

NAACP

San Luis Obispo County Branch

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RACIST GRAFFITI VANDALISM IN SANTA MARGARITA PARK EVIDENCE OF LARGER ISSUE IN SLO COUNTY COMMUNITY

SAN LUIS OBISPO: On the morning of December 23, 2020 Dr. Ryan Alaniz was playing at Santa Margarita Community Park with his four-year-old, when they came across scrawls of racist graffiti vandalism on the second tier of the play structure.

“When my four-year-old and I noticed this graffiti, I was angered but not surprised,” said Alaniz. “Born and raised in SLO County, I recognize that this is how many folks feel about minority groups, especially African-Americans. Most residents here are good people, but they continue to perpetuate a culture of superiority and inferiority more by their inaction to systemic racism than by active racist thoughts and acts. The fact that this happens all the time here—at Cal Poly, in Paso Robles, Atascadero, Nipomo, San Luis Obispo, etc.—evidences that it is an unhealthy part of who we are as a community.”

The vandalism was reported to the sheriff’s office through an online form the morning of December 27. Alaniz also directly notified San Luis Obispo County sheriff’s office Commander Keith E. Scott and NAACP San Luis Obispo County that same morning. While no formal response was received from the online report filing, Scott did respond directly to Alaniz via email:

“Thank you for sharing this unacceptable occurrence and unfortunate experience with me. Thank you for accessing our online reporting to notify Sheriff’s Patrol. We responded to the location and documented the incident as a PC 422.7 (Hate Crime) and PC 594 (Vandalism). The graffiti has been removed by County Park Rangers. The case number for the incident is CR: 2012-09976. The incident is being handled by the Sheriff’s North Patrol out of Templeton at this time. Along with community partners, the SOUC was formed to be part of the effort in helping with diversity, equality, race and inclusion. Hateful acts like this one are never ok; and there in[sic] no tolerance for it within the Sheriff’s Office!”

[A greeting and closing with signature were also included in the email.]

GRAFFITI VANDALISM AND CULTURE: REFLECTIONS OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Graffiti Art and Graffiti Vandalism have both long been recognized as culturally reflective and influential components of civilizations. San Luis Obispo County has a history of bias-motivated hate crimes in the form of graffiti vandalism. Local incidents that garnered significant attention have included, among others, the July 2020 hate graffiti vandalism at Grover Beach Elementary School and the April 2018

posting of racist fliers and graffiti vandalism at Cal Poly following student protests against CP administration's perceived lack of action relating to photos that surfaced of racist activities in the campus community. These incidents are an indicator of racism that is active in our community.

Federally, hate crime statistics are available through 2019, and show several local jurisdictions as reporting zero hate crimes:

Arroyo Grande
Atascadero
Grover Beach
Morro Bay
Pismo Beach
California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo
Cuesta College
California Highway Patrol San Luis Obispo County
Atascadero State Hospital
California Department of Parks and Recreation: Oceano Dunes
California Department of Parks and Recreation: San Luis Obispo Coast
Union Pacific Railroad: San Luis Obispo County

However, during that time, American Identity Movement fliers were posted around Cal Poly SLO, according to a May 2019 post by user monochrome_yeti in r/CalPoly, a subreddit dedicated to Cal Poly SLO. The American Identity Movement is recognized as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center due to promotion of white nationalist messaging. SPLC recognizes a San Luis Obispo group of the American Identity Movement as currently active on its interactive Hate Map.

At the State level, hate crime statistics are available through [State of California Department of Justice - OpenJustice](https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/exploration/hate-crimes) [<https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/exploration/hate-crimes>] and can be sorted by County level statistics. State reporting shows a total of 13 hate crime incidents in San Luis Obispo County in 2019, 7 of which had a race/ethnicity/ancestry bias motivation. In 2018, 7 hate crime incidents were reported in San Luis Obispo County, 4 of which were race/ethnicity/ancestry bias motivated. These data show a clear rise in both hate crime and, specifically, race/ethnicity/ancestry bias motivated hate crime in San Luis Obispo County.

There are many cautions and scholarly discussions available which focus on the limitations of such hate crime statistics, including inconsistencies in reporting, incomplete data and differing policies within jurisdictional agencies. Additionally, many hate crimes may go unreported to authorities, which limits reporting and available statistics. There are numerous reasons hate crimes go unreported, stemming from both social and systemic sources.

NAACP SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY RESPONSE

With great disappointment, we learned on December 23, 2020, one of our members found hateful vandalism on the Santa Margarita Community Park play structure while playing with his four-year-old child. The vandalism was written in white letters and contained "F*ck BLM [Black Lives Matter]," "Hail Hitler," "N****r," and a swastika symbol.

Time and again, hate speech creates a hostile environment for people of color in our community and leads to violence.

Some may claim racism does not exist in our county; yet, we can see it clearly from park play structures to the actions of elected leaders. We experience it. The pattern of reported hate crimes increase in San Luis Obispo County is significant and concerning. There is no doubt many incidents that go unreported. Racists are emboldened when they see racism, when it is left to stand or, worse, coming from those in positions of power.

Denying racism exists is passivism, or passive racism—the most insidious factor that contributes to American racism, according to Stanford University scholars. The first step to healing is admitting a problem exists. In this case, the problem is that a racist feels comfortable defacing public property with racist words and symbols in our community. Any type of racism should not be tolerated anywhere in our County, and we call on our leadership and our fellow community members to take appropriate anti-racist actions to make that clear.

“The lie of silence hurts our society,” said Rev. Stephen Vines, president of NAACP San Luis Obispo County. “We need to speak up and speak out.”

We deserve a place where everyone feels welcome and safe.

WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN DO

If you see something, say something:

If you encounter racist or other hate-driven vandalism on private or public property, please report it to authorities as soon as possible. Crime can only be counted if it is reported; reported statistics drive budgets and policy change, so having accurate data is important. Anonymous reporting tools are available through local law enforcement agencies.

If you witness discrimination, speak up and report as appropriate:

Whether verbal harassment or racist jokes, it’s important to speak up on behalf of those being targeted. As appropriate, you can provide witness support or report to local authorities or law enforcement. Follow up to ensure a case number is assigned and appropriate corrective action is taken.

If you experience discrimination or are a victim of a hate crime:

Report the incident to appropriate local authorities in a timely manner. Document the incident and retain a copy of any pictures, emails, letters, etc. California has several discrimination complaint tools which address specific types of discriminatory acts (housing, employment, etc.). These don’t cover all incidents, so it’s important to start with reporting locally. Follow up to ensure appropriate action is taken.

Support increased anti-racism action in the community:

Encourage budget allocations dedicated to anti-racism education, bias awareness and inclusive positive community projects to engage and support creating a welcoming and safe community for all.

Hold leadership accountable:

Support transparency from local leadership by demanding accurate reporting, data aggregation and statistics. Follow up on hate crime incidents to ensure they are investigated and resolved. Advocate for

changing policies, programs and leadership that exhibit bias. When incidents occur, hold those responsible accountable with appropriate action.

We can address racism in our community, but it takes all of us, working together, to achieve justice. The new year is a good time to commit to action against racism in San Luis Obispo County.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest nonpartisan civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities. You can read more about the NAACP's work and our six "Game Changer" issue areas [here](#).

