

Antisemitism and Xenophobia

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As the child of a Holocaust survivor, I grew up understanding the urgency of making a difference and combating evil when it rears its head. I was surrounded by real evidence of how evil could destroy people, evidence shown to me every day by my parents and missing grandparents, and I wanted to do everything I could to stand against it. Today, I feel the rise of antisemitism acutely. Yet I also believe that antisemitism is being exploited and weaponized to divide people, including Jews, to instill fear and demonize people.

At present, the Trump administration is convening [task forces](#) and advancing projects predicated on a fiction that the left is singularly responsible for antisemitism in our country, while ignoring its root causes and the vile ways in which it is expressed by [those in power](#). In Trump's statements, there is no mention of white nationalism, Christian nationalism, Holocaust denial, or Hitler salutes, nor of blood libel or deicide, and zero discussion of how antisemitism works in tandem with these other hatreds, including xenophobia. Taking it even further, officials within the Trump administration have [embraced antisemitic conspiracy theories and associated with known white supremacists](#).



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There is perhaps no clearer example of how antisemitism and xenophobia work in tandem than the Great Replacement Theory, a conspiracy [echoed by several members of the administration](#), stating that “elites”—often code for Jews—are working to flood the country with migrants to change its demographics. In over-assigning agency to shadowy Jewish figures seeking to corrode the nation, this is antisemitic. In ignoring that people come to this country not via a puppet master, but in search of a better life, it's xenophobic and dehumanizing.

As the Trump administration ramps up its attacks on immigrants, [often by plain-clothes or masked Immigrants and Customs Enforcement Officers](#), the rhetorical ties between ideas like the Great Replacement Theory and the actions of the Trump administration are clear. But

rhetoric never stands on its own. The Trump administration's embrace of conspiracy theories, associations with white supremacists, and targeting of immigrant communities should be a warning not only to Jews but to marginalized communities around the country.

Xenophobia and antisemitism have already worked together effectively and tragically. The massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in 2018, the deadliest attack on Jews in American history, was carried out by a right-wing extremist who believed Jews were flooding this country with immigrants. Failing to fight hatreds in tandem allows individual hatreds to fester, and also surrenders one of our unique strengths: the power we find in coalitions. The power we can harness from working together to fight bigotry is more important than ever, a point as Amy Spitalnick makes in her essay from this strategy, [Antisemitism x Democracy](#): "To effectively combat antisemitism, we must understand how it is used as a tool to fuel broader hate, violence, and anti-democratic extremism, and build solutions that recognize this deep interconnection."

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In my time at the State Department, I learned that coalition building is something we in the United States do uniquely well and has been one of our great strengths as Americans and American Jews. To give it up now would be self-defeating. At this historic time in both Jewish and American history, forging coalitions across communities should be our top priority. Our safety, and the safety of American democracy, depends on it.

In addition, Trump's Executive Order on antisemitism [threatens](#) to target people on visas, including students, for participating in protests critical of Israel — all under the guise of combating antisemitism. The White House has since made good on this threat. [Project Esther](#), a policy initiative developed with minimal Jewish input last fall and which has been [nearly replicated](#) by the administration, explicitly designates pro-Palestinian activism as part of an alleged " Hamas-Support Network." These actions threaten to cast antisemitism as an imported, rather than a homegrown, problem.

It also recalls a dark period of American history. In the early 20th century, Jews fleeing persecution and pogroms in Europe sought a new home in America. But as a pretext to deny them entry, American political leaders warned that they were coming here only to smuggle in Bolshevism. Some also argued that Jews were incapable of acculturation and assimilation, charges used against the community to prevent their integration into American life.

Today, Jews, too, will be impacted by President Trump's immigration plans. His [suspension](#) of the US Refugee Admissions Program [is keeping Iranian Jews out of the United States](#). The stop-work orders, which paused all foreign aid spending, also hamper the ability of groups like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society ([HIAS](#)), which is trying to continue helping Venezuela's 6,000-strong Jewish community.

It is only by working together – building coalitions and partnerships across communities – that we can best combat antisemitism, xenophobia, and all forms of bigotry.

RECOMMENDATIONS:



- ⑤ **Building coalitions is more important than ever:** We should all be focused on building and supporting partnerships across communities that make everyone, including Jews, safer.
- ⑤ Jewish communities should commit, as hundreds of Jewish clergy have [done](#), to **pushing back against the suspension of refugee admissions** through the US refugee resettlement program and the elimination of the right to seek asylum.
- ⑤ **Members of Congress must shed light on the impact of the executive orders**, including the impact of the [suspension](#) of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and stop-work orders. We should all be working at the federal, state, and local levels to help refugee communities already here.
- ⑤ **Jewish communities have a particular obligation to return to their historic commitment** to these pro-immigrant and refugee efforts and to work in coalition to prevent antisemitism from being used as a pretext to deport people for engaging in free assembly or free speech.
- ⑤ **We should educate young people about America's immigration history**, including the ways in which it intersects with antisemitism. It isn't just that we should fight xenophobia so others will join us in the fight against antisemitism. It's that one cannot be fought without also fighting the other. We should push for more robust, nuanced history education, even when that history is uncomfortable and painful. It is the only way we can learn from it.