Top 10 Moments of Inspiration and Hope in 2021

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As the year draws to a close, ADL looks back on the moments from 2021 that gave us hope and encouragement that our hundred-plus-year fight against antisemitism and hate is making progress.

And there were plenty of big, inspirational moments to choose from in 2021: A $26 million verdict against the white supremacists responsible for Charlottesville; the launch of a $1.1 billion foundation to help prevent Anti-Asian hate crimes; and meaningful legal victories against racially motivated violence – just to name a few.

Here's our list of the Top 10 most inspiring moments of 2021, as selected and curated by members of ADL's staff.

**LANDMARK VICTORY IN CHARLOTTESVILLE TRIAL: $26 MILLION VERDICT AGAINST WHITE SUPREMACISTS**

A federal court jury in Charlottesville, after hearing four weeks of testimony in *Sines v. Kessler*, found the main leaders of the deadly far-right “Unite the Right” rally in 2017 liable under state law for injuries to counter-protesters, awarding nearly $26 million in damages. The trial, one of the most important cases against extremists in modern history, exposed the depths of hate that motivated the defendants, which included two dozen white supremacists and neo-Nazis, including Richard Spencer, Jason Kessler, Christopher Cantwell, Identity Evropa, Vanguard America, League of the South and more. ADL and its Center on Extremism supported the work of Integrity First for America, the organization that brought the case to trial, as part of its long history of fighting bigotry, hate and bias. The verdict sent a powerful message to extremists everywhere that there would be serious consequences for violence motivated by racism and hate. And this trial was just the first salvo in seeking accountability. Last week, the Attorney General of the District of Columbia announced a new lawsuit against the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers for their role in the January 6 Capitol insurrection. ADL is serving as co-counsel in this case.
POLICY MILESTONES THAT ARE POISED TO DRIVE SYSTEMIC CHANGE

While incremental changes to government policy don't always make for big headlines, there were several milestone federal bills this year that are expected to have a dramatic impact on the fight against hate and extremism for years to come. In the aftermath of the January 6 Capitol insurrection, the U.S. government released its first-ever comprehensive interagency strategy focused specifically on countering the threat of domestic violent extremism, such as violent white supremacy and anti-government extremism. Many elements of the Biden Administration’s plan, announced in mid-June, directly corresponded with ADL’s PROTECT Plan, a comprehensive proposal for countering extremism released in February. And in April the U.S. Senate, with bipartisan support, passed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act and the Khalid Jabara and Heather Heyer National Opposition to Hate Assaults and Threats to Equality Act (NO HATE Act), named after two victims of attacks carried out by extremists. The president later signed both bills into law. The two bills, which ADL supported extensively, address the rise in hate crimes and violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and establish...
new measures to address the disturbing increase in hate crimes, including law enforcement prevention, training, and education.

It was a breathtaking moment: After a divisive presidential election campaign season and the attempted insurrection at the Capitol in early January, a young African American poet, Amanda Gorman, stepped into the national spotlight and seized the world’s attention with her inspirational poem, “The Hill We Climb.” Aside from the symbolism of a young Black woman speaking for her generation at a presidential inauguration, Gorman made history as the youngest poet to address a presidential inauguration. Her captivating prose, and the dramatic closing line, “There is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it/ If only we're brave enough to be it” was an inspiration to millions around the world. We, too, were inspired and lifted by Ms. Gorman’s clarion call for unity at a time when the nation...
continued to grapple with issues of racism and hate, an ongoing pandemic, and with divisions that threaten to undermine our democracy and civil society. And ADL was proud to welcome this amazing National Youth Poet Laureate to kick off ADL’s No Place for Hate school year. No Place for Hate teaches and inspires 1.3 million students each year to fight bias, bullying and bigotry in our schools.

STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARAB COUNTRIES THROUGH THE SIGNING OF THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS PORTENDS NEW ERA OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

This year marked the strengthening of relations between Israel and several Arab countries - both on the governmental and people-to-people levels, in the wake of 2020 historic Abraham Accords. In 2021, Israel exchanged embassies with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and trade between Israel and the Emirates may reach as high as $1 billion by the end of this year. Morocco became the first Arab state to sign a defense Memorandum of Understanding with Israel. Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi hosted the first-ever state visit by an Israeli premier, where UAE and Israeli officials agreed to establish a joint research and development
fund to help reinforce trade, technology, energy and climate efforts. Meanwhile, just weeks ago, Israeli officials indicated that Israel is expecting to sign additional normalization agreements with Arab states in the coming year and is in active discussions with nearly every state in the region. And in Israel, a new diverse Israeli coalition government was formed, one of the most diverse in Israel's history, including the Israeli-Arab Raam party, along with parties ranging from the right to the left.

DEBORAH LIPSTADT NOMINATED AS THE NEXT ANTISEMITISM ENVOY AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT

At a time of rising antisemitism both at home and abroad, it was more than encouraging that the Biden Administration sought out one of the world’s foremost
experts on the subject for the position of United States Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism at the U.S. State Department. The administration’s choice – Deborah Lipstadt – is no stranger to anyone who has followed the issues of antisemitism and Holocaust denial. Perhaps no one person has invested more of her life’s work in researching, documenting, exposing and fighting antisemitism – as an academic, author, orator and activist. Perhaps best known or her legal battle against the notorious British Holocaust denier David Irving, who attempted to sue her in court and lost, Lipstadt is well known and admired across the Jewish community for her keen intellectual prowess as well as her blunt outspokenness when it comes to the root causes of antisemitism. It needs to be said: We hope that the Senate will move quickly on her confirmation, which is, as of this writing, being held in political limbo for no apparent good reason.
THE ASIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION INCUBATED WITH $1.1 BILLION, AND A BOOST FROM ADL
Just six weeks after the Atlanta-area shooting spree that targeted Asian women in March, and in the midst of a surge in anti-Asian hate crimes, a small group of business leaders active in the AAPI community launched The Asian American Foundation (TAAF) with a $125 million commitment from its board. The grant-making organization was founded with a goal to work with existing AAPI organizations to empower them to fight hate and extremism across society. In creating the new foundation, the founders enlisted ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt for his expertise, recruiting him to join the new board, and enabling the group to tap into ADL’s resources and extensive knowledge in countering hate crimes. The new foundation comes at a critical time -- when anti-Asian hate crimes are at an all-time high due to coronavirus misinformation both online and from elected officials who blamed the virus on China. Within the first two weeks of its existence, TAAF had raised about $1 billion more from foundations, corporations and individuals, and Greenblatt was tapped as the only non-AAPI member of the board of directors.
President Biden’s choices for key cabinet and administration positions repeatedly broke barriers in 2021. Beginning in 2020 with his choice of Kamala Harris as Vice President, the first woman and woman of color to hold that office, the president continued to shatter the glass ceiling with his choice of Pete Buttigieg as the first openly gay cabinet member, and Deb Haaland as the first Native American cabinet member. The appointments followed up on the president’s pledge to make his Cabinet the most diverse in U.S. history and a better representation of the current ethnic makeup of the country, and, according to at least one independent assessment, he had followed through on that promise, with a Cabinet that was 45 percent female and 55 percent nonwhite -- far outstripping the Cabinet diversity of both presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Another 58 percent of Biden’s 1,500 agency appointees are women, according to the White House. Other firsts included first woman of color to chair the Council of Economic Advisors (Cecilia Rouse), first woman of color to serve as U.S. trade representative (Katherine Tai), the first Black Secretary of Defense (Lloyd Austin) and the first Latino and immigrant to serve as secretary of Homeland Security (Alejandro Mayorkas), the first Black Secretary of Defense (Lloyd Austin) and the first Latino and immigrant to serve as secretary of Homeland Security (Alejandro Mayorkas).
While the nation has yet to heal from the racially motivated killings that took the lives of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, juries in both cases reached decisions that finally brought a measure of justice and a sense of closure to the families of the victims. In Brunswick, Georgia, this November, a jury found three White men charged in the killing of Arbery guilty on multiple murder counts and related charges. The verdict followed eight days of painful testimony by witnesses to the killing of Arbery, whose death spurred national outrage and helped shine a light on the scourge of racially motivated crimes nationwide. Meanwhile, former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pleaded guilty to a federal charge of violating Floyd’s civil rights, admitting that he kept his knee on Floyd’s neck even after he became unresponsive. Chauvin’s plea followed his conviction in the spring of state murder and manslaughter charges in Floyd’s death, for which he was sentenced to more than 22 years in prison.

MEANINGFUL LEGAL VICTORIES IN RACIALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS OF FLOYD AND ARBERY

Getty Images
FACEBOOK WHISTLEBLOWER MOTIVATES ACTION

A stunning series of revelations came to light through internal Facebook documents leaked by courageous whistleblower Frances Haugen, a former data scientist at the company. These documents opened a window into the inner workings of the company. The *tens of thousands of pages of confidential documents* were used to substantiate complaints Haugen filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission against Facebook, claiming that the notoriously secret company was intentionally hiding vital information from its investors, the public and the government. The leaked documents reveal that Facebook's own research shows that the company knows its products harm children, sow division, and undermine democratic norms. *In a dramatic series of Congressional hearings*, Haugen told legislators that Facebook had consistently chosen profits and growth over protecting users, all while hiding data and internal research that clearly illustrated the harm caused by Facebook products. “The result has been more division, more harm, more lies, more threats and more combat,” she testified. “In some cases, this dangerous online talk has led to actual violence that harms and even kills people.” While she wasn’t the first – or the last – Facebook employee to raise concerns about the world's largest social network, Haugen's compelling testimony and the internal documents she brought to light made a significant impact. Haugen provided an extremely important and convincing counternarrative to Facebook's consistent deflection and denial that the company does not take consumer protection seriously. CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who continued to defend the company's products, insisted that the internal research had been “taken out of context” and misrepresented to “construct a false narrative that we don’t care.” Legislators and regulators will have the final say as they consider new legislation to help rein in the abuses of Big Tech.
Antisemitism continued to have an impact in America in 2021, appearing on college campuses, on social media, and at times expressed behind closed doors. But in some communities this age-old hatred surfaced in ways that were at first shocking, but later, revealing, for the loving acts of kindness it inspired in response.

Take Austin, Texas, where a series of blatantly antisemitic incidents in October and November horrified friends and neighbors and unsettled the community. White supremacists were seen hanging vicious antisemitic banners over local freeway overpasses. Local high school students found antisemitic, racist and homophobic slurs and symbols painted in their parking lot and a local Jewish congregation was set on fire. But rather than brush these incidents off, residents of Austin acted. On Sunday, November 14, the entire community rallied at the Texas State Capitol to promote acts of love and kindness in the face of hate. They were joined by the mayor, state senators, a congressman and others who spoke out.
against hate crimes and called for all people to unite against hate. On November 1, the local interfaith community released a statement in support of the Jewish community signed by over 500 faith and local leaders.

Or take George Washington University, where the destruction of a small replica Torah scroll used for initiation at a Jewish fraternity caused students and faculty to voice outrage and to hold a rally against hate. The desecration was described as the latest in a series of antisemitic incidents affecting the Washington, D.C. campus and others across the country. Nearly 400 students gathered for the rally, and speakers and organizers of the event said they were deeply moved by the “historic” turnout of students.

And, take Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where the community that experienced the devastating Tree of Life synagogue shooting in 2018 arranged and hosted the groundbreaking Eradicate Hate Global Summit, which in October brought together some of the world’s leading multidisciplinary anti-hate experts for three days of speeches and collaboration. Rather than let themselves be defined as victims of hate, the Pittsburgh community resolved to convert what happened at the Tree of Life – the largest loss of life in an antisemitic event in U.S. history – into what was described as “the most significant anti-hate rule of law initiative in the world.”

Finally, in the face of terrible antisemitic physical attacks in May, more than 30 diverse political leaders joined in solidarity with the Jewish community for an online “virtual rally” to combat antisemitism featuring House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. More than 23,000 people attended the bipartisan online event.

All these efforts, and others elsewhere, stand as testament to the fact that when good people act in the face of hate, good things invariably will happen. We were
inspired and awed by these selfless acts to turn incidents of hate into moments of hope.