



UNITED SIKHS

Recognize the Human Race as One

THE CHRONICLES OF HATE

Attacks Against Sikh-Americans Since
September 11, 2001

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A report by **UNITED SIKHS**



The Current Situation :

Picture yourself driving your car while working for Uber, or a similar ride-sharing service. It is a bone-chilling day in mid-January. You pick up a passenger – just like any other. You exchange a curt greeting and get underway to the destination. But before you even go a mile, your passenger is berating you, making snide comments under his breath about your dress and appearance. At first it seems like he is just being rude, and you dismiss it – perhaps he had a bad day. The comments keep coming though, gradually becoming more aggressive – even hostile. The rude comments slowly turn into thinly-veiled threats. He begins physical violence. You are growing very uncomfortable, so you pull over and ask the passenger to leave, only to

have him exclaim, “I hate you people!” while suddenly brandishing a gun that is now pointed directly at your head. You have no idea what is happening, or why. While your life flashes before your eyes, as the passenger starts shouting about terrorists and “turban people,” you realize the absurdity of it all. You are not even who the passenger thinks you are, but just some stereotyped idea he has absorbed from representations in the media.

This roughly describes what happened to Gurjeet Singh, a Sikh-American living in northern Illinois, just this past January. Events like this are becoming normalized for a growing number of Sikhs in the United States.

Sikhs are no stranger to persecution. In fact, the Sikh faith was born from it, emerging against the background of stifling caste oppression in the Punjab region of Northern India during the late-15th and early 16th century. This origin shows itself in the enduring commitment of Sikhism to the fundamental values of social equality, compassion, and humanitarianism that define the faith. Today, some 700,000 Sikhs live in the United States, giving back to their local communities in a variety of ways through humanitarian

aid and civic engagement. Yet, innocent Sikh citizens are regularly stereotyped, misidentified as Muslims, and victimized in criminal acts of hate motivated by pernicious images that circulate in the media. For example, the turban, the distinctive headdress worn by Sikh adult men, makes them easy targets. For years, the discourse of the “War on Terror” centered on the villainous image of the turban-wearing Osama Bin Laden, cementing a psychological association in the mind of the public between the turban and terrorism. This association fuels misinformed attacks against law-abiding Sikhs that can be emotionally traumatizing, spiritually degrading, and in many cases fatal.

The challenges for Sikhs living in America began over a century ago in Bellingham, Washington, in a time of rising anti-immigrant sentiment not unlike today. In 1907, a mob of 500 Bellingham residents –

many of whom were members of the local chapter of the then-popular Asiatic Exclusion League –descended upon the South Asian immigrant workers who were employed in the town’s lumber mills. A majority of the workers were Sikhs. In a few hours, the entire Sikh population of Bellingham was forced to flee before an onslaught of enraged townspeople, leaving many of them battered and bruised. The assailants had violently proven their point: non-white economic competitors were not welcome there.

The Bellingham pogrom can be seen as the inaugural event in a trend of discrimination and ill-informed hostility that has persisted over time in American history. Recent years, especially since the national trauma of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, have seen a sharp uptick in hate incidents directed at Sikh Americans,





such as Mr. Surjit Malhi. In early August of this year, Mr. Malhi was traveling around his community near San Jose, California. He was placing political signs around town representing candidates he supported in upcoming elections. While doing this, he was abruptly set upon by two men, who approached him from behind. They assaulted him with what felt like a belt and a baseball bat, shouted “You don’t belong here,” and defaced Mr. Malhi’s truck, scrawling “GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY” on its side. Luckily the victim came out of the encounter without serious injury. His assailants probably did not know what he actually believes, where he is from, or what ethnicity he represents. For the assailants in cases like these, it is sufficient for the target to appear suspicious by simply wearing a turban and having brown skin.

Additional cases like those of Surjit Malhi and Gurjeet Singh can be easily

multiplied. It has been clear for some time that xenophobia, bigotry, and virulent nationalism are all on the rise in recent years, and this increase is reflected in the statistics: from 2016-2017, hate crimes spiked, reaching their highest levels since immediately after September 11, 2001. The rash of attacks against Sikhs is part of a growing, more general trend in anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiment, not just in the Western democracies, but across developing countries as well. Increased suspicions of majority communities toward immigrants and, in the West, people of color, are growing stronger, stoked by deepening social inequality and opportunistic politicians who demonize vulnerable groups for political points. Compounding the problem, until very recently attacks against Sikhs are classified as “anti-Muslim” or “anti-Arab” attacks in the records of the FBI, obscuring the data on the scale and extent of



specifically anti-Sikh violence in the U.S. Furthermore, the single most important agency for monitoring demographic trends in the country, the U.S. Census Bureau, does not allow for the correct disaggregation of Sikhs from the broader category of "Asian Indian."

These blind spots are making a bad situation even worse. Pointless acts of hate and cruelty against Sikhs, such as what befell Gurjeet Singh and Surjit Malhi, happen on a semi-regular basis. Usually, the assailant does not even know who Sikhs are, or what they believe. And because they are misunderstood by the authorities, many of them go uninvestigated and unresolved. This, in turn, is causing many incidents to go unreported, as victims have come to feel that nothing will be done, so a formal report is not seen as worth the effort. Official blindness is hiding an epidemic of hate directed against innocent citizens in the Sikh community.

Record of Known Hate Crimes or Bias Incidents against Sikh Americans Since 9/11/2001 :

Official statistics documenting hate crimes and bias-based offences against Sikhs are unreliable in part because reporting attacks is not mandatory. Many Sikhs do not report such incidents, which range across a spectrum from hateful or xenophobic comments to violent physical assault and everything in between. As mentioned above, such incidents are frequently classified by authorities, if they go reported at all, as "anti-Muslim" rather than anti-Sikh. A general unfamiliarity with Sikhism among law enforcement figures, particularly at the local level, also contributes to incidents going unreported. The FBI, for its part, only began tracking explicitly anti-Sikh hate crimes in 2015. As a result, the true extent of anti-Sikh discrimination and violence is difficult to know. Nevertheless, a public record exists of the most high-profile attacks. What follows offers a documentation of all such reported incidents since 9/11/2001.



Sept. 15, 2001 — Mesa, AZ

Four days after the attacks of 9/11, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a 49-year-old Sikh, is shot and killed outside the gas station he owned.

Nov. 18, 2001 — Palermo, NY

Three teens burn down Gobind Sadan, a gurudwara in New York, because they thought it was named for Osama bin Laden.

Dec. 12, 2001 — Los Angeles, CA

Surinder Singh Sidhi, a store owner in Los Angeles, is beaten in his store by two men who accuse of him of being Osama bin Laden.

Aug. 6, 2002 — Daly City, CA

Sukhpal Singh, brother of Balbir Singh Sodhi, who was the first Sikh murdered following 9/11, is shot while driving his cab.

May 20, 2003 — Phoenix, AZ

Sikh immigrant and truck driver Avtar Singh is shot while waiting for his son to pick him up. As he is being shot, he hears someone say: "Go back to where you belong."

Aug. 5, 2003 — Queens, NY

Members of a Sikh family are beaten outside of their home by drunk individuals yelling, "Go back to your country, Bin Laden."

Sept. 25, 2003 — Tempe, AZ

Sukhvir Singh, a 33-year-old convenience store owner, is stabbed to death. It is not labeled as a hate crime.

March 13, 2004 — Fresno, CA

Gurdwara Sahib, a local Sikh temple, is vandalized with graffiti messages: "Rags Go Home" and "It's Not Your Country."

July 11, 2004 — New York, NY

Rajinder Singh Khalsa and Gurcharan Singh are beaten by two drunk white men. Rajinder is beaten unconscious and suffers a fractured eye socket, among other injuries.

May 24, 2007 — Queens, NY

A 15-year-old Sikh student has his hair forcibly cut by an older student at his high school. A main pillar of the Sikh faith compels followers to keep their hair uncut.



Sarah Mervosh and Melissa Gomez, "Sikh Man Attacked in Hate Crime: 'My Turban Really Saved Me,'" New York Times, August 8th, 2018.
See the Federal Bureau of Investigation's statistics on hate crimes, viewable at: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2016-hate-crime-statistics>.
"Petition to Disaggregate Sikhs Correctly in the 2010 Census and Future Census Data Products," UNITED SIKHS: <http://www.unitedsikhs.org/petitions/census.php>.
FBI Reports.
Some of the data below was originally collected by the Huffington Post in, "History of Hate: Crimes Against Sikhs Since 9/11," August 7, 2012.



May 30, 2007 — Joliet, IL

A decorated U.S. Navy veteran of the Gulf War, Kuldip Singh Nag is approached by a police officer outside of his home, who reportedly assaults Nag with pepper spray while hurling expletive-laced, anti-immigrant statements.

Jan. 14, 2008 — New Hyde Park, NY

A 63-year-old Sikh, Baljeet Singh, has his jaw and nose broken when attacked outside his temple by a man who lived next-door.

Feb. 28, 2008 — Bryan, TX

A Sikh man is assaulted in a Wal-Mart parking lot. The assailant called him a terrorist, punched him in the face and head and knocked his turban off.

June 5, 2008 — Queens, NY

A ninth grade Sikh is attacked by another student, who tried to remove his patka, or under-turban head covering.

June 5, 2008 — Albuquerque, NM

A vehicle belonging to a Sikh family is defaced with the message "F*** Allah!" and a picture of male genitalia.

Aug. 4, 2008 — Phoenix, AZ

Inderjit Singh Jassal is shot and killed while working at a 7-Eleven. No clear motive is ever found for the crime.

Oct. 29, 2008 — Carteret, NJ

A Sikh man, Ajit Singh Chima, walks in his neighborhood and is attacked by a man who casually leaves the scene afterward. Nothing is stolen.

Jan. 30, 2009 — Queens, NY

Three men attack Jasmir Singh outside of a grocery store, slinging racial slurs and seriously injuring the victim.

Nov. 29, 2010 — Sacramento, CA

Harbhajan Singh, a cab driver, is attacked by passengers who call him Osama bin Laden.

March 6, 2011 — Elk Grove, CA

Two elderly Sikh men in traditional clothing are shot and killed. The perpetrator is not found.

May 30, 2011 — New York, NY

Jiwan Singh, the father of Jasmir Singh, who was assaulted in early 2009 in Queens, is attacked and accused of being related to Osama bin Laden.

Feb. 6, 2012 — Sterling Heights, MI

A gurudwara (Sikh temple) is defaced with graffiti that includes a gun and references to 9/11.

Aug. 5, 2012 — Oak Creek, WI

A white supremacist gunman is shot dead by police after he opens fire in a gurudwara during Sikh prayer services, killing six.

May 5, 2013 — Fresno, CA

82 year-old Piara Singh is assaulted outside his gurudwara and subsequently hospitalized.

July 29, 2013 --- Riverside, CA

A gurudwara is vandalized overnight and spray-painted with the word "terrorist."

Sept. 22, 2013 — New York, NY

Prabhot Singh is assaulted by a group of people who shouted racial slurs.

July 30, 2014 -- Queens, NY

Sandeep Singh, 29, is accosted by a man in a pick-up truck as he crosses the street. Singh is called a terrorist and the assailant runs him over and flees the scene.



Sept. 8, 2015 -- Darien, IL

Inderjit Singh Mukker is assaulted in his car by an attacker who called him "Bin Laden," and told him to "go back to his country."

Dec. 5, 2015 -- Buena Park, CA

A gurudwara and a member's truck parked in the parking lot, were reportedly vandalized with graffiti, including "F—ISIS and Islam."

Dec. 9, 2015 -- New York, NY

A man posts an online video of Darshan Singh while sleeping on a flight from New York to California with a title 'Would You Feel Safe' and a description that says "flying with bin laden."

Dec. 26, 2015 – Fresno, CA

Amrik Singh Bal, 68, was waiting alone for a ride to work when two white men stop their car in front of him and started yelling obscenities at him and beat him while yelling "Why are you here?"

Jan. 1, 2016 – Fresno, CA

68-year-old Gurcharan Singh Gill, an employee at local liquor store was at work when he was stabbed to death during broad daylight.



Aug. 21, 2016 -- Washington D.C
Mehtab Singh Bakhshi is standing, talking with friends near Dupont Circle when Dylan Millhausen, an U.S. Air Force Officer, pulls off his turban and punches him in the face until he was unconscious.

Sept. 25, 2016 -- Richmond, CA
Five white men pull up to a stoplight in a Ford F-150 pickup truck next to Maan Singh Khalsa, who was driving a car in the next lane over. They hurl a beer can at Khalsa, then get out of the truck to punch him through his car window and cut his hair off with a knife. His hand is severely stabbed, requiring a finger amputation.

March. 3, 2017 — Kent, WA
Deep Rai is shot and critically injured by assailants while working on his car in front of his home.

March 26, 2017 — Gresham, OR
A Sikh woman is subjected to attempted sexual assault in a gurudwara by a drunk man.

April 16, 2017 — New York, NY
Harkirat Singh experiences an attack while driving a taxi in which a passenger forcibly pulled the turban from his head.

Sept. 4, 2017 --- Los Angeles, CA
A gurudwara is vandalized with hate messages scrawled on its walls, including one calling for 'nuking' Sikhs. When confronted by a man who caught the vandal on cell phone video, he threatens to slit his throat.

Jan. 28, 2018 — Moline, IL
Gurjeet Singh is threatened by an irate Über passenger who points a gun at his head, shouting "I hate turban people."

July 31, 2018 — Turlock, CA
Surjit Malhi is violently assaulted while placing political signs in his community. His truck is vandalized with white supremacist markings and the words "Go Back to Ur Country."

August 6, 2018 -- Manteca, CA
71-year-old Sahib Singh Natt is enjoying his morning walk when he is brutally attacked by two teens, one of whom is the son of a local police chief. In a video captured by a nearby surveillance camera, the teens are seen kicking and spitting on Natt while on the ground.

August 16, 2018 -- East Orange, NJ
Terlock Singh, 55, was found dead with stab wounds inside his store, Park Deli and Grocery.

Challenges to Accurate Reporting

- More than half of hate crime victims don't file reports to the police.
- Many police precincts offer little training to officers about how to handle hate crimes. Only 12 states have statutes requiring this type of instruction at police academies.
- The FBI only started tracking hate crimes against Sikhs in 2015. It is not mandatory for police precincts to report hate crime data to the FBI. Thousands of them opt not to participate in the FBI's hate crime program at all. Only about 15,000 do.
- Even if hate crimes are investigated, they aren't always prosecuted because it is often extremely difficult to prove the intent of the accused in court.
- Like local police, federal agencies often fail to send their hate crime statistics to the FBI, too.
- Violence by white supremacist groups sometimes goes unchecked by police, as was the case in Charlottesville in 2017 and with members of the so-called Rise Above Movement.

6 ProPublica, What we learned during a Year Documenting Hate, <https://www.propublica.org/article/what-we-discovered-during-a-year-of-documenting-hate>



Policy Recommendations

The majority of discriminatory incidents go unreported, which means the true extent of hate crimes victimizing Sikhs is unknown. The documentation compiled above should be seen as a representative sample, rather than an exhaustive record. But as it makes clear, the growing problem of Sikh-directed acts of hate is not going away unless something is done. There are a number of avenues available for pursuing solutions that would not only help the Sikh community, but also marginalized groups from all different backgrounds in the United States.

Sikhs should be represented as a distinct group in the Census. Allowing Sikhs to self-identify in the 2020 Census would go a long way to making everyone count so that action can be taken to address hate crimes against the community at-large. Sikhs are 100 times more likely to be attacked than any other citizen in America.

Studies estimate that at least half of members of the Sikh community have been bullied, harassed or even assaulted at some time in their life because of bigotry and xenophobia. The Census cannot assist in accurately identifying the percentages of hate crimes occurring in the Sikh community until it can provide reliable information about how many Sikhs there are in the country.

Federal and state governments rely on the U.S. Census to provide funding in order to address civil rights violations.

Because the Census loops Sikhs into the general Asian-Indian racial group, it does not provide the necessary statistics that would enable the federal and state to have accurate data.

A Census that does not count Sikhs as a separate category of people does not fulfill its mandate. UNITED SIKHS have received widespread support from members of Congress who agreed to sign-on to a letter to the Census Bureau calling for identification of Sikhs as a distinct group in the Census. We've also advocated for Punjabi language instructions to be sent to the community before the next Census to insure that Sikhs know their rights.

Until the federal government overhauls its census categories to include Sikh demographic information, we will continue to be without reliable statistics on hate crimes against Sikhs. Census reform is urgently needed so that law enforcement agencies can effectively do their job of protecting our vulnerable communities.

Of course, the Sikh community is not alone in this campaign to raise awareness and spur action. Many people from different racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds face dangerous, racist discrimination on a daily basis as well. That is why concerned citizens must work with each other and their elected officials representing their local communities in alliance with allies from other faith traditions and ethnicities to advance public protections for the most vulnerable among us.

For instance, recently, in the town of Federal Way, Washington – just outside Seattle – UNITED SIKHS organized a community meeting with the mayor to discuss these issues. Inviting leaders from different religious and ethnic minority communities, representatives from we organized a civic discussion focusing on how cooperation and communication can be improved between the public authorities, particularly law enforcement, and the communities they are meant to protect. The event sparked an ongoing dialogue with the municipal government, and a promise to redouble efforts to investigate and resolve all reported criminal incidents directed at innocent people because of their racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation.

A steadfast commitment to social and humanitarian justice is at the core of what it means to be a Sikh. We call upon the public authorities, in the U.S. and every country, to modernize their demographic data and recommit to one of the most basic tasks of civil government: the protection of its own citizens.






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