



Pacific Media Watch

REGION:

Los Angeles Times exposes Pacific cyber-stalker Bill White

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Scores of individuals and organisations around the South Pacific region - including Divine Word University staff and Pacific Media Watch - have been the target of a series of attacks on websites created by Californian cyber-stalker Bill White. A Los Angeles Times reporter, Steve Hymon, has filed an exposé on the cyberspace activities of White. In turn, his own newspaper has become a target of abuse.

CYBERSPACE: LAST FRONTIER FOR SETTLING SCORES?

www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-cyber15jun15,1,3842460.story?coll=la-headlines-california-manual

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By [Steve Hymon](#), Times Staff Writer

In hindsight, John Henningham wishes he had never visited <http://www.johnhenningham.com/>.

The journalism professor in Brisbane, Australia, gasped when the site filled his screen in January. He was looking at his own photo. Underneath was a vulgar description of a sexual act in bold letters preceding his name. There were accusations that Henningham had committed academic fraud and had been fired from his previous job "for selling degrees for cheap sex or some other price."

The web page was signed by a Los Angeles man named [Bill White](#).

In the last four years, from his apartment near skid row, White, 60, has published more than 180 web pages attacking 60 people across the globe, accusing them of being liars or frauds, corrupt and much worse.

Many of his targets have some connection with Divine Word University, a small Roman Catholic university in Papua New Guinea where White worked briefly as a teacher before leaving in 1997 after accusing the president of being involved in a sex and blackmail scandal.

As his targets have learned, White's activities demonstrate one of the realities of the Internet: For all its omnipresence, it remains frontier territory, laden with traps for the unwary.

Web sites established to air a grievance or attack an enemy are a growing issue as more people discover they can settle old feuds and grudges in cyberspace, according to lawyers and Internet experts. Katya Gifford, program manager of CyberAngels, a Pennsylvania group that helps people deal with online abuse, said her organization receives 200 e-mails and up to 30 phone calls a week from people who say they are being harassed over the Internet.

"This is exactly the problem posed by this technology," said Gail Thackeray, an assistant attorney general in Arizona and the state's top cyber-cop.

"Whatever someone's agenda is," whether a political cause or a personal grudge, the Internet "gives him powerful tools because of the worldwide reach," she said.

"The physical stalker has to sleep sometime, but these guys never do," Thackeray added. "That's what makes them so menacing ... There are endless ways to be creative with this stuff."

In White's case, many of the people he has targeted say they have watched helplessly as he used information gleaned about them on the Internet -- a resume, a photo from a baby christening, a research paper -- and turned it against them.

Some say White's allegations have cost them jobs and money. Others fear for their reputations. Henningham, for example, worries that prospective students looking for information about his private journalism school will instead stumble on White's sites about him.

"When I go to conferences, people ask me 'Who ... is this bloody nut case?' " said Trevor Cullen, a journalism lecturer at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Australia, who has been the subject of several of White's web sites and who sued White for defamation.

Many of White's targets have complained to Internet firms that host his pages, only to be told that there is nothing they can do. His activities do not appear to violate cyber-stalking laws, which now exist in 45 states, including California -- most laws apply only to people who physically threaten someone, and no one has accused White of doing that.

Defamation laws are also of little assistance. One of the notions underlying libel laws is that people who can afford to distribute potentially defamatory statements widely -- by publishing a newspaper, for example -- have resources that a victim can go after in a lawsuit. In the Internet world, that assumption falls apart. Posting a web site -- even scores of web sites -- costs almost nothing.

A judge in Australia recently ruled that White had defamed Cullen, who concedes there is little chance he will ever collect a penny.

White has acknowledged creating these web sites and others. In a series of e-mail exchanges and Internet postings and in an interview, he referred to himself as a "whistle-blower" trying to expose a sex scandal at the Papua New Guinea college.

"In the Old West, they called the six-shooter, 'the great equalizer,' " White recently wrote. "Well, in the 21st century and the Information Age, the Internet is the great equalizer."

Bill White's adventure began in 1996 when he left behind a long legal career in Long Beach and

Orange County to go to Papua New Guinea to teach.

"I had wanted to do something like this from the time President Kennedy announced the Peace Corps," said White, who attended Stanford as an undergrad and the Hastings School of Law in San Francisco, according to State Bar of California records.

White practiced civil, tax and real estate law through the early 1990s, working mostly out of his two-story home on a cul-de-sac in suburban Fullerton, according to state bar records.

He learned about the overseas teaching opportunity through a Roman Catholic church he attended in Orange County, church officials said. The Lay Mission Helpers -- a branch of the Los Angeles Archdiocese -- sent White to Divine Word University in Papua New Guinea to teach law.

White has contended that, once he was there, in 1996, he discovered that several faculty members were blackmailing the president of the school, Father Jan Czuba. White began writing letters to the L.A. Archdiocese, accusing Czuba of having had sex with a student, having impregnated a hairdresser and possibly of having been involved with "a pregnant nun." He said that he quit the school in 1997.

Czuba has denied White's accusations and said that students reported that White was behaving strangely in the classroom.

Czuba said that school officials thought White was suffering from culture shock. They offered White a counselor, Czuba said, but White insisted it was the counselor who needed counseling. Finally, White was given a plane ticket and told to leave the country, Czuba said.

White returned to Los Angeles in February 1997 and was told by the Lay Mission Helpers that he would not be sent overseas again, officials said. The mission went to court to have him evicted from its dormitory that fall, court records show.

White said he began using the Internet at public libraries in Los Angeles around that time. He soon found a Web site that had been created by an attorney who was suing the Boston Archdiocese over allegations of sex abuse. That gave him an idea.

"I said, 'Hey, this is a great way to get information out,' " White wrote in an e-mail. "And I never forgot it."

Over the next few years, White obtained several personal computers, which he keeps in his apartment in downtown Los Angeles. He said he spent "lots of time" on his sites. Many of those sites include information about people that White apparently found while combing the Internet. "This is what is so nice about the Internet," he wrote. "You can do most of it without leaving your desk."

In 1999, Daniel Smith-Christopher said, he received an e-mail from White urging him to stop teaching Bible classes for the Lay Mission Helpers. If Smith-Christopher didn't stop teaching, White said, he would post a Web page about the teacher.

Smith-Christopher knew White, who had taken a Bible study class from him while preparing for the job in Papua New Guinea.

"I had no idea what he meant," said Smith-Christopher, a professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "Then two days later, another e-mail came. It said, 'Your Web page is up Daniel.' "

On the page -- the first of several to appear -- White alleged that Smith-Christopher had AIDS. Another page urged readers to send a contribution to a memorial fund for Smith-Christopher at

Loyola Marymount.

Smith-Christopher said he doesn't have AIDS. He tried to have the sites removed, but finally gave up, he said, after discovering that one Web host company was in Pakistan.

Around the same time, Sir Peter Barter, a government minister in Papua New Guinea, heard of White's Internet campaign against Divine Word. Barter sent White e-mails telling him to stop.

White constructed several sites about Barter, including one that incorporated the logo of Barter's travel firm and urged prospective customers to boycott the business, which specializes in taking foreigners to Papua New Guinea.

Barter said he believes the sites cost him millions of dollars in lost business. In 2001, Barter traveled to Los Angeles in hopes of stopping White's Internet activity. Barter asked officials from the Los Angeles Archdiocese to sue White in civil court over the Web sites. The archdiocese declined, deciding that a suit would be "an exercise in futility," said a spokesman, Tod Tamberg.

And today, when Sir Peter Barter enters his name in a Google search, the first 10 sites found are usually Web sites created by Bill White.

People attacked by White can ask the firms that organize or sell space on the Internet to remove or ignore White's pages. Google, among other search engines, has refused to remove White's sites. Company officials don't want to be judge and jury over the approximately 3 billion Web sites that are searched by Google, according to a company spokesman, David Krane.

The companies that sell White the names of his Web sites -- such as <http://www.trevorcullen.com/> -- say they can't take back a name unless there is a legal judgment against White in the United States.

Federal law gives the companies protection against liability for content that customers might post on Web sites, including defamatory material.

Several Internet site providers shut down some of White's Web sites after receiving complaints, but he has always been able to find a new provider.

In fact, White is now suing the Los Angeles Archdiocese, saying it wrongly pressured an Internet firm to remove some of his sites.

Catalina Hosting, based in Avalon on Catalina Island, now hosts the bulk of White's sites. A company employee said in an e-mail responding to an inquiry from The Times that the company has received complaints about White's sites but has chosen not to remove them.

"We are glad he has the time [to] spend his money with us," the employee said in the e-mail.

White remains a mystery to many of the people he has attacked. Few have met him or spoken to him or even know what he looks like.

Henningham, the journalism professor, has never met White. Henningham said he was attacked because he refused to bend to White's demands and flunk one of his students -- Trevor Cullen, according to Henningham and White's Web site. Henningham has since set up his own site on White - <http://www.billwhitecyberstalker.com/>.

Cullen, now a journalism professor in Perth, said he had taught at Divine Word University in Papua New Guinea at the same time White was there. Cullen said White was upset with him because he refused to confirm White's story of the alleged sex scandal.

White has tenaciously guarded details about his personal life and has made sure they don't surface on the Internet. In an e-mail exchange, he said he is divorced and has no children, but otherwise declined to provide personal information.

A few weeks ago, White agreed to meet a *Los Angeles Times* reporter at the cafeteria at the L.A. County Superior Courthouse in downtown Los Angeles.

"If I meet you there, you can be sure that I have been through the search to get into the building, and am not 'armed,' " he wrote in an e-mail.

White -- wearing a Cincinnati Bengals jacket and a button-down shirt -- refused to speak on the record about his activities. But in subsequent e-mails, he repeatedly expressed astonishment that *The Times* was focusing on him instead of on the alleged scandal he said he is trying to expose.

Then, five days after the meeting, White posted a web site about the reporter, followed soon by sites about two *Times* editors.

"I think I would give up eating to maintain my sites," White wrote when asked about his endgame. "Well, almost. Well, maybe I would eat less."