

United States: Anti-Black racism lives in liberal California

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A revealing article was published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on June 9. Justin Phillips, an African American columnist reported on “anti-Black racism” in California. He said that many African Americans in the state don’t see California as racist toward them, but is mainly a problem elsewhere in places like the South and Midwest.

Phillips writes, “It was in one of San Francisco’s busiest tourist spots that Bay Area native Maya was called the n-word by a stranger.

“Maya and a group of friends, several of whom were Black, were in a crosswalk near Pier 39 one afternoon two years ago, when a car almost barreled into them. Words were exchanged, then Maya said the driver threw a water bottle that hit her shoulder and shouted, ‘I should have hit you n—s. It took me a long time to process what happened,’ said Maya, who lives in San Francisco, works in tech and asked that I only use her first name. ‘It felt like something that would happen in the South, not in California.’ ”

But the facts show otherwise.

A report published by the Public Policy Institute of California in May says anti-Black hate crimes almost tripled between 2019 and 2022. This tracks with California Department of Justice data, which as far back as the 1990s shows Black people as the most common target of hate crimes.

Phillips notes, “Hate crimes motivated by racial bias rose by 11.4% from 1,165 in 2021 to 1,298 in 2022, according to state DOJ data. Most victims were Asian, Latino or Black.

“After reaching a 20-year high of 247 in 2021, anti-Asian hate crimes fell to 140 in 2022, which is still a higher total than any year between 2001 and 2020.

“Anti-Latino hate crimes increased from 197 in 2021 to 210 in 2022. Anti-white hate crimes rose from 83 in 2021 to 103 in 2022. [Whites, 41%, are the largest racial/ethnic group in California.]

“Add together all of the anti-white, Asian and Latino hate crimes in 2022, and the total is far less than the number of anti-Black hate crimes that year — 652, a 27% increase from 513 in 2021.”

In a 2021 similar data was reported by the San Diego station KPBS:

“Hate crime in California surged 31% in 2020, fueled mainly by a big jump in crimes targeting Black people during a year that saw the worst racial strife in decades, according to an annual report released Wednesday by the state’s attorney general:

“Overall hate crimes increased from 1,015 to 1,330 last year, while the number of victims increased 23%, from 1,247 to 1,536. Black people account for 6.5% of the state’s population of nearly 40

million people but were victims in 30% of all hate crimes — 456 overall, up 87% from the previous year.

“ ‘For too many, 2020 wasn’t just about a deadly virus, it was about an epidemic of hate as well,’ Bonta said while speaking in Oakland’s Chinatown.

“ ‘What we see from these reports is what we have seen and felt all year — we are in the midst of a racial justice reckoning in this country. It’s multi-faceted, and it cannot be solved overnight.’ Attorney General Rob Bonta said.”

California saw some of the largest Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020, underscoring the need for mass action as a pushback.

It is noteworthy that the mainstream media rarely focuses on these facts. Today, in fact, there is more talk about the rise of “antisemitism.” But many of these charges are against any pro-Palestinian organizations against Israel’s war in Gaza, by the White House, most politicians in both parties and other supporters of Israel’s war including the Israeli lobby.

This diverts attention from the real antisemitism on the part of right wing racists, who believe Jews are behind anti-racism movements of Blacks, Latino and Asian Americans as well as movements for LGBTQ rights.

A growing number of hate crimes are by white racists across the state. Among other things, they allege there is too much “diversity” and affirmative action programs by the government, universities, and corporations to deal with historic discrimination.

California’ image as a bastion of racial diversity and equality isn’t true. Even where I live in northern California’s Wine Country where African Americans are a small number of the population, discrimination has always been rampant in the housing market (covenants in contracts once were written saying only whites could buy the property when sold) and discrimination in employment.

California is not an outlier

As Phillips notes, “ ‘What’s true for California is true for America,’ said University of San Francisco political science professor and leading San Francisco reparations advocate James Taylor.

“ ‘Anti-Blackness is the baseline of hate in the U.S.,’ he said. ‘The idea that California is some kind of liberal bastion that is above pedestrian racism is wrong.’

“Slavery was never officially sanctioned in California, but the California Fugitive Slave Act in 1852, which allowed slave owners to recapture their slaves that had escaped to California, shows the state was more of a haven for white slave owners than a sanctuary for Black people seeking freedom. In the 1920s, Ku Klux Klan chapters throughout California influenced housing policies and law enforcement practices.

“Fast-forward to 1966, a century after the abolition of slavery, when the Black Panther Party emerged in Oakland to combat the kinds of oppression Black communities had faced since the country’s founding. The party’s struggle for equality was reignited in 2020 in local George Floyd protests, along with movements to reimagine policing and to provide reparations.

“Meanwhile, Black people across California are racially profiled in clothing stores, have the police called on them for selling water or entering a business they own or barbecuing at a lake.”

California experienced some of the largest anti-Black racism protests in the country following the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.

California's legal system defines hate crimes as those targeting victims because of their race or ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or a disability. The definitions have been expanded at various times in recent years. Each hate crime event can include more than one related offense against more than one victim by more than one offender.

"The quiet kind of racism can be really loud in California," Shawneequa Badger of the Badger Real Estate Group in Oakland told Phillips.

"The first time Tinish Hollins heard the n-word was in the late 1990s as a seventh grader in San Bruno. She was walking home with her brother, and a school bus filled with non-Black students pulled up next to her.

"The kids on that bus put the windows down and started throwing paper at us and calling us n—s,' said Hollins, the co-founder of San Francisco's SF Black Wall Street, an organization that focuses on improving Black economic mobility. "That experience felt like an exception at the time, but it's far more common now. It's why we have to literally create safe spaces for Black people to exist and just be Black."

As Phillips concluded in his column, "Recent hate crime data illustrates how these spaces are needed, because it simply isn't safe to be Black in California. Past hate crime data says maybe it never has been."

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