Hatred and Violence Endanger Everyone...Including the Criminals

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According to the NYPD, six teens between the ages of 12 and 16 were approached by three male teens, who "stated that they wanted to fight them and that because they were Jewish, they wanted to get them." "The suspects brandished a knife, crow bar and a sword, and followed them towards their residence before fleeing," said a spokeswoman for the NYPD. "There were no reported injuries as a result of this incident. The NYPD's Hate Crimes Task Force was notified and is investigating."

The above news story about a recent incident on the Upper West Side of Manhattan is disturbing…and not entirely accurate. Yes, the Jewish teens were not physically harmed and the perpetrators got away. But the report states that there were "no reported injuries"…and that is only partially correct.

In fact, there were very serious injuries. The Jewish victims were not simply confronted by weapon-wielding haters; they were psychologically injured by the confrontation. Their level of trust in their personal safety has been compromised. Their trust in their fellow human beings has been shattered. They will now need to keep wondering if they will be attacked again…only because they are Jewish.

The injuries go beyond the psychological damage to the teen victims. All Jews have another reason to feel that they can be victimized only because they are Jews. We can try to put this incident aside as a fluke aberration from our normal sense of safety and well-being…but a scar—however small it may seem—will remain.

And it's not just Jews who have sustained injuries in this incident: it is also the perpetrators themselves. One act of hatred and violence tends to lead to another, and then another. The teen haters are condemning themselves to a life of hatred and violence that may ultimately land them in prison. Even if they escape justice this time, eventually their violence and bigotry will backfire on them.

It is very upsetting watching the news these days. Not only do we view the horrific situation in Ukraine and Palestinian terrorism in Israel; we see images of violent people in our own city and country who hit, rob, shoot, and murder others. We are witnessing a rise in hate crimes against Jews, Asians and other groups.

On the positive side, politicians speak out forcefully against bigotry and gun violence. Law enforcement leaders assure us they will catch the criminals. But on the negative side, we sense a breakdown within society. Pundits blame racism, anti-Semitism, gangs, mental illness, availability of guns, frustration due to the Covid pandemic etc.

While so much needs to be done in order to maintain civility and safety, a key area that needs to be studied is the family. Healthy families produce healthy, productive children. Healthy families convey moral values. Healthy families strive to help family members who are moving in dangerous anti-social directions.

When families do not properly fulfill these functions, our entire society suffers the consequences. But what is being done by our government, schools, and media to promote healthy families? Have things deteriorated beyond repair? Have the leaders and opinion makers given up on promoting healthy families?

We are told that a high percentage of violent crimes are committed by a small number of criminals. But who are these criminals? Where did they learn to hate and hurt? What kind of families do they have? What could parents do to better guide their children? What resources do parents of problematic children have to help them steer their children in the right direction? And if the parents themselves are haters and criminals, how can the children be freed from the bad influences of their parents?

When society was first confronted with the Covid plague, vast financial and human resources were mobilized in order to deal with the virus and its spread. It was quickly realized that the virus posed a threat to all of us.

But the virus of hatred, violence and bigotry receives inadequate responses. This virus undermines the foundations of civil society and is a threat to everyone. It demands a strong response. The goal is not only to punish perpetrators but to strengthen families and schools so that our younger generations grow up with healthy moral frameworks.

The Covid crisis demonstrated how society rallied massive energy and budget to bolster society’s physical health. Shouldn’t we be able to act with an equal sense of emergency on behalf of society’s moral and psychological health?