Top 10 Heartbreaking Moments of Hate in 2021, and How ADL Responded

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The year 2021 was marked by a series of heart-wrenching setbacks in the fight against hate around the world. From the Capitol insurrection on January 6 to
brazen attacks on Jews, Asian Americans, and other marginalized groups in the streets of New York and Los Angeles, these events drew back the curtain on the prevalence of antisemitism and racism, fueled hatred in our communities and fostered division across society.

Fortunately, they did not come without repercussions or a response. Unfailingly, good people in communities across the United States spoke out forcefully against hate – as did many of our nation's leaders. And ADL’s dedicated team of professionals mobilized time and again in response to fight hate in the trenches.

At the close of each year, ADL's experts and staff traditionally take a moment to reflect on the moments that shaped the year – for better and for worse. Here's our take on the Top 10 moments of hate in 2021.

**THE JANUARY 6 INSURRECTION**

In a shocking display of violence and aggression, a horde of extremists and pro-Trump loyalists descended on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, pushing through barriers and assaulting law enforcement officers in their attempt to interfere with the constitutionally prescribed electoral process. The attack, sparked in part by conspiracy theories spread online about a supposedly “stolen election” and encouraged at a rally beforehand by then-President Trump, included shocking displays of antisemitism, such as a man wearing a shirt emblazoned with the words “Camp Auschwitz.” This was a predictable act of political violence fueled by years of increasing domestic violent extremism. One individual was shot and killed as she attempted to infiltrate a closed wing of the building; numerous law enforcement officers were seriously injured, and four members of law enforcement guarding the building that day later died by suicide. Congressional investigations continue to this day.

In response to the violence and chaos that day, ADL reviewed footage and highlighted connections between those who breached the Capitol and groups like the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Groypers and other white supremacy groups, as
well as QAnon conspiracy theorists. ADL introduced its PROTECT Plan to mitigate the threat of domestic terrorism while protecting civil liberties, with seven actions to significantly help prevent and counter domestic terrorism in the future. And just this month, ADL announced that it was serving as co-counsel in a federal lawsuit filed by D.C. Attorney General Karl Racine to hold two violent groups accountable for the role they played in planning and carrying out the attack on January 6.

MAINSTREAMING OF ANTI-ZIONISM TRIGGERS SURGE OF ANTI-SEMITIC INCIDENTS DURING THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT
In May, a multifaceted security crisis exploded on the ground in Israel, Gaza and the region, much of it building upon long-term tensions and dynamics. Over 4,300 rockets and missiles were fired from Gaza toward Israeli civilian centers. In response to the barrage of rockets, the Israeli military launched “Operation Guardian of the Walls” targeting Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad sites and operatives throughout Gaza via airstrikes and artillery fire. As the crisis unfolded between Israel and Hamas, there was an alarming outbreak of violence in a number of Israeli cities which have significant populations of both Jewish and Arab citizens. Throughout the conflict it was evident that anti-Zionist sentiment had become increasingly mainstreamed, with demonizing rhetoric directed at Israel and those associated with Israel by influential voices. Within this atmosphere, around the globe there were incidents of violent antisemitism targeting Jewish people and institutions. Some perpetrators of these attacks deliberately targeted Jewish institutions to express their anger toward Israel. In the U.S., Jews were brazenly assaulted in the streets in New York and Los Angeles, and ADL saw an increase in on-the-ground activity that demonized Israel and, at times, crossed into antisemitism. An ADL analysis of Twitter in the days following the recent outbreak of violence showed more than 17,000 tweets which used variations of the phrase, “Hitler was right” between May 7 and May 14, 2021.

In response, ADL comprehensively documented antisemitic incidents and called out antisemitic actions, including extreme and demonizing speech related to Israel that contributed to an environment in which Jews were attacked. ADL also spoke out against subsequent antisemitic incidents linked to anti-Zionism, including the Sunrise DC’s exclusion of Jewish groups, Linda Sarsour’s comments after the Surfside collapse and antisemitic remarks by Zahra Billoo of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). ADL also provided resources for responding to demonizing accusations about Israel as well as tips to have conscientious conversations about the conflict.
A consortium of 17 U.S. news organizations began publishing articles based on the Facebook Papers, a trove of tens of thousands of internal documents leaked by whistleblower Frances Haugen and included in disclosures made to the Securities and Exchange Commission. The disclosures suggested that the social media behemoth knowingly misled investors and the public about the spread of misinformation, hate and violence on its various platforms in the lead-up to the Jan. 6 insurrection. Whistleblower Frances Haugen stepped forward with further allegations about how the company had intentionally misled the public, the press and organizations about its own research showing how Facebook amplifies hate, misinformation, and political unrest. “The things I saw at Facebook over and over again was there were conflicts of interest between what was good for the public, and what was good for Facebook,” Haugen told 60 Minutes. “Facebook has realized that if they change the algorithm to be safer, people will spend less time on the site, they’ll click on less ads, they’ll make less money.”
In response ADL continued to build on the momentum started by the Stop Hate for Profit coalition of organizations it had founded in 2020 to address the harms caused by Facebook. ADL’s senior leaders testified multiple times before Congress and state legislatures on the issue and announced the rollout of ADL’s REPAIR Plan, proposing a series of legislative and other steps to rein in Big Tech.

INAPPROPRIATE HOLOCAUST COMPARISONS SURGE AS PANDEMIC RAGES

Opposition to mask wearing mandates and vaccine requirements led to a surge of inappropriate comparisons between common sense public health measures and the policies of Nazi Germany that led to the Holocaust. Some federal and state leaders railed against the proposed vaccine passports, with Rep. Madison Cawthorn saying the proposals “smack of 1940s Nazi Germany.” The Libertarian Party of Kentucky compared such passports to Nazi Germany’s practice of mandating that Jews wear yellow Stars of David, and in some locations around the
protests against mask mandates included people wearing yellow stars.

Jewish leaders repeatedly spoke out about the danger of trivializing and distorting the real history of the Holocaust at a time when Holocaust denial is on the rise. ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt made the point emphatically that such comparisons are "ignorant and shameful," noting that "The Holocaust was one of the darkest periods in our history with millions of lives lost." ADL wrote letters to various state and Congressional leaders deploring such comparisons as odious and false.

Threats and harassment by anti-vaccine conspiracy theorists against public school officials and medical professionals have also become increasingly common during the pandemic. Extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, have joined these efforts, which have included doxing and spreading extremist propaganda. ADL has called for criminal doxing to be outlawed.
The FBI's annual hate crimes report, released in August 2021, revealed that 2020 saw a six percent increase in reported hate crimes from the previous year and represented the highest total in 12 years. A total of 8,052 hate crime incidents were reported, an increase from 7,314 in 2019 and the most since 2008, when 7,783 hate crime incidents were counted. Reported hate crimes targeting Black people rose by at least 43 percent, and the number of anti-Asian hate crimes nearly doubled. Hate crimes targeting the Jewish community made up nearly 60 percent of all religion-based hate crimes. The increase in reported hate crimes came even though, for the third straight year, the number of law enforcement agencies providing data to the FBI declined.
In response, ADL continued to call for improved data collection and urged federal legislators to pass and expand legislation requiring municipalities to accurately report hate crimes to the federal government. And in April 2021, ADL praised the U.S. Senate's bipartisan passage of the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act as well as the Khalid Jabara and Heather Heyer National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality Act (Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act), both of which were ADL legislative priorities.

Meanwhile, multiple white supremacist and antisemitic groups expanded their networks. ADL has watched groups like the Goyim Defense League, the Nationalist Socialist Movement using social media and public events to increase their influence and attract new members. Some individual members from these groups have joined the White Lives Matter movement, while members of the Goyim Defense League held antisemitic protests outside Jewish institutions. ADL has paid close attention to these groups and others like them, tracking their movements on our H.E.A.T. map.

NEW ANTI-VOTER LAWS APPEAR DESIGNED TO TARGET PEOPLE OF COLOR
In an unprecedented year for anti-voter legislation, at least 19 states have enacted 33 laws so far, making it more difficult for Americans to cast a vote, with state lawmakers leaning on outright falsehoods to justify these laws despite the fact that the 2020 election was the most secure in U.S. history. These laws interfere with the freedom to vote by erecting deliberate, unnecessary barriers that disproportionately affect people of color, students, people who live in rural areas, low-income people, and other marginalized communities.

In March 2021, the Georgia State Legislature passed SB 202, a major law that restricted and suppressed voting across the state. Voting rights groups, civil rights groups, Democrats and other advocates criticized and condemned the law, saying it limits voting rights and it unfairly targets voters of color. Many other states followed suit.

In addition to condemning the legislation and creating educational materials around it, ADL also committed to furthering its partnership with the National Urban League to fight this effort. ADL has also remained actively engaged with partner organizations on ways to ensure equal and fair access to the ballot during a pandemic, including serving as a plaintiff (represented by the Brennan Center) in a new case in Texas challenging that state’s latest voter suppression law.
The March shootings unfolded over several hours across the metropolitan Atlanta area. The accused shooter, Robert Aaron Long, killed eight people across two counties in a rampage targeting three massage parlors. All of the killings had one thing in common – the people murdered were women, and all were of Asian descent. Prosecutors later declared the Fulton County shootings hate crimes because the perpetrator had intentionally targeted some of the victims because they were of Asian heritage. The shootings unfolded at a time when the entire Asian American and Pacific Islander community was already on edge from a severe uptick in racially motivated hate crimes aimed at their community stemming from anti-Asian rhetoric around the spread of coronavirus. In August, Stop AAPI Hate, a national coalition that gathers data on anti-Asian incidents, reported more than 4,500 incidents targeting the AAPI community in just 2021 alone.
In response, ADL helped to incubate The Asian American Foundation after a small group of individuals active in the AAPI community enlisted ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt's guidance in creating the new organization, which named the tracking of hate incidents as one of its top three priorities.

A new survey conducted by Hillel International and ADL found that antisemitism is a looming and present threat for Jewish college students, with one in three students personally experiencing antisemitic hate directed at them in the last academic year. The nationally representative survey also found that most students who experienced antisemitic activity on campus did not report it, suggesting the frequency of incidents on campus is larger than previously thought. For the first time, the survey made clear that antisemitism and hate are of growing concern for Jewish college students and merits the serious attention of university leaders across the country.
In response to these trends, ADL and Hillel joined forces to work collaboratively on several initiatives starting in the new academic year to proactively address the disturbing rise in antisemitic activity on campus through new educational programs and assessments of the climate on campus for Jewish students. The new initiative harnesses ADL’s deep expertise in tracking and responding to antisemitic incidents and Hillel’s vast network of professionals and programs on campus. Working together, ADL and Hillel will grow their education and engagement of the full campus with quality curricula, programming and research, and will collaborate in responding to antisemitic incidents.

With the election of Iran’s most radical president in history, Ebrahim Raisi, the Government of Iran remained the world’s number one state sponsor of terrorism, antisemitism and Holocaust denial. This year, Tehran continued to support terrorist attacks against Israel, as well as plots targeting Jewish individuals or
communities around the world, including reported plots in both Cyprus and in East Africa. Iran dramatically increased its illicit nuclear activities during 2021 and elected a new government headed by a president responsible for a 50-part documentary to promote the notorious antisemitic forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Two cabinet members in the new government are wanted for their role in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Throughout 2021, ADL continued to document and call out antisemitism emanating from the Iranian regime, including by Iran’s leadership and in textbooks and educational materials, drawing attention to Iran’s persecution of vulnerable minorities.

ADL SURVEY SHOWS MOST U.S. TEENS EXPERIENCE ALARMING LEVELS OF HATE/HARASSMENT WHEN GAMING ONLINE
Sixty percent of children ages 13-17 have experienced harassment while playing games online, according to a first-of-its-kind survey of youth online gaming experiences. The ADL survey found that, despite the significant percentage of young people who reported experiencing harassment while gaming online within the six months prior to the survey period, less than 40 percent of parents or guardians of young people surveyed reported implementing safety controls in online multiplayer games. Additionally, less than half of teenage gamers say that they talk to the adults in their lives about their experiences in online multiplayer games.

This new research examining the experiences of young online gamers shed important light on their specific experiences and revealed deeply disturbing trends. In response, ADL’s Center for Technology and Society issued detailed recommendations for actions the games industry, civil society and the government should take to reduce hateful content and harassing behavior in online games. These include asking gaming platforms to implement product safety controls as the default; encouraging civil rights and education groups, among others, to broaden their work to address the impact of online multiplayer games; and calling on government legislators to strengthen and enforce laws that protect targets of online hate and harassment.