



The Swastika: A Symbol of Hate

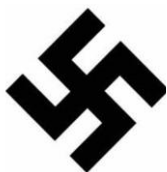
By Denise Ham (from ADL Web site)

The swastika is an ancient symbol that emerged independently among many cultures on several continents. Before the 20th century, its use (including in the United States) was almost always benign. Even today, the swastika is a common symbol across Asia, used by Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of other religions, where it is often associated with good fortune.

However, in the early 20th century, various right-wing adherents of the so-called “völkisch” movement in Germany, a movement in large part dedicated to uncovering a romanticized and largely mythical German/“Aryan” past, adopted the swastika as a symbol. The use of the swastika in this context subsequently influenced Adolf Hitler to adopt the swastika as the primary symbol for the Nazi Party in 1920. The murderous legacy of the Nazi regime, especially the Holocaust, permanently converted the swastika into a symbol of hate, anti-Semitism and infamy.



Since 1945, the swastika has served as the most significant and notorious of hate symbols, anti-Semitism and white supremacy for most of the world outside of Asia. Its display is prohibited in Germany and some other countries, leading some right-wing extremists to devise variants or alternatives to the swastika that would evoke a similar effect. In the United States, the swastika is overwhelmingly viewed as a hate symbol.



The swastika as adopted by the Nazis has “arms” that hook to the right; later white supremacists maintained this tradition. Though sometimes more ignorant white supremacists accidentally render swastikas “backwards,” the backwards or left-pointing swastika is typically the hallmark of someone not actually that familiar with white supremacist iconography. The swastika, along with the letters “KKK” and the numbers “666,” is one of the most common forms of “shock” graffiti in the United

States, typically spray-painted by juveniles who are not actually white supremacists but simply want to use the image to shock and alarm people.

Among white supremacists, the swastika is a very common symbol, rendered in many different ways and often combined with other hate symbols. The most common swastika variant is a round or curved swastika. Since the release of “American History X,” a favorite movie of white supremacists, it has been very common for male white supremacists to get a swastika tattoo on their left breast in imitation of the main character in that movie. One trend seen most often in California among members of white power gangs is the popularity of very-large outline swastika tattoos.