

OPINION

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

"Ask yourself one question. 'Is it right?' Then do what you believe is best for your town, your state and your country."

— James M. Cox, founder, Cox Enterprises

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Remember the Holocaust and the toll of hate

People of goodwill must listen as growing number of Jews express a lived experience of fear and ostracism.

By Ariel Zwang and Eliot M. Arnovitz For The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Eighty-one years after the liberation of Auschwitz, antisemitism remains a deadly reality for Jews around the world.

From Manchester to Milan, from Brooklyn, New York to Boulder, Colorado, and now Bondi, Australia, and Jackson, Mississippi, attacks on Jews have forced Jewish communities to invest tens of millions of dollars into metal detectors, concrete blockades, surveillance equipment and trained, armed personnel.

While there is government funding for some of these efforts, and authorities are committed to the safety of Jewish communities, the onus is on Jews themselves for attaining the highest level of security.

Simultaneously, there is a less visible, equally insidious cost as antisemitism also chips away at Jews' confidence in their identity and institutions, their mental health and their place in broader society.

Indeed, The Washington Post's September 2025 polling makes clear that Jews feel increasingly isolated and scared about being publicly Jewish, echoing growing sentiment we have heard from Jewish communities abroad and right here in the United States.

Amid anxiety and loss, there is a growing thirst for connection

We hear stories of children facing bullying. Families, including non-Jewish family members, feel anxious and lost



A docent speaks to a school group from Monticello at the Breman, a Holocaust museum, in Atlanta. In the face of rising antisemitism, many Jews today feel a loss of agency to be proud Jews. NYT 2024

after friendships and support networks evaporate.

Jews' allies in many aspects of their lives have turned away. Students report hiding their Jewish identities. Poor, elderly, and sick Jews face growing isolation and insecurity, increasingly afraid to ask outsiders for help as caregiving professionals are increasingly exposed as antisemitic.

Above all, many feel a loss of agency to be proud Jews. They fear being associated with Jewish causes, in Jewish spaces, and are especially wary of expressing a connection with Israel, irrespective of their opinions about the policies of its government. This litmus test is clear: "Give up Israel" — where half the world's Jews live — or stand alone.

Yet, there is also a growing thirst for Jewish content and connection. Jews previously unconnected to Jewish life, Israeli expats (conflated by others with the actions of the land of their birth), and Jews who

have migrated from other locations to Europe are turning to local Jewish communities for these connections.

As we are reminded on this International Holocaust Remembrance Day, antisemitism often accompanies global upheaval. In the past, as societies became increasingly antisemitic, persecution pushed Jews into poverty and isolation. Jews required social and emotional aid, communal connections for spiritual sustenance, and — if they were fortunate enough to escape persecution — aid in transit and as they settled in new lands.

This moment is different. Most Jews do not live amid state-sponsored antisemitism.

The increased threat is instead at the grassroots, where the impact of rising antisemitism and growing anti-Israel sentiment often intertwine. The result is burgeoning needs that must be met to ensure Jewish

well-being and safety and to stave off further threats to Jewish inclusion and advancement in our societies.

Three ideas to address rising antisemitism

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has long addressed these issues in overseas Jewish communities with support from the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, and other local and international partners.

From World War I-era

pogroms through the Holocaust, from Soviet oppression to terrorist attacks on Jews from Argentina to Paris, we've been caring for vulnerable Jews outside the U.S. for more than a century, setting them on a path for a stronger future.

To address rising antisemitism, we believe three steps

need to be taken, leveraging knowledge from work we are doing around the globe.

■ First, Jews must regain

agency over their identities and spaces, combining security and preparedness with investments in new Jewish programming tailored to those turning to the Jewish community for support for the first time. By pairing the two, we can create secure spaces that offer a range of educational, cultural, and religious offerings where Jews can celebrate their heritage meaningfully and safely. Promising results in Brazil demonstrate this approach is critical for building resilience and restoring the confidence that so many Jews lost over the past few years.

■ Second, tailored mental health interventions can address the anxiety and trauma felt by many in the Jewish community, especially youth. In public schools, youth often feel ostracized, subject to the social message that being Jewish or associated with Israel is a danger. Many have fled to Jewish schools and we must create sanctuaries for traumatized children in these spaces — like work being done in the Netherlands — promoting trauma-awareness training for staff, stronger parent engagement and individual support for students' diverse mental health needs.

■ Third, isolation in the most vulnerable members of Jewish communities — like seniors, low-income residents and people with disabilities who now avoid help from those outside the community — must be addressed and investments made in social support that pairs human services with connection to other Jews. Programs are being piloted in France that connect young Jewish volunteers with seniors, offering them companionship and access to social support.

Above all, people of goodwill must listen as growing numbers of Jews express a lived experience of fear and ostracism. After all, antisemitism is not just the responsibility of Jewish communities. It is a barometer for the direction our societies are taking, and it is time we correct course.

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Michael Ramirez

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READERS WRITE

Trump's impulses threaten nation's peace, security

Whether intentionally or not, the Trump administration is increasing the risk that every American will live in an unstable, more dangerous world. The obsession with acquiring Greenland is alienating our staunchest allies. Our invasion of Venezuela emboldens our adversaries to take similar actions without consideration of international law or the common good.

How quickly it is forgotten that similar actions led to the worst calamity in world history, where 70 million souls perished. World War II was a result of naked ambition on the part of autocrats who stoked the fires of self-interested nationalism by creating enemies where none existed. The horrors of that war prompted thoughtful economic policies and international protocols that have helped prevent serious conflict and increased economic prosperity for most people worldwide. This was accomplished by working with other nations, not by bullying and demeaning them.

The parallels of the 1930s and today are eerily stark. If Congress fails to act to curb the worst impulses of the president and his administration, the peace and prosperity we have enjoyed for the past 80 years are at serious risk.

MARK HUNTER, ATLANTA

Constitution protects free speech, good and bad

On the news that former Middle Tennessee State University dean Laura Sosh-Lightsy has sued because of her firing after responding viciously to the Charlie Kirk assassination, she probably will win and win big. The mistake the institution has made is simple: It let the emotional atmosphere dictate policy. The mistake those who oppose the evil and morally bankrupt folks who supported the assassination is that they attempted to silence them.

Let the anti-Kirk folks speak out. They make idiots of themselves. They degrade any credibility they may have amassed in their careers. They condemn themselves.

The firing is unnecessary, and for MTSU, it likely will be costly. Free speech protects the moral and exposes the morally suspect, and that's what the Constitution intends.

ELAINE KROMHOUT, MORGANTON

Focus of deportation seems to be in 'blue' states

If illegal immigration is such a problem for this country, why is the administration currently focusing so many law enforcement resources in Minnesota?

There are an estimated 100,000 or so illegal immigrants in that state, compared to an estimated 1 million or more in Florida and 2 million in Texas. Could it be that Minnesota is a blue state, and Florida and Texas are red?

MATT WILLIS, LAWRENCEVILLE