

Four Questions: Fighting Antisemitism and Seeking Freedom from Persecution

A Haggadah Supplement

What does Passover teach us about the continuing need to fight antisemitism and hate?

The story of Passover is one of Jewish enslavement and suffering, of migration and loss, but it is also a story of liberation and joy. “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but now we are free” (Avadim Hayinu, Passover Haggadah).

As we revisit this account that our ancestors have told for generations, let us consider what lessons it holds for us today about the need to be vigilant against antisemitism and hate. The Passover story of liberation is at the core of Jewish values, urging us never to forget what it is to be vulnerable and the lessons we should draw from that experience: “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 23:9). We are therefore commanded to ensure justice for ourselves and for others: “Justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deut. 16:20).

The scourge of antisemitism has followed us throughout our history. ADL’s recently published [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents for 2022](#) documented the highest number of such incidents in the more than four decades that ADL has been tracking them. There were increases in assaults, vandalism, and harassment, targeting individuals, synagogues, and other Jewish institutions. And we know there have been similar increases in hate crimes and incidents targeting other marginalized communities.

We have seen a general mainstreaming of extremism, the spread of conspiracy theories, disinformation, and ugly propaganda, and [surveys](#) showing a greater prevalence of antisemitic attitudes. Once largely relegated to white supremacist rhetoric, the racist, anti-immigrant, and often antisemitic “great replacement” theory – a classic example of antisemitism – has made its way into mainstream consciousness in the past several years.

In recent years, we have seen the consequences of unchecked hate: from Charleston to Charlottesville to Pittsburgh, from El Paso to Buffalo, we know how antisemitism, racism, anti-LGBTQ+ hate, anti-immigrant hate, and other forms of bias can intertwine to result in bias incidents and even deadly violence against vulnerable communities.

For all of us, antisemitism and these related hatreds undermine our sense of security and ability to truly feel free. Let us continue to speak out against antisemitism and bigotry, defend ourselves and protect our neighbors from bias and hate, and work together to truly achieve freedom and justice for all.

Why does Passover inspire us to advocate for freedom from oppression and persecution?

As the Haggadah reminds us, citing Rabban Gamliel (BT Pesachim 117b), we should never forget our history or become complacent. We must therefore remember that like the Jewish people, many continue to face persecution, many are displaced and in need of a safe place to call home, many are in need of our advocacy and support.

In every generation, and specifically during the Seder, each of us is obligated to see ourselves as if we, personally, came out of Egypt. At our Seder table, let us commit not merely to remember, but also to act so that all who seek safety and security will find open arms and open hearts. People come to the United States from all over the world, fleeing persecution and dire circumstances in their countries of origin. Those that have found safe haven here have flourished and contributed to the well-being of the nation, including as vital frontline workers during the pandemic, despite ongoing anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric. Those who seek safe haven now continue to face prejudice and hate in the various regions where they resettle. As we engage in our own fight against antisemitism, we must also welcome them and advocate for their safety and security.

Throughout history, immigrants and refugees fleeing oppression and persecution in their own lands have sadly often been met with anti-immigrant and anti-refugee prejudice and hate. The U.S. – symbolized by the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor – has aspired to be a beacon of hope for refugees fleeing oppression, for victims of religious persecution, and for immigrants seeking better lives. But anti-immigrant and racist policies and culture have undermined that goal. From the antisemitic and racist Immigration Act of 1924 to the Islamophobic Muslim Ban of 2017 to more recent policies barring asylum and migration from the southern border, the promise of freedom is not equally available to all.

Many Jewish American families first came to this country as refugees and asylum seekers. We are acutely aware of what happens when the United States flatly denies asylum to displaced persons without consideration for the harm they may face once turned away from this country's protection, for the incident of the *St. Louis* is burned into our collective memory. In 1939, the German ship *St. Louis* sailed for Cuba carrying 937 passengers. Almost all of them were Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. Most of the Jewish passengers had applied for U.S. visas and were planning to stay in Cuba only until they could enter the United States. However, political conditions in Cuba changed abruptly just before the ship sailed and only 28 passengers were actually admitted by the Cuban government. The remaining passengers were left in limbo – unable to disembark and be admitted to Cuba and terrified of turning back. With the U.S. refusing to admit the asylum seekers aboard, the *St. Louis* ultimately had no choice but to return to Europe. 254 former *St. Louis* passengers were later murdered in the Holocaust.

The Jewish people's own experiences of oppression and migration, both historical and modern-day, give us a special perspective to consider the needs of those who are now on an exodus to the United States or other havens as they flee persecution and hardship in their home countries. In addition to speaking out against a surge of antisemitism in this country, let us recognize that this era of global mass displacement is also an era of prejudice and hate against immigrant and refugee communities. Through our awareness and action, we can pursue improved security for our own community while also working towards the goal of achieving freedom, inclusion, safety, and security for all.

What facts can I share to counter antisemitism, hate and bias in this country?

Countering antisemitism requires assessing and understanding the pulse of antisemitism in the United States. Sharing details from ADL's recent [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#) and survey of [Antisemitic Attitudes in America](#) can explain why we are at an inflection point in this country now. Antisemitism and anti-Zionism have been entering the mainstream in unprecedented ways, and we need a whole-of-society approach to respond to these dangerous trends.

Because welcoming the stranger is a fundamental Jewish value, we also need to acknowledge that we are living today in a world in which millions of people have been and remain displaced by war, persecution, and instability. For the first time in recorded history, the number of displaced people in the world [exceeds 100 million](#). Asylum seekers are turned away from border after border even as climate-related weather events have had disastrous consequences for the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

In an age of disinformation and bigotry, anti-immigrant hate and misconceptions about immigrants and asylum seekers have spread throughout American politics and society. As a result, this country has seen a concerning uptick in rhetoric, policies, and social movements that threaten to or directly harm immigrants and refugees. [This resource](#) contains information and sources that set the record straight and will hopefully help mitigate the damage caused by disinformation about immigrants.

What can I do to fight antisemitism and support those seeking freedom from oppression and persecution, during and after Passover?

- Encourage public officials and civic leaders to use their bully pulpits to speak out against antisemitism and all forms of hate and extremism; support measures to provide law enforcement officials with the necessary tools and training to respond to bias-motivated crimes and educators the resources to expand anti-bias training; and urge school districts to promote anti-bias, bullying prevention and Holocaust education programs and university leaders to respond firmly and forcefully to antisemitic acts on college campuses.
- Support [Kulanu](#), ADL's program dedicated to empowering congregations to address antisemitism and hate in their communities through education, community engagement, and advocacy. During the program, participants join a network of congregations to build bridges of understanding across communities. ADL has resources that will help develop and implement engaging and impactful programming through our exclusive Kulanu initiative inspiration library, interactive webinars with ADL experts, and guidance from our professionals.
- Combat anti-immigrant/anti-refugee hate and bias by sharing ADL resources with your communities and educating others about immigration issues and the increase in anti-immigrant bias.
 1. [Education Resources for Educators and Parents on Immigration, Immigrants and Anti-Immigrant Bias](#)
 2. ["The Great Replacement:" An Explainer](#)
 3. [Eight Facts about Immigrants and Immigration](#)
- Consider sponsoring refugees through [Welcome Corps](#). This new program for supporting refugees through private sponsorship allows people to work in groups of at least five to welcome refugee newcomers by securing and preparing initial housing, greeting refugee newcomers at the airport, enrolling children in school, and helping adults find employment. Groups are trained and supported by refugee resettlement organizations like HIAS.

Visit [adl.org](https://www.adl.org) for additional resources.