

Kentucky Jewish Council

Antisemitism Report 2023

What is Antisemitism?

Antisemitism is a form of discrimination or prejudice against Jews. It can manifest itself in various ways, including hostility, prejudice, and violence toward Jews, as well as the promotion of negative stereotypes about Jews. Antisemitism has a long history, dating back to ancient times, and it continues to be a problem in many parts of the world today. It is often based on the belief that Jews are a distinct and inferior race, or that they have certain negative characteristics or traits that make them different from other people. However, these beliefs are not based on fact and are instead rooted in prejudice and discrimination. Antisemitism is a form of racism.

The word "antisemitism" was coined in the late 19th century. The term was used to describe prejudice and discrimination against Jews. It was first used in this sense in an 1879 essay by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr, who used it to describe his belief that Jews were a distinct and inferior race that posed a threat to the purity of the Aryan race. The term quickly gained popularity and was widely used to describe anti-Jewish sentiment in Europe and beyond. Contrary to a popular misconception, it does not refer to Semitic peoples as a whole.

In 2021, Kentucky adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's Definition of antisemitism, which includes:

1. Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
2. Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective – such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
3. Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
4. Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).

5. Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
6. Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
7. Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
8. Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
9. Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
10. Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
11. Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.
12. Holocaust denial or minimizing the scale and impact of the Holocaust, a genocide in which six million Jews were killed by the Nazi regime during World War II.

The Full IHRA Definition, which has been adopted by the United States, and 36 other nations, can be found here:

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism/adoption-endorsement>

It is important to note that not all forms of antisemitism are overt or explicitly expressed. Some forms of antisemitism may be more subtle or disguised, and may not be immediately apparent to others.

ANTISEMITISM IN 2023

This year had the bloodiest day in Jewish History since the Holocaust, in the Oct 7th Massacre, as well as other horrific attacks including;

The Murder of a Jewish man at a political rally in California,

Hundreds of bomb threats against Jewish Centers,

A sharp rise in antisemitism on college campuses, including arson and violence,

Massive violent antisemitic attacks across Israel,

A wave of antisemitism on social media including X and Tiktok,

Mainstreaming of Antisemitism by NGOs such as HRW, CAIR, UN, and Academia

ANTISEMITISM IN KENTUCKY - 2023

January 2023

Holocaust Appropriation Oped Attacks Jewish Community (1/27)

The Courier-Journal of Louisville released an Op-ed, also shared by the Lexington Herald-Leader, suggesting Holocaust Day is not about the Holocaust, and the Jewish community, which uses the day to promote Holocaust education, is racist. The offensive article was condemned by state-wide and national Jewish groups.

February 2023

Paducah Synagogue Threatened (2/01)

A Synagogue in Paducah Kentucky, the only one in the city, receives threatening phone calls.

University of Kentucky Hosts Offensive Lecture (2/19)

The University of Kentucky holds a talk titled “Too Jewish”. The speaker openly admitted their words were offensive to the Orthodox Jewish community, and increased the risk faced by their community.

March 2023

Rabbi Receives Hate Mail (3/13)

Lexington Rabbi receives hate mail from members of the Black Hebrew Israelite Cult. The BHI Cult was tied to the attempted assassination of a Jewish Mayoral Candidate in 2022.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (3/28)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes across a Lexington neighborhood. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

April 2023

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (4/12)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes across a Georgetown neighborhood. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

May 2023

Jewish Center Receives Hate Mail (5/13)

The University of Kentucky Chabad Jewish Student Center received an extremist religious letter, demanding the Jewish students abandon their faith, referencing the historical slaughter of Jews.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (5/20)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in Union Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (5/23)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in Madisonville, Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

June 2023

Antisemitic Activists Open Kentucky Office (6/5)

Until Freedom, a controversial political group founded by two activists with a history of antisemitism, opens offices in Louisville and Lexington

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed Statewide (6/11-12)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in cities across Kentucky, including Winchester, Mt Sterling, Corbin, and Paris. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (6/16)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in Boone County Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (6/19)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in Wingo Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

Jewish Center Receives Threats (6/29)

The University of Kentucky Chabad Jewish Student Center receives several threatening messages at its office.

July 2023

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (7/5)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in Ashland Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

Kentucky Legislators Receive Manifesto (7/11)

Kentucky Legislators, including the only Jewish Representative, receive a 3-page manifesto titled "On the Topic of these Jews". The screed traffics in numerous antisemitic conspiracy theories.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (7/28)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in Bowling Green Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

Hate Group Targets Synagogue (7/30)

A White supremacist group distributes hateful pamphlets outside a Lexington Synagogue. The display took place during children's programming.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (7/31)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in the Kenwick Neighborhood in Lexington Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

August 2023

Bomb Threat targets University of Kentucky Jewish Center (8/9-12)

The University of Kentucky Jewish Student Center receives a series of violent and hateful messages, including threats to attack the Rabbi, and Jewish Students at the University of Kentucky, and bomb the center. Sendil Nathan, a former UK employee was arrested. The University has yet to condemn the threats

Jewish Leaders Harassed (8/21)

Libertarian activists on Twitter launched a campaign of harassment against a pair of Jewish leaders. The Libertarian Party of Kentucky has a history of online antisemitism.

Antisemitic Flyers Disbursed (8/27)

Hateful Flyers, intended to intimidate, are disturbed to lawns and mailboxes in Covington Kentucky. The flyers contain messages of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism.

September 2023

Suspicious Man Causes Fear (9/2)

A suspicious individual is seen loitering outside a Louisville synagogue, during the lead-up to the Jewish High Holidays

October 2023

Jewish children's toys destroyed (10/4)

A Jewish child in Lexington has a holiday display created for the Jewish festival of Sukkos destroyed outside his home by a passing motorist.

Hamas Launches Massacre (10/7)

The Hamas terrorist group, whose charter calls for the Genocide of all Jews around the world, launched an invasion of Israel. In the bloodiest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust, 1200 civilians were slain, dozens were raped, and children were massacred including beheadings and burnings. 240 civilians were kidnapped into Gaza.

Synagogue Threatened (10/7)

A Lexington Synagogue got an anonymous call celebrating the atrocities in Israel and threatening further violence against the global Jewish community

Hateful Rally calls for violence in Lexington (10/8)

In the immediate aftermath of the Oct 7th massacre, as details were still being reported, a protest glorifying the Hamas terrorists, and demonizing the victims of the atrocities, took place in downtown Lexington. The rally, Led by UK Students, included calls for violence against Jews.

Armed man at Synagogue (10/10)

An unidentified man with an aerosol gun was spotted outside a Louisville synagogue.

UK Ignores Jewish Students (10/10)

Jewish Students at the University of Kentucky plead with the administration to make public comments about the Massacre, and the resulting antisemitism on campus. They receive no response.

Pro-Hamas Rally calls for violence (10/11)

A Hamas-linked protest took place at the University of Louisville, glorifying the Oct 7th Massacre, and using slogans calling for violence against Jews in Kentucky. The Rally was condemned by U of L's President.

Louisville Synagogue “Swatted” (10/16)

A “Swatting” attack took place at a Louisville synagogue. The intention was to storm the building during services.

Hateful Rally calls for violence in Lexington (10/17)

A rally occurred in downtown Lexington, led by University of Kentucky student groups, including praise of the Hamas Terrorists who carried out the Oct 7th atrocities and calls for further violence against Jews, both in Israel and in Kentucky

Rabbi Assaulted at a supermarket (10/18)

A Rabbi was accosted in a Louisville Kroger, before being assaulted with a cart. The assailant claimed “Jews should pay for what is occurring in Gaza.

Hateful Rally calls for violence in Lexington (10/23)

A rally took place in Louisville, led by University of Louisville students, including praise of the Hamas Terrorists who carried out the Oct 7th atrocities and calls for further violence against Jews, both in Israel and in Kentucky

Hateful Rally and Graffiti at Western Kentucky University (10/23)

Graffiti making accusations about the war in Israel defaced the central building at Western Kentucky University, accompanied by a protest including calls for violence against Jews

Jewish Posters Vandalized (10/27)

Posters placed by Jewish Students were torn down and defaced at the University of Kentucky. No disciplinary actions were taken.

Jewish Leader Threatened (10/28)

A Jewish Leader in Lexington received a threatening phone call at the synagogue they work at.

Jewish Posters Vandalized (10/30)

Posters placed by Jewish Students were torn down and defaced at the University of Kentucky. In their place, posters were placed that glorified terrorists who murdered Jews. No disciplinary actions were taken.

November 2023

Hateful Protest at Political Rally (11/2)

At Get Out The Vote rallies led by Governor Beshear at the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky, protests took place, including calls for violence against Jews. At the University of Kentucky, the crowd charged the stage, endangering members of Beshears party, as well as other students.

Jewish Posters Vandalized (11/3)

Posters placed by Jewish Students were torn down and defaced at the University of Kentucky. No disciplinary actions were taken.

Jewish Posters Vandalized (11/7)

Posters placed by Jewish Students were torn down and defaced at the University of Kentucky. No disciplinary actions were taken.

Hateful Posters at WKU (11/9)

Posters calling for the genocide of Jews were found at Western Kentucky University.

Jewish Posters Vandalized (11/14)

Posters placed by Jewish Students were torn down and defaced at the University of Kentucky. In their place, posters were placed that glorified terrorists who murdered Jews. No disciplinary actions were taken

Rabbi Harrassed on Highway (11/15)

A Rabbi in Northern Kentucky was followed and harassed by a motorist while traveling on Highway 75 outside of Covington.

Jewish Posters Vandalized (11/16)

Posters placed by Jewish Students were torn down and defaced at the University of Kentucky. No disciplinary actions were taken.

Hateful March Threatens Jewish Community (11/17)

A March, led by University of Louisville student groups in partnership with the antisemitic PCUSA, marched towards a Synagogue chanting violent slogans. The March was titled "Remove Genocide Profiteers from our Neighborhoods"

Hateful Rally calls for violence in Lexington (11/18)

A rally took place in Louisville, led by University of Louisville students, including praise of the Hamas Terrorists who carried out the Oct 7th atrocities and calls for further violence against Jews, both in Israel and in Kentucky.

Propaganda Film Shown at Library (11/20)

A film titled "Gaza Fights for Freedom" by Russian Today Propagandists, is hosted at the Lexington Public Library. The event includes calls and banners for violence against the Jewish community.

Jewish Posters Vandalized (11/27)

Posters placed by Jewish Students were torn down and defaced at the University of Kentucky. In their place, posters were placed that glorified terrorists who murdered Jews. No disciplinary actions were taken.

December 2023

Antisemitic “Town Hall” in Lexington (12/4)

A “Town Hall” was held at a Lexington Mosque, attended by 3 members of the City Council, and 2 members of the Fayette County School Board. The event included Nazi conspiracy theories about Jewish Control of the American government

Antisemitic Tweet From Congressman (12/5)

A Kentucky Congressman tweeted a meme promoting the dual loyalty trope, of Jewish power and money controlling the government. A Congresswoman had lost committee assignments for similar tweets earlier in the year.

Jewish Representatives Scapegoated (12/10)

Jewish Representatives in Frankfort received multiple messages accusing them of involvement in the war in Israel.

Antisemitic Tirade at HRC Meeting (12/12)

A Special Meeting of the Kentucky Commission of Human Rights is called to discuss a resolution condemning antisemitism, in light of the rising hate on campus. A Louisville Attorney, Kelly Parry-Johnson, makes a speech saying antisemitism is faked, Jewish Americans have dual loyalties, and defending Hamas. The Commission overwhelmingly adopted a resolution condemning antisemitism.

Bomb Threat to Synagogues (12/18)

A Bomb threat is made at synagogues across Kentucky, including in Louisville, Lexington, and Paducah. The threats were part of a national threat, and no explosives were found.

Action Items

As we reflect on the range of antisemitism in the Commonwealth over the last year, it is easy to identify problem areas that need to be addressed.

1. Kentucky Universities:

Since the Oct 7th Massacre, we have seen an outpouring of hate on college campuses, with the Administrations doing little to stop it. While Presidents at the University of Louisville and Murray State signed onto a letter condemning antisemitism, the others have remained silent in the face of mounting antisemitism. Jewish students must be able to attend our Universities safely. Already this year Jewish students have felt the need to drop classes, and in some cases have transferred out of state.

2. White Supremacist Flyers:

Over the past year, we have seen a flood of antisemitic flyers, both left in homes and handed out in public, in an effort both to gain a following and to intimidate members of the community. Kentucky has responded firmly again and again: We Reject This Hate. While the cowardly littering has not had its desired effect, it cannot be ignored

3. Pro-Hamas Messaging

In the weeks following the October 7th atrocities, we have seen an insidious attempt to whitewash not only the Massacre, which included infants beheaded or burned alive, women raped, and over 240 innocent civilians kidnapped, including Americans, of whom 138 are still being held, but also attempts to cleanse Hamas itself, a terrorist organization whose founding charter calls for the murder of Jews all over the world. This hatred cannot be ignored and creates the constant risk of further violence.

4. Media

This past year, we have seen antisemitism in Courier-Journal op-eds, and in the work of their cartoonist Marc Murphy, as well as a lack of understanding of how antisemitism presents itself, shown by the broader media. Especially as the war in Israel has dominated the news, repeated slanted stances have been taken that demonize the only Jewish Majority State, and her supporters in Kentucky. Following the Holocaust Op-ed outcry, the Courier-Journal announced plans for a meeting with the Jewish community for educational opportunities. This never took place. In the coming year, our local media should strive for better understanding and coverage of these issues.