

## **Countering hate with tolerance, and racism with education**

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The cross burning and hangman's noose so viciously left on the lawn of the Howe family home in Poplar Grove has stunned a community and a country into slack-jawed shock. We cannot seem to find the right words to express our amazement and outrage; understanding eludes us. Isn't this Ku Klux Klan-like behaviour a sorry remnant of a more racist time and place, fitting only for the comic fodder of writers of The Simpsons cartoon? We find it difficult to wrap our minds around such hateful cowardice, and this is all to the good.

Still, it did happen. Brutal hate has not disappeared altogether. Police have arrested two young men who have allegedly resuscitated a 20th-century hate crime perpetrated against black communities in the southern United States and imported it to Hants County. We had hoped the days of such overt displays of racism were behind us, and feel powerless to act in the face of such blatant malice.

And yet we must act; to do otherwise would be tantamount to acceptance.

The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC) has a great deal of experience dealing with hate crimes in cities and towns across the country, and we have learned that the best way to counter racist attitudes and beliefs, and to prevent a recurrence of such incidents, is through tolerance education. It is critical that community leaders, including politicians, police, school boards, faith groups and others, focus their energies on diversity awareness and education in both schools and the workplace.

The inherent right of all Canadians to live free of fear, harassment and intolerance is not simply a motherhood statement of goodwill, but a mandate for social justice that demands a plan of action. Not only will these efforts help ensure the Howe grandchildren are never subject to the evil their children experienced, but they may also assist in changing more subtle forms of racism, such as the discriminatory attitudes many minorities in Halifax say they experience working at City Hall.

Implementing tolerance education workshops is, however, not enough. It is just as important for elected officials and public servants to continually monitor Internet sites where hate is fomented, including social media like Facebook and Twitter. Hate literature, whether on the web, in books or in the classroom, must be exposed and the mindset it embraces condemned in the strongest terms possible, especially by all levels of the political establishment. It is vital not only that hate-

mongers be marginalized, but that their views are seen and understood for what they are and for the danger they present.

It is a task which may seem overwhelming. It is difficult to understand what drives such hatred. And yet, FSWC has experienced a great many positive outcomes in our own tolerance workshops dealing with people of all ages and backgrounds. Bigotry is learned, and can be unlearned. It is essential not to lose hope.

The Howe family, having lived through a nightmare, deserves more than our mere moral support. They deserve to know that out of their ordeal, a plan of tolerance was born.

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