeler almost a year later, Chief Lee could not go into detail about the incident because it was still "an active case,"[50] demonstrating how prosecution of such a hate crime requires

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[47] Hate Crimes | United States Department of Justice | Hate Crimes | Learn More

[48] As another example, in 2021 in Warren, Michigan, a swastika incident involved a man spray painting swastikas and the word "die" on a church with a predominantly Black congregation as well as spray painting swastikas and a racist slur in a public bathroom that was frequented by members of the Black community. In 2024, he was charged with a federal hate crime offense. https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/michigan-man-charged-federal-hate-crime-offenses-defacing-predominantly-black-church&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1725036521246109&usg=AOvVaw2-_xR2MRry5HiA_XlV463n

[49] Wheeler, K. L. (2022). "Silence, Speech, and Support: Community Response to Trauma and the Taxonomy of an Embodied Rhetorical Genre."

[50] ibid

tenacity and due diligence. But while pursuing swastika incidents as hate crimes requires the long game and may ultimately fail to end in arrest, SCP encourages such efforts whenever possible so that a clear message is sent to the community: that investigating and prosecuting swastika incidents as hate crimes is more than just about protecting property; and that it is about ensuring safety and security and belonging for all members in the community.

2. Coordinating Stakeholder Action to Generate Community Resources and Events for Discussion, Education, and Repair

As discussed above in this report, in addition to investigative action, statements and letters issued by various community stakeholders to simultaneously condemn swastika incidents and invoking a strong sense of community are common responses to swastika incidents. Boise community leaders were no different in delivering such well-intended discourse. However, Boise leaders also came together to organize various events and campaigns to help align community leaders in coordinated action,to generate support for social justice organizations working toward systemic change, to motivate participation by all community members, and, ultimately, to confront the harm done to the community as a result of the swastika incident.

One of the first events that took place was a public virtual meeting held on December 10, 2020, just two days after swastikas and the "We are Everywhere" stickers surfaced on the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial. Mayor McLean convened this meeting with Wassmuth Director Dan Prinzing, Rabbi Dan Fink, and Joel Poppen, a leading figure in the community who is the Senior Vice President at Micron Technology, Inc. McLean started the meeting acknowledging Idaho's history with hate, antisemitism, and white supremacy and noted that these elements were still present in the community:

> We in Boise, we in Idaho, know because of the history that we've had that it is so important to address [hate] to move forward from it, and it's time that we do it again; that we renew our commitment to doing that again. I want to say from a city perspective, you know I deeply believe that we are a stronger community because we are really willing to address what has been here, what is here, and we're willing to talk about who we are and who we want to be. That is so important particularly in these tough tough days, and that makes us in many ways unique: the connections that we have to each other, our willingness to be honest about elements that are here, and our deep desire to protect the people of this place and to make this place a better community for it.[51]

When interviewed by Wheeler, McLean said that in opening the meeting with such a statement, McLean wanted to move beyond condemnation to immediately begin establishing solidarity and rallying the community into coordinated action. "We took the quick step of having a community conversation, condemning [the incident] of

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[51] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjZShpx2HKM

course in our statements, but then telling the community we'd be calling on them to join us in action to amplify and push back on what had happened and amplify who we really were."[52]

This initial community response proved constructive for three reasons: First, it created a central hub for coordinated action–the Wassmuth Center. Sustained coordinated stakeholder action needs organized leadership working toward systemic change, and Dr. Dan Prinzing provided a touchstone and point of contact for the various strands that would amalgamate into sustained community action. Second, it inspired corporations in Boise, local business leaders, and the downtown business association to step up support for the Wassmuth Center, so it could expand and enhance the Center's ability to not only respond to the most recent swastika incidents but also provide community resources, education, and trainings geared toward, more generally, promoting "respect for human dignity and diversity through education" and cultivating "individual responsibility" and abilities among people of all ages "to work for peace and justice."[53] Micron, for instance, began financially supporting human rights education programming at the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights while Chobani began financially supporting the construction of a new intensive and expansive Wassmuth Education Center.

Third, Boise community leaders set a positive tone and began to outline multiple ways other community members could engage and mobilize outward support in diverse material and embodied ways. As Jennifer Hensley, executive director of the Downtown Boise Association at the time of the incident, explained, "How do you engage with the general population, if everything is terrible? There's no place for engagement for a person, right? You got to give them a positive platform" and some way to express support and to engage in meaningful ways.[54] This platform seemed to be effective in that community members began immediately to support the Wassmuth Center through financial donations, left notes and flowers at the Memorial, and attended other events such as a virtual vigil to memorialize the recent swastika incident and discuss various paths for moving forward. This coordinated community response was particularly noteworthy because despite being in the middle of COVID, leaders were able to create multiple pathways to participate and disseminate information to the community while also keeping costs for participation low at a time when COVID limited opportunities for in person community engagement and caused financial hardship for some with the loss of wages during the lockdown.

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52 Wheeler, K. L. (2022)."Silence, Speech, and Support: Community Response to Trauma and the Taxonomy of an Embodied Rhetorical Genre."

53 https://www.wassmuthcenter.org/our-mission-history/

54 Wheeler, K. L. (2022)."Silence, Speech, and Support: Community Response to Trauma and the Taxonomy of an Embodied Rhetorical Genre."

3. *Coordinating Stakeholder Action to Generate Community-Wide Campaigns that Defuse Antisemitic Language and Reclaim Public Space*

Boise provides another valuable lesson for coordinating stakeholder action through its unique effort to generate a community-wide media campaign that aims to co-opt antisemitic language and reclaim public space by verbally and visually branding Boise as a community that supports diversity and inclusion. As Wheeler's case study of this community response explains, the threatening phrase "WE ARE EVERYWHERE" that accompanied swastikas on stickers placed on the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial[55] has been used by neo-Nazis and white nationalists to threaten and claim spaces and places as white.[56] Aware of this white nationalist effort and in consultation with the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights, Healthwise, a local non-profit organization, created signs inspired by a note written by a local community member and left at the Memorial after the incident. The note, which remixed the threat, said, "Love is Everywhere." Eventually, a campaign coordinated by Dan Prinzing, Healthwise, and other community stakeholders was sparked in which 6500 yard signs were designed and printed containing a new message of love, justice, respect, equality, kindness, and compassion (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: A yard sign with the co-opted phrase. Source: Wassmuth Center for Human Rights

To amplify the media campaign, this refrain was also echoed on the city's message board at the entrance to town and on readerboards across the city. Shop owners hung freely available signs from the Wassmuth Center in their business windows, and residents placed them in their yards. Signs were even sent all over the state to individuals who requested them. A year later, some of these signs were still visible in neighborhoods across Boise, a sign of how the community has continued to embrace

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[55] ibid
[56] ibid

the lessons and community values that surfaced in light of a swastika incident as Boise rebranded what it meant to be a Boisian.

In addition to these campaign efforts, the Downtown Boise Association, in association with The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, created 75 banners that they hung up in centrally located, high traffic areas of town including the main corridor to the capital and on lampposts in and around the Memorial (See Figure 6).[57] These banners again co-opted the threatening language of the stickers and echoed the sentiments of the yard signs but added a specific action: choosing love. The through line of logic was that we are everywhere, and we choose love, so love is everywhere. These banners, which still surround the Memorial space a year after the incident, are further testimony of how the community chose to mark and reclaim the Memorial as "a convening place where we come together as a community to heal after less-than-stellar events" and as "a physical reminder of what's been done, who we are, and what we could to do to… move forward." [58]

Figure 6: Images of the three different banners placed around Boise, ID. Source: Downtown Boise Association

Based on Wheeler's analysis of such campaign efforts, SCP maintains that defusing antisemitic language around swastika incidents without underplaying the harm of the swastika itself and reclaiming spaces beyond mere coverup could prevent future hate and antisemitic acts. Both forms of action–defusing and reclamation–transform public space marked by antisemitic frames into public spaces framed by love. Reclaiming targeted spaces and places as inclusive and using language that centers care, diversity, and belonging can do much to restore security in a particular area that was marked by a swastika and in a way that is more potent and impactful than the harm of the swastika itself. In reclaiming and renaming a public space, the community reestablishes, verbally and materially, who belongs in that space, possibly even dissuading a perpetrator from marking that space again.

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[57] ibid
[58] ibid

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To summarize and reiterate the value of coordinated stakeholder action in responding to swastika incidents, SCP wants to note how Boise addressed community harm on both small and large scales. The police acted quickly and treated the incident as a hate crime; city leaders held events to disseminate information and call on the community to act; businesses financially supported local social justice organizations so they could enhance educational opportunities; local nonprofits organized a community wide campaign to reclaim public space; and community members participated in vigils, left notes and flowers of support, and helped to circulate campaign messages. Community leaders "understood the assignment" when they recognized the seriousness of the swastika incident and how their response would influence how they, as a community, would be perceived by those within and those outside of the community. In essence, the hate act asked Boisians to reconsider what their community is as well as what it wanted to be.

Leaders also understood that while there were different valences of harm for some groups more than others, the harm to one community was actually harmful to the community as a whole. Rabbi Fink articulated it best in the virtual meeting on December 10th with Mayor McLean, Joel Poppen, and Dan Prinzing. Quoting well-known Rabbi Hillel, Rabbi Fink said, 'If I'm not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I, and if not now, when?' We have to be for ourselves as Hillel said. If we are not for ourselves, who will be? We have to stand for ourselves as a city…" Rabbi Fink also reiterated that well-intended discourse is not enough to address antisemitic acts such as swastika incidents. "[T]he words will be empty," he noted, "if we don't get out there and show that this is not who we are because who we are is ultimately determined by our actions--by the actions of the majority, who I believe are good and caring and compassionate and want to say no to hate and will say no to intimidation." In saying as much, Fink notes how identity of the community is important, as the community is the extension of the individual. Fink's call to action is also an important reminder to all community stakeholders that when faced with swastika incidents, coordinated action and being our brother's keeper can result in a community where all can be welcomed and supported.