

Hi, Haters. We See You.

Despite the Bay Area's reputation for open-mindedness, hate has been brewing for years, and Donald Trump's campaign is coaxing it to the surface.



Charles Donner, Marina man. - ERIC HOOD/OC WEEKLY

By Channing Joseph

San Francisco has long been a sanctuary for outsiders. Hippies, hobos, queers, and kinksters of all colors have called it home, and it is tempting to believe that hateful extremists could never gain a foothold here.

Yet they already have.

In the city's Marina District, while starry-eyed newlyweds pose for photos amid the grand columns of the Palace of Fine Arts, a Ku Klux Klansman watches through the second-floor window of his Baker Street home.

In Oakland, elementary school students jump rope and practice their multiplication tables at E.C. Reems Academy while — just two blocks away — the jihadist leader of the Masjid al-Islam mosque rejoices over suicide bombings targeting civilians.

And in nearby Pleasant Hill, students play ball in the Diablo Valley College baseball field, unaware that on the other side of a chain-link fence is the suburban headquarters of IslamThreat.com, one of the Bay Area's most notorious anti-Muslim websites.

Hate is hiding all around us, even in the most benign settings. And in the wake of recent hate-fueled shootings this year in Orlando, Fla.; Baton Rouge, La.; and Dallas — and last year's

racially motivated church massacre in Charleston, S.C. — the potential dangers posed by Bay Area-based extremists deserve closer scrutiny.

That scrutiny seems especially warranted as some experts say the nakedly hateful rhetoric of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump — who refers to Mexicans as rapists, promises to ban Muslims from entering the United States, and refused (at first) to denounce the KKK's David Duke — is encouraging other bigots to come out of hiding.

"The main effect of Donald Trump is that he has opened up a political space for the radical right to have a conversation about these issues," Mark Potok, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), tells me.

According to research by the center, which is a legal advocacy nonprofit that tracks extremists, there are now 892 active hate groups in the U.S., an increase of more than 100 in just a year. Of that total, 17 groups are based in Northern California, with seven in the wider Bay Area and two in the city of San Francisco.

The list is a virtual rainbow of hate, showcasing ideologies denouncing blacks, whites, Jews, Muslims, and the LGBT community. The seven Bay Area groups include: the Black Hebrew

Israelites and the Christian Guardians, both of San Francisco; the Black Riders Liberation Party, the Nation of Islam, As-Sabiqun, and Masjid al-Islam, all of Oakland; and IslamThreat.com, based in Pleasant Hill.

SPLC's list does not, by the way, account for several so-called statewide hate groups or for Charles Donner, the Klansman in the Marina, whom SPLC did not even know about until February — after this year's national list had already been compiled — when Donner was arrested at a KKK rally that erupted into violence in Anaheim. Calls and emails to Donner and several other individuals and groups monitored by SPLC were not returned.

"Things are getting significantly worse," Potok says. "We are seeing a very serious rise in right-wing populism."

The strong upward trend began with President Barack Obama's election in 2008, Potok says, and it has worsened because of ongoing angst among members of the white middle class, who feel alienated by a society different from the one in which they grew up.

"It's not simply that there's a black man in the White House," Potok says. "It's what he represents," which is the fact that whites are losing the demo-

graphic majority. "When Obama was elected, most of the country was celebratory ... but the next day, the servers of two very major white supremacist organizations" — Stormfront and the Council of Conservative Citizens, which inspired the Charleston church killer Dylann Roof — "crashed because they were getting so much traffic."

"To every significant change, a backlash occurs," he added. "A certain segment of the population becomes angrier and angrier, and that ultimately leads to real violence and sometimes terrorist violence."

Recently, white supremacist groups have also spoken out strongly against the Movement for Black Lives, conflating its activism with violence. In a YouTube video posted July 8, a day after the Dallas shooting that killed five police officers and injured nine others, Will Quigg, the KKK's California grand dragon, announced to the world: "The Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan are here. California is up and running. When they start killing our police officers and innocent people for no reason, something needs to be done."

Calls to a number listed on Quigg's Twitter page and on his group's website were not returned.

Four days after his video was posted online, recruitment fliers were found in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood urging white Christians to "join the Ku Klux Klan" because "Black Lives Matter Black Panthers are telling followers to kill white people and police officers in the name of justice."

It was not the only racist incident in the city's recent history — in January, 62-year-old John Schenone was convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes for spray-painting "No More Chinese" all over the Portola neighborhood, and in May, the city's then-police chief, Greg Suhr, was ousted after officers fatally shot an unarmed black woman and a series of text messages revealed that officers routinely used racial, homophobic, and transphobic slurs to refer to city residents.

Still, it seemed strange that neighborhood residents apparently were not all that concerned about the fliers. Despite the local precinct's exhortation to report them even if no laws had been broken, Capt. John Sanford Jr. told Hoodline, "We have not received any complaints whatsoever."

That lack of concern worries some city residents, like Shaun Haines, 38, an African-American man who was born and raised in San Francisco and

currently lives in Hayes Valley, which is near where the Klan recruitment fliers were found. As a person of color, he finds he has encountered more racism as an adult — including being called "nigger" and having someone spit in his eye — than he ever did as a child, in a much less gentrified San Francisco.

Haines, who recently ran unsuccessfully for a seat on the city's Democratic County Central Committee, tells me he is troubled about his neighbors' apathy. "It indicates that S.F. isn't quite the bastion of liberalism, accepting and open community as we like to believe," he said, "and its trend suggests we've got a conservative core and pockets of hate heating up."

Clare Bayard, co-founder of the San Francisco-based Catalyst Project, which works with white people and organizations to become more actively anti-racist, says she was also uneasy that the fliers had been disregarded.

"We are at a serious crossroads about which way to push this country," she says. "We have to take seriously the threat to people's everyday safety on the street, as well as the threat to democracy, that racist white nationalism poses. And white people have a responsibility to take action."

Bayard has her work cut out for her — as there are many more groups espousing racist and other hateful ideologies than there are groups like hers.

Peter M. Friedman, the aviation expert, firearms instructor, and Trump supporter who runs IslamThreat.com, also regularly speaks to Republican, Tea Party, and other groups, giving presentations on Sharia law and Islamic finance, which claim that the ultimate goal of Islam is to "fight and terrorize the nonbeliever."

Across California, he says his talks have attracted crowds of more than 100.

"I'm trying to explain to people what the origins are of Islam and Muslims and how they affected the world in the last 1,400 years," he tells me. "All of this moderate Muslim stuff is a bunch of crap. There is no such thing as moderate Islam. Islam isn't moderate."

But in 2012, he used even stronger words to describe his views on Islam, saying in a Solano County talk: "Violence mandated by Allah with the objective of converting, killing, or subjecting and taxing the infidel ... it continues to define Islam."