

Anti-Semitic attacks on the rise in the US during the pandemic

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Three men involved in a neo-Nazi demonstration near Orlando, Florida last weekend have been arrested and charged with hate crimes for physically assaulting Jewish student David Newstat when he stopped his car and told the fascists that they were not welcome in the area.

The Orange County Sheriff's Office charged Burt Colucci and Joshua Terrell of Kissimmee with battery evidencing prejudice for the attack on Newstat, who is a University of Central Florida college student. The battery charge, normally a first-degree misdemeanor, is being upgraded to a third-degree felony under Florida's hate crime law.

The charges against the two are based on a review by Sheriff John Mina of social media videos and those taken by the defendant Colucci and other neo-Nazis as evidence for the arrests. A video taken by Newstat showed Colucci approaching his car and spitting at him while shouting anti-Semitic slurs.

Other videos showed Newstat being punched repeatedly by Terrell and pepper-sprayed by Colucci. The third man arrested, Jason Brown of Cape Canaveral, was arrested and charged with grand theft for stealing Newstat's phone which was later recovered and deemed "damaged beyond repair."

Colucci, 45, is the leader of a fascist group called the National Socialist Movement (NSM) that organized the demonstration in Orlando. At the time of his arrest, he was facing different charges for pointing a loaded handgun at a Black man and threatening to kill him and his friends outside of a hotel in Phoenix, Arizona last April.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the NSM was founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1994 and was at one time among the most active neo-Nazi groups in the US. It is known for organizing demonstrations

with members clad in black uniforms and swastika arm-bands and shouting racial and anti-Semitic epithets at bystanders and challenging them to fight.

The events in Orlando, Florida are part of the surge in anti-Semitic threats and acts of violence which have been on the rise throughout the US during the two years of the coronavirus pandemic. The increase in the instances of anti-Semitic attacks is directly related to the growth of fascist political tendencies inside of the Republican Party and the neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups that operate in and around the periphery of the GOP.

This relationship was dramatically deepened during the presidency of Donald Trump and emerged visibly during the January 6 mob attack on the US Capitol that was aimed at overturning the 2020 elections and overthrowing the US Constitution. Among the far-right and neo-Nazi groups espousing anti-Semitism that participated in the January 6 assault were QAnon supporters, Proud Boys, 3 Percenters, Boogaloo Boys, The Oath Keepers and the NSC-131.

The most recent "Audit of anti-Semitic Incidents" by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) showed that there were "more than 2,100 acts of assault, vandalism and harassment, an increase of 12 percent over the previous year." This was the highest level of such incidents since the ADL tracking began in 1979. The report documented "five fatalities directly linked to antisemitic violence and another 91 individuals targeted in physical assaults."

A report entitled, "The State of Antisemitism in America" published by the American Jewish Committee last October showed "deep anxiety among American Jews and divergent views among the general public about the severity of antisemitism in the United States." Among the key findings of the report are: one

in four American Jews say they have been targets of antisemitism in the last 12 months; four in ten American Jews have changed their behavior out of fear; four out of ten of all Americans have personally witnessed antisemitic incidents; and 82 percent of American Jews say anti-Semitism has risen over the last five years while only 44 percent of the general public believes that to be the case.

Fears among Jews grew significantly following the armed hostage-taking incident at a synagogue in the Fort Worth suburb of Colleyville, Texas on January 15. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has characterized the ten-hour standoff—in which the hostages escaped, and the hostage taker Briton Malik Faisal Akram was killed—as an “act of terrorism targeting the Jewish community.”

In Florida, the ADL’s data shows that anti-Semitic incidents rose by 40 percent in 2020 with 127 occurrences of harassment and vandalism reported in the state. Among the incidents reported were a Jewish elementary school student in Broward County who was threatened by a peer who told him that he had a gun and that “Hitler should have finished the job.” In another case, a Jewish man in Miami-Dade County and his 12-year-old son were verbally harassed by a passerby who shouted antisemitic slurs and threats telling the two “I’m going to fucking kill you, fucking Jews.” He followed the father and son into an ice cream shop where he shouted, “Fuck the Jews, your time has come.”

In another incident in Broward County, a flier was distributed which read, “Our patience has its limits one day we will shut their dirty lying Jewish mouths.”

During the weekend of January 22, anti-Semitic fliers were distributed to hundreds of homes in Miami Beach and Surfside, Florida with large Jewish populations. The flyer listed the names of approximately one dozen Washington DC public health officials leading the government response to COVID-19 and said that “every single one is Jewish.”

As reported Wednesday by the *World Socialist Web Site*, when Republican Governor of Florida Ron DeSantis was questioned about the fascist attack on David Newstat in Orlando, he refused to condemn the neo-Nazis. Instead, he falsely accused Democrat and practicing Muslim Ilhan Omar of Minnesota of anti-Semitism, without mentioning her by name, saying,

“I’m not going to have people try to smear me who belong to a political party that has elevated anti-Semites to the halls of Congress.”

This is the same kind of tactic used by Donald Trump, who refused repeatedly to denounce the rampage of white-supremacists and neo-Nazis through Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11–12, 2017, which ended in the murder of counter-protester Heather Heyer. Instead, Trump referred to the “Unite the Right” demonstrators—including numerous armed and right-wing militia groups who marched through Charlottesville with torches, carrying Confederate flags, wearing Nazi symbols and chanting “Jews Will Not Replace Us”—as “very fine people.”



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