

OPINION

Anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem

What is happening in America right now is not just a crisis for Jews. It is a crisis for this nation as a whole; it is an assault on the very thing that makes us all Americans.

By Marc Baker, Jeremy Burton and Robert Trestan , Updated January 3, 2020, 5:20 p.m.



A demonstrator holds a sign during a rally on December 31 in Brooklyn. A coalition of religious and civil rights leaders were holding a #SafetyInSolidarity rally in Grand Army Plaza to speak out against recent anti-Semitic attacks. STEPHANIE KEITH/GETTY

This year, the lighting of the menorah, the candelabra synonymous with the eight-night Jewish festival of Hanukkah, was supposed to offer a bright light during a period that has seen the worst wave of sustained anti-Semitic violence in our nation's history. Yet last weekend, America's Jewish community was again reeling from an attack: [a brutal stabbing at a Hanukkah celebration](#) in the New York City suburb of Monsey left five Hasidic Jews hospitalized. As of this writing, one victim remains in critical condition and, [according to his family](#), doctors are not confident he will regain consciousness.

The lone suspect, arrested two hours later, reportedly had written journals referring to Nazi culture and made [troubling references to Jews](#). As a result, he's been charged with hate crimes in addition to other charges in connection with the assault.

In the 14 months since the Tree of Life massacre in Pittsburgh, places of Jewish gathering have endured deadly attacks, including well-publicized tragedies in Poway, Calif., and Jersey City. We, the Jewish community of Greater Boston, have endured our own recent wave of anti-Semitism including three [arson fires at Chabad houses last summer in Needham and Arlington](#) and

numerous incidents of vandalism, hate speech, and threats, including at elementary, middle, and high schools, on [college campuses](#), in public spaces, and at a Jewish cemetery. The incidents over this past year, nationally and here in Greater Boston, do not fit a single narrative. The perpetrators have been of different backgrounds and adhered to different ideologies, but what they all share is their anti-Semitism; the inclination to blame Jews — and take action against us — for their own troubles and for evils they ascribe to us. We have seen this during other times and in other countries, while the Jews of America have lived in relative peace since this nation's founding. Yet the sobering reality is that living in the United States no longer inoculates us from the most virulent and violent forms of anti-Semitism. Could it be that this is now the norm of being Jewish in America?



File - In this October 2018 photo, a makeshift memorial stands outside Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in the aftermath of a deadly shooting. Eleven people were killed. MATT ROURKE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Make no mistake: Anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem; anti-Semitism is an American problem and a global, human problem. Anti-Semitism is, at its core, an expression of a society's need to have an "other" to define its own identity and to blame for its troubles, whatever they may be, in any given period.

What is happening in America right now is not just a crisis for Jews. It is a crisis for this nation as a whole; it is an assault on the very thing that makes us all Americans. For the Jews of America, this is yet another moment in which our country is not living up to its promise; it is a moment that requires leadership and support. An American problem requires all of us to be part of the solution.

We need action to fight against anti-Semitism in all of its forms. We need governors, mayors, city councilors, faith leaders, and philanthropists here in Massachusetts and beyond as well as President Trump to convene and find solutions. Among the immediate steps we can take:

All of us, especially parents, must do a better job reaching young people in a way that makes it clear that hateful acts will not be tolerated. This includes a review of school curriculums to ensure that students are growing up to be informed citizens, equipped with the intellectual tools to call out hateful rhetoric when they hear it.

As Sacha Baron Cohen articulated in his [now-viral speech at a November ADL event](#), we must hold [social media companies accountable](#) for giving a platform to those who choose only to spew hatred and bigotry. Until now, these companies have gone virtually unchecked. Recognizing our current crisis, Governor Baker will sign a bill on Jan. 6, allocating a total of \$1.5 million dollars for the state's [Nonprofit Security Grant Program](#). We need all lawmakers to respond with such urgency, making funds available to protect vulnerable communities and to expand programming to educate our youth about hatred and intolerance.

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Meanwhile, Jewish leaders bear a tremendous responsibility to keep our own communities safe.

We must take our own proactive steps to improve safety and security at our institutions. This means deepening relationships with law enforcement, enhancing security at our facilities, and attending awareness and preparedness trainings. Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Jewish Community Relations Council, ADL, and partner organizations are all investing in programming and education to rid our schools, workplaces, sporting venues, and religious institutions of anti-Semitism. It also means standing together with people from every background and faith against all forms of hatred and violence so that no one needs to be afraid to proudly live out their faith or cultural heritage.

To ensure our voices are heard at this critical moment, a contingent from Boston is traveling to New York City Sunday, Jan. 5, to take part in a solidarity march under the banner "[No Hate. No Fear.](#)"

If the United States is no longer a place where Jews can live in safety and security, it will be a failure of our country's values. And it will not be us, the American Jewish community, who has failed. It will be the failure of the nation, if not to defeat anti-Semitism once and for all, at least to beat it back into the darkest corners from which it has emerged. Our society's future depends on it.

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