

Twelve Tribes cult member rescue thwarted, kidnappers arrested in Vista

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The investigation continues into the kidnapping attempt of a young Twelve Tribes member, Robert Martinez 23, the Sheriff's Department said to the [Los Angeles Times yesterday](#). Three people were arrested Friday night in Vista on suspicion of kidnapping a relative from the Twelve Tribes Community cult because they feared Martinez was being "brainwashed" by the group that is part of a national movement that began in 1972 in Chattanooga, Tenn., a breakaway from the Jesus Movement. The national leader refers to himself as Yoneq.



Photo by David McNew/Getty Images

In a statement emailed to reporters, the group expressed sadness at the incident: "We are very thankful that he is back at home with his wife who is expecting their first child next month. We do not know of the motives for this action."

The 'Times' reports, "We live as a big, extended family because we love one another," the Vista group said in its statement. "We love to work together in our Yellow Deli, where many, many people in Southern California come and continually witness our life and our relationships. We are not hidden or inaccessible."

The [Union-Tribune](#) in San Diego reported that the Twelve Tribes "disputed cult allegations, and issued a statement on Saturday saying it was "very saddened by the situation that happened here at our home on Friday." The statement said family members tried to forcibly take away Robert Martinez, who belongs to the community with his wife.

What concerns many about the Twelve Tribes cult, including cult expert, [Steven Hassan](#) in a news story by [CBC News](#) on Mar. 23, 2015: "One of the things that I am arguing ... is that freedom to believe does not mean freedom to behave in [a certain way]," said Steven Hassan, of both the [Freedom of Mind Information Resource Centre Inc.](#) and the [International Cultic Studies Association](#). And so I am calling on officials to step into this area and see clearly behaviours that are very concerning."

Specifically, Twelve Tribe members are being accused of practising [corporal punishment](#) and disciplining their children with wooden sticks; as a member himself told CBC Information Radio last fall.

One **ex-member alleges** that, “Exposed to a cacophony of contradictions which assault their conscience, community members must work long hours (16-18 hours a day) for no pay. Women usually stay at home and the men do not regard them as sources of wisdom or knowledge. Children probably experience the worst plight, with many forced to endure thrashings that leave them black, blue, and sometimes bleeding from the back of their neck to the soles of their feet. Seeking to attract young students who desire to separate themselves from their troubles, the Twelve Tribes usually place their businesses (Common Ground Café) on or near college campuses.”

Twelve Tribes leader strike the ultimate fear into members and those who say they want to leave. Constructing psychological barriers in the minds of defectors, the ‘Tribes’ make leaving very difficult, stating, “You will turn into a homosexual if you leave us”, or “you will experience an accident or your family may die” or “you will go to the Lake of Fire.”

For disagreeing with a teaching of Yoneq, a member could find themselves dropped in front of a dingy hotel or homeless shelter with only \$100, if they are lucky. When community members leave they must often undergo years of therapy to cope with the psychological damage and trauma (PTSD).

The **Cult Examiner reported** on the Twelve Tribes on Feb. 5, 2015, “An ex-Twelve Tribes member says that charismatic cult leader, Gene Spriggs, “decides all belief, practice and lifestyle. Positioned in a place of unrivaled power-and control, Spriggs is the monarch and pope of the community - answers to no one. Being the sole leader of the tribes, Spriggs prefers to maintain a low profile, and keeps any knowledge of his whereabouts, lifestyle, or finances secret.”

Following the Examiner story, several ex-cult members contacted the Examiner by email with disturbing stories about the suffering endured by family members. Wishing to remain anonymous, one ex-member states: “My feeling is that if consenting adults want to join an extreme religion that is their prerogative to do with their lives as they please. However when children's potential is being capped by the fears, laws and controls of men, then I have no sympathy for this abuse regardless of the 'religious reasons'. Also the Twelve Tribes lies to people. They are homophobic, racist, and anti-Semitic. Their own teachings attest to that regardless of their many denials. There are many cases of abject partiality. Some leaders are forgiven for adultery while others are kicked out for looking at porn, this, while many of the leaders are addicted to porn.”