



OPINION

Ellen J. Kennedy: 'We See You, Jew'

By [ELLEN J. KENNEDY](#) |

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"We See You, Jew." That was the subject line of an email I received last month. The message read, "Misusing the name Kennedy doesn't hide what you really are from everyone, Tuchner. Put on your yellow star." There was no signature and no traceable email address. The sender was anonymous and invisible. I was neither anonymous nor invisible.

I am a Jew. I wear a Jewish star around my neck every day. I identify strongly with my Jewish heritage – the history, the culture, and the religion.

I married a man named Kennedy and took his last name, which was typical at that time.

My maiden name is Narotzky, not Tuchner. My grandparents came to the U.S. from Vilna, Lithuania, in 1903, long before the Holocaust. My relatives who stayed behind were exterminated by the Nazis.

I don't know why I received that message. Maybe it was because the next night we had a program at Mitchell Hamline School of Law called "From the Nazis to the Neo-Nazis." Maybe it was because I had an article in that morning's electronic newspaper MinnPost excoriating the rise of neo-Nazism. Or maybe it was just part of today's climate in the U.S. and in St. Paul as well, where swastikas have been displayed on some of the city's college campuses, at a local synagogue, and on a jogging path.

Being identified as a Jew today is becoming increasingly dangerous.

The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that the number of hate groups operating across America rose to a record high of 1,020 in 2018, with most of them being white supremacist and neo-Nazi in ideology. While the members of these groups also hate other minorities, they perceive "the Jew" as their cardinal enemy.

As the number of hate groups rise, the FBI reports a corresponding increase in hate crimes over the past three years, most of the crimes accompanied by online messaging.

Tanya Gersh was threatened with assault and death – over and over again, one story of many that are occurring today.

Gersh is a Jewish real estate agent who was targeted by followers of The Daily Stormer, a far-right neo-Nazi website that advocates for the genocide of Jews. In 2016, the site's founder, Andrew Anglin, incited his followers to harass Gersh after accusing her of extortion. Gersh, her husband, and her 12-year-old son received nearly a thousand messages filled with vitriol, including death threats:

Thanks for demonstrating why your race needs to be collectively ovened.

You have no idea what you are doing, six million are only the beginning.

We are going to keep track of you for the rest of your life.

Hickory dickory dock, the kike ran up the clock. The clock struck three and the Internet Nazis trolls gassed the rest of them.

The Daily Stormer also listed the names and contacts of other Jews in that area and called on readers to “take action” against them.

The targeting of Jews is not only a U.S. phenomenon. It is a global poison.

Liliana Segre, an 89-year-old Auschwitz survivor and an Italian senator, receives an average of 200 online threats a day from far-right extremists. Earlier this year, a teacher wrote on Facebook that Segre “would do well in a nice little incinerator.” The attacks increased since Segre proposed a parliamentary commission to combat racism and antisemitism. She now has a police escort.

In France, after the 2015 Paris slayings at the Charlie Hebdo magazine and at a kosher store, the French government launched Operation Sentinel, deploying 10,000 soldiers and 44,700 police and gendarmes around Jewish community buildings and other potential targets. The French state bears nearly all the security costs for Jewish institutions, about \$1.2 million per day.

Where does this hatred come from?

At the Charlottesville Unite the Right rally in August 2017, neo-Nazis from around the country marched and shouted “Jews will not replace us! Jews will not replace us!”

A year ago, a shooter killed 11 Jews who were at prayer in a Pittsburgh synagogue, the worst-ever act of violence against Jews in the United States. As the shooter received medical care in police custody, he allegedly told a SWAT officer that he wanted all Jews to die, and that Jews were committing genocide against his people.

Last spring, six months after the Pittsburgh shooting, a gunman fired into a synagogue in a town north of San Diego. In an antisemitic and racist open letter posted on 8chan, a website used by violent extremists, the shooter blamed Jews for the “meticulously planned genocide of the European race.”

The chant and the shooters’ messages refer to “white genocide,” the white replacement or white extinction conspiracy theory. Neo-Nazis and other alt-right groups maintain that non-white immigration in supposedly white-founded countries will make whites extinct. This change that they see as a threat to white hegemony is attributed to a Jewish-run plot to overthrow white Christian rule.

For perspective on these claims of the extermination of Europeans, consider: Jews are 2% of the population of the United States and about 0.18% of the numbers in the entire world.

The violence and hate come from organized groups, individuals who are radicalized online, and from messages that emanate from our government.

The Southern Poverty Law Center states that numbers of hate groups will continue to rise “as President Trump fans the flames of white resentment over immigration and the country’s changing

demographics.” Trump stoked identity-based fears and praised “both sides” after the deadly Charlottesville attack and he continues to lend credibility to white nationalists and anti-Muslim bigots.

SPLC data show a 30% increase in hate-group growth that coincides with Trump’s campaign and presidency.

The FBI reports a corresponding rise in hate crimes, with about 850 open investigations across the United States. Federal prosecutors have backed a domestic terrorism bill that they say could aid in investigations, but the effort has stalled at the White House, according to a Justice Department official.

“Certainly, the most lethality in terms of terrorist attacks over the recent years here in the homeland has been on the domestic terrorism side,” said Christopher A. Wray, the national FBI director, in testimony to lawmakers. Just days after his testimony, the FBI charged a white supremacist in Colorado with plotting to blow up a synagogue.

A recent headline in the Minneapolis Star Tribune (Nov. 10, 2019) posed the difficult question: When is a crime a hate crime? There is disagreement among law enforcement personnel nationally and in Minnesota. At a meeting in St. Paul, Ramsey County Attorney John Choi said, “People are now coming to the realization from a community value perspective and ... by people impacted by racially motivated crimes that these are significant harms.”

Attorney Choi is right about the harms. Synagogues and other Jewish community buildings are resembling fortresses. In Minneapolis, I go through multiple security checks to get to the gym at my local Jewish Community Center; years ago, I simply walked in. Local synagogues have increased security budgets, policies, and procedures exponentially.

Federal Prosecutor Justin Herdman recently said, “Threatening to kill Jewish people, gunning down innocent Latinos on a weekend shopping trip, planning and plotting to perpetrate murders in the name of a nonsense racial theory, sitting to pray with God-fearing people whom you execute moments later — those actions don’t make you soldiers, they make you criminals.”

Some people are standing up to these threats.

Tanya Gersh brought a civil suit against Anglin, alleging that he had intentionally inflicted emotional distress. In November 2017, a federal judge ruled that Anglin’s harassment campaign was not protected under free speech, and on August 8, 2019, Anglin was ordered to pay \$14 million in compensatory and punitive damages to Gersh. He fled the country and will likely never pay.

Tanya Gersh was threatened with assault and death – over and over and over again. I received one message and it was deeply upsetting. I cannot imagine the fear that will remain with her forever — but she stood up to him.

At a public meeting in a Cleveland suburb, FBI agent Eric B. Smith expressed concern that the bitter divisions that have colored the nation’s political discourse will only worsen in an election year and could stoke more violence. White supremacists have already committed at least 73 murders since Charlottesville.

We must take threats seriously and report them to the FBI and other authorities. And we must stand up against the erosion of our core principles of freedom and equality.

We are at the edge of a precipice.

In both human and economic terms, what is the price of Jewish survival? What is the cost of hate?

Ellen J. Kennedy, Ph.D., is executive director of World Without Genocide and an adjunct professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul.

<https://www.twincities.com/2019/12/01/ellen-j-kennedy-we-see-you-jew/>