History says bigotry must be challenged

Two years ago, I interviewed some Jewish Holocaust survivors in southeast Michigan exploring a simple question: How far has America come since the Holocaust?

I wanted to find out if they thought we as a nation had learned from that atrocity on history. Because looking back, America arrived painfully late in denouncing the atrocities against Jews carried out in Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

Among those I spoke to was Guy Stern, a Holocaust survivor and former member of the Allied forces who is the current director of the Institute of the Rightheous at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills.

Stern told me the world is still dealing with the bitter legacy of the Holocaust and the lesson is that we must continue to speak out against anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of bigotry whenever they occur.

Fortunately, some of those who escaped the horrors now are working to stand against hate in all its forms. The need to not be silent anymore is even more important in the wake of recent anti-Semitic incidents around the country that include threats against synagogues, Jewish Community Centers and the desecration of hundreds of cemeteries in Jewish cemeteries in Philadelphia and suburban St. Louis.

The desecration of those Jewish graveyards sends a disturbing message about the perpetrators, and further underscores the need for future generations to see the Holocaust.

What will future generations say about our leaders, some of whom have failed to stand against anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of bigotry whenever they see it?

There are those who would prefer to leave things as they are. But we cannot keep silent because the Jewish experience, like the black experience, is part of the greater American experience, and we need to see a rainbow over the tragedies of our time.

Because at the end of the day, all that will be asked of us is that we are aware and whether we speak up forcefully against bigotry when we see it.

The attacks at these cemeteries has me pondering:

What kind of human being goes to a burial ground to desecrate tomstones erected by families to keep alive memories of their loved ones? What are we to make of these despicable actions that seek to inflict pain on the families of the deceased?

In 2018, the American Jewish Committee invited me to speak at their lead-