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Texas' Holocaust Remembrance Week is more important than ever

Antisemitic attacks have been on the rise since Oct. 7.



The Memorial and Reflection Room honors Dallas-area survivors and their families of the Holocaust at the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum in downtown Dallas, on Thursday, September 12, 2019. Today's

climate also makes clear that teaching the lessons of the Holocaust must go beyond the simple confines of historical understanding, write Kenneth Goldberg and Rachel Fish. (Tom Fox / Staff Photographer)

By Kenneth Goldberg and Rachel Fish
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In the 4 1/2 years since the Texas Legislature established [Holocaust Remembrance Week](#) in the state's public schools, we have been continually reminded why this effort is essential.

During the week (which, this year, is Jan. 22-26), Texas school districts are required to teach students about the Holocaust, during which 6 million European Jews and 11 million people overall were slaughtered by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s. The schools' [legal mandate](#) is to “inspire in students a sense of responsibility to recognize and uphold the human value and to prevent future atrocities.”

Sadly, every day we see that such atrocities are not only possible but are actually happening.

In the years after Gov. Greg Abbott signed the legislation in 2019, the nation and world saw a spike in attacks on Jews. Texas was not immune from the scourge. A rabbi and his congregants were [held hostage by an anti-Israel terrorist in Colleyville](#). A synagogue was [set on fire in Austin](#) by a white supremacist. Neo-Nazis hung swastikas from highway overpasses and blanketed communities [with fliers that blamed Jews](#) for everything from COVID-19 to controlling the media and government.



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Then came Oct. 7, 2023. Hamas terrorists raped, terrorized, and killed more than 1,200 Israelis, primarily civilians, and kidnapped 240 more. This horrific act was the bloodiest day for Jewish people since the Holocaust. It showed that Hamas is committed to the [genocidal promise in its charter](#) to annihilate Israel and indiscriminately kill Jews and Israelis.

As horrifying as that day was, the aftermath has been just as frightening. Instead of standing by Israel and the world's Jewish community in its darkest hour, too many ordinary people and world leaders have blamed Israel and unleashed a torrent of hate against Jews.

The [Anti-Defamation League](#) reported more than 2,000 antisemitic incidents in the first two months after Oct. 7 — the highest number in any two-month period since it began tracking antisemitic acts in the 1970s.

We've seen attacks on Jewish-owned businesses, schools, and synagogues worldwide and countless acts of physical violence, including a [murder in Los Angeles](#). In North Texas, [college students](#) have reported feeling unsafe and ignored by university administrators, and [Temple Emanu-El was targeted by protesters](#) waving a Nazi flag, holding antisemitic signs, and wearing swastikas.

Even the criticism of Israel's military response has crossed the line from legitimate scrutiny of its military policies in Gaza to questioning its very existence and depicting the world's only Jewish state as the embodiment of evil. Activists routinely deny the right of Jews to live anywhere between [the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea](#) and have used that "political" view as a guise to target Jews.

Just as antisemites have tried for generations to deny the Holocaust, over the past three months, many have also denied the truth of Oct. 7. They've built on the "Big Lie" theory promulgated by Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, who understood that when you repeat something often enough, many people will come to internalize and accept it. Israel's critics are leveraging social media to deny and distort the reality of Hamas' attacks — including the horrific [rape of Israelis](#) — because the narrative does not conform with their worldview that Jews are perennial oppressors.

These trends mirror the antisemitism unleashed after Israel's 2021 war in Gaza. Research [by Boundless](#) and the [Network Contagion Research Institute](#) demonstrated that intense antisemitic language online quickly normalized violence, which lasted for months after the war ended.

In this environment, Holocaust Remembrance Week is more important than ever. But today's climate also makes clear that teaching the lessons of the Holocaust must go beyond the simple confines of historical understanding. For many students, the Holocaust seems like ancient history, so it's vital that educators connect it to today's events so students understand how societies can allow such venomous hate to spread.

The past 4 1/2 years have shown that Jew-hatred is a malignant cancer that will infect a society's healthy tissues and organs and corrode them from within. Teachers this week have an opportunity to help their students make sense of the cancer of antisemitism and draw a clear connection between today's horrors and the horrors of the past.

Kenneth Goldberg is the former president of Dallas' Jewish Community Center and chairman of the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission. Rachel Fish is special adviser to the president at Brandeis University and co-founder of Boundless, which supports Israel education and combats hatred of Jews.

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Kenneth Goldberg and Rachel Fish

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