

OPINION

Opinion: Remember Holocaust by fighting anti-Semitism

Beth Bailey |

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On International Holocaust Remembrance Day this Sunday, we are called to reflect on the history of the Holocaust, and remember that it was Nazi hatred and prejudice that led to the genocide of five million non-Jewish victims, including homosexuals, the disabled, Jehovah's Witnesses, political and religious dissenters, gypsies, and Poles.



A holocaust survivor places flowers in commemoration of the people killed by the Nazis at the former Auschwitz Germany Nazi death camp in Oswiecim, Poland, Jan. 27, 2017, on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day that marks the liberation of the Auschwitz Nazi death camp on Jan. 27, 1945.

Czarek Sokolowski / AP

We especially recall the particular variety of hatred — anti-Semitism — that led the Nazis to strip Jews of their civil rights, and ultimately to murder six million Jewish souls — more than two thirds of Europe's Jewish population.

Today, most Americans hear about anti-Semitism in headlines about politicians attacking Israel or "Zionists," members of our glitterati tweeting about "getting that Jewish money," or religious leaders, like Louis Farrakhan, calling Jews "termites."

The news, however, could not possibly cover all the anti-Semitism percolating within our country.

A potent hatred of Jews lives online in social media, message boards, and websites, where old anti-Semitic tropes and conspiracy theories are made new again. James Wenneker von Brunn, a Holocaust denier who killed a special police officer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in June 2009, and Robert Bowers, who killed 11 congregants of Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in October 2018, spoke of their hatred of Jews online long before committing their attacks.

Anti-Semitic hatred most often rears its head in public, though singular incidents may escape attention. The Anti-Defamation League's "H.E.A.T." map, allows us to view such incidents in aggregate, where they become especially concerning.

The map shows 3,253 incidents of anti-Semitic hate reported in the U.S. between January 2016 and December 2017. Though some reports are confidential, the cowardly acts run the gamut of slurs, anti-Jewish rallies, vandalism, harassment, and threats.

Add to this another disconcerting fact: for the 22 years the FBI has kept track of hate crime statistics, Jews have been the most-targeted religious group in America, though they make up just 2 percent of the population. In 2017, hate crimes against Jews increased by 37 percent, with 938 crimes reported.

Anti-Semitism in the U.S. is a serious, and growing, problem. And because every aspect of American life is now viewed through the lens of politics, celebrities and politicians alike are blaming its rise on opposition political parties.

It is easy to blame our opponents, but harder to accept personal responsibility.

Professor of Holocaust history Deborah E. Lipstadt likens anti-Semitism to a herpes infection that "re-emerges at times of stress." Stress is mild a description of the force currently driving Americans apart. Hatred is more accurate.

Around the clock in the U.S., politicians, celebrities, and citizens pelt their political opponents with base insults and disgusting words, and then virtue-signal, reinforced by collective back-patting, that they are doing their duty by going after the "bad" guys. Worse still, some of our leaders call for violence against their opponents, or make unfounded and inaccurate accusations of Nazism and anti-Semitism, using hate to diagnose alleged hate.

Our politically-driven hatred keeps us from recognizing the dangerous anti-Semitism boiling up inside our country, anti-Semitism which, according to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Britain's former chief rabbi, "is the world's most reliable early warning sign of a major threat to freedom, humanity and the dignity of difference."

It also contradicts the very reason we study the Holocaust: to remember, in the words of a representative from the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, "the devastating consequences...when hatred of others goes unchecked."

We can claim to care about its history, but as long as we profess and hold onto our hate for one another, we are not truly living the lessons of the Holocaust.

To mark the solemn occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Americans should not only recall the history of the genocide, but also devote ourselves to combating the growing hatred and anti-Semitism infecting our society.

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