

[Click to Print](#)[EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Immigrants Focus Of Hate Revival, Report Says

By ERIN TEXEIRA The Associated Press

Published: Feb 11, 2007

NEW YORK - Huge street protests made millions of immigrants more visible and powerful last year, but they also seem to have revived a hateful counter force: white supremacists.

Groups linked to the Ku Klux Klan, skinheads and neo-Nazis grew significantly more active, holding more rallies, distributing leaflets and increasing their presence on the Internet - much of it focused on stirring anti-immigrant sentiment, a recent report released by the Anti-Defamation League says.

"Extremist groups are good at seizing on whatever the hot button is of the day and twisting the message to get new members," said Deborah M. Lauter, ADL Civil Rights director. "This one seems to be taking hold with more of mainstream America than we'd like to see."

Old Klan chapters have been revived and new ones started throughout the South, historically the heart of the group, and in other places such as Michigan, Iowa and New Jersey, the report says.

Last May in Alabama, an anti-immigration rally included slogans such as "Let's get rid of the Mexicans!" according to the document, titled "Ku Klux Klan Rebounds."

"The Klan is increasingly cooperating with other extremist groups and neo-Nazi groups," Lauter said. "That's a new phenomenon."

Between 2000 and 2005, hate groups mushroomed 33 percent and Klan chapters by 63 percent, according to Mark Potok, director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate crimes.

Precise data are difficult to pin down, but Potok's group counts as many as 150 Klan chapters with up to 8,000 members nationwide. More than 800 hate groups exist across the country, Southern Poverty research shows.

In the late 1990s, memberships in such groups was crumbling as they lost leaders and struggled to organize, said Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino. Many hit bottom about 2000.

Historically, the Klan's focus had been to terrorize black Americans - through race riots, lynchings and other killings - but it reached peak membership at more than 4 million in

the 1920s by focusing on immigration.

Newcomers from Ireland and Germany were portrayed as Catholic usurpers invading the United States, taking jobs from native-born Americans and undermining national fabric, Levin said.

Said Potok: "It's remarkable to look back at the nativist sentiments toward Catholics; it's very similar to what we're seeing with Mexicans now."

Today, many white supremacists blame immigrants, particularly Hispanics, for crime, struggling schools or unemployment, for instance.

Many Latinos are feeling the effects firsthand. Last September, a Kentucky family originally from El Salvador found a wooden cross burning on their front lawn just weeks after they moved in. Earlier last year, a Latino teenager in Houston was brutally beaten and sodomized while one attacker screamed "White Power!" The victim barely survived, and one attacker was sentenced to life in prison.

"I've been doing [Hispanic advocacy work] for a long, long time, and the atmosphere has never been as poisonous as it has been in the last few years," said Lisa Navarrete, a vice president at the National Council of La Raza. "The level of vitriol is new."
