

OPINION COMMENTARY Opinion

## Opinion: Black and Jewish leaders unite against rising antisemitism, racism



This shows a Passover Seder plate with symbolic foods. (Mikael Haggstrom/Creative Commons)



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As leaders committed to protecting the safety and dignity of the Black and Jewish communities in San Diego, we have been in constant conversation about the troubling rise of antisemitism and racism over the past three years. The data tells a sobering story. According to 2024 FBI data, anti-Black hate crimes comprised the single largest portion of all reported incidents. Antisemitic hate crimes rose to nearly 70% of all religion-based hate crimes, the highest number ever recorded.

We've seen how these trends manifest right here at home in San Diego County. Students at a local high school formed themselves into human swastikas on campus. In Carlsbad, an 11-year-old Black girl was physically assaulted in an incident that sparked community outrage. Places of worship, both synagogues and churches, have faced vandalism and threats.

Neither of us is willing to accept this reality for our children. When a society's climate fosters rising antisemitism and racism, extremism and bigotry themselves are normalized, which makes all of us vulnerable. Historically, other dark forces run parallel alongside rising hate, like increased conspiratorial thinking and misinformation.

The biblical story of Passover, which the Anti-Defamation League and the Urban League will commemorate together at our upcoming Black-Jewish Seder, is a universal story of slavery and liberation that resonates deeply with both our communities. When Jewish families retell the Exodus from Egypt, they're renewing their commitment to fight for freedom wherever it is denied.

In San Diego, the Anti-Defamation League and the Urban League are working together to translate our communities' historic partnership into concrete present-time action. Through the Community Safety and Solidarity Coalition, our national organizations have joined forces to address hate-fueled violence. Locally, we are bringing community leaders, clergy and students together for dialogue. We encourage all houses of worship to take advantage of the federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which provides critical funding for security enhancements. None of us can be truly safe unless all of us are safe.

We commend the San Diego City Council for recently adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism. We now call on the San Diego Human Relations Commission to continue this vital work by developing clear definitions for other forms of hate, including anti-Black racism.

But policy alone isn't enough. We need action from every corner of our community. Schools must implement comprehensive anti-bias training and enforce zero-tolerance policies. Parents must have difficult conversations about hate with their children. Faith leaders must speak out from their pulpits. Business leaders must create inclusive workplaces. Neighbors must intervene when they witness hate. Each of us has a role to play.

Our Black-Jewish Seder is one step in this ongoing journey. When we break matzah bread together and commit to protecting one another, we're building the foundation for a safer, more just future for all our children. Don't face this battle alone — invite speakers from different communities to your place of worship, reach out and attend different faith services, build friendships and connections.

As Rabbi Abraham Heschel said after marching with Martin Luther King Jr., “I prayed with my feet.” That spirit of active solidarity must guide us today. We must pray with our feet, speak with our voices and protect our children with our collective will. The time for action is now.

The liberation story of Passover remains unfinished until all people are free from fear, hatred and violence. In San Diego and beyond, our two communities stand together, ready to complete that work. Our children deserve nothing less.

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