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# Jewish heritage is interwoven with Texas history and culture

By **Judith Zaffirini, Kenneth E. Goldberg**, *For the Express-News*  
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The Hate Ends Now Mobile Holocaust Experience is housed inside a full-scale replica of a World War II cattle car. This interactive exhibit one way to better understand Jewish history and foster lasting human connections.  
Courtesy/Hate Ends Now



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Jewish heritage is interwoven with Texas history and culture

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This spring a replica of a Holocaust cattle car came to six Texas universities, from Dallas and Fort Worth to Laredo and Brownsville.

Part of the [Hate Ends Now](#) educational initiative, it was sponsored by the [Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission](#). The harrowing, immersive exhibit gave students, educators and community members — including us — the somber experience of stepping inside and encountering Jewish and world history in a way that felt immediate, disturbing and deeply personal.

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Standing together, at times in profound silence, groups of visitors were reminded how powerful education can be when history is humanized and moves beyond textbooks.

The Texans who walked through that exhibit did not leave only carrying the weight of history or recognizing the connection between [the Holocaust](#) and [current antisemitism](#). Many also left with curiosity, compassion and a deeper understanding of people whose heart-wrenching stories previously may have felt distant from their own.

That is an especially important lesson this May as we mark [Jewish American Heritage Month](#) in Texas. At a time when so much public discourse feels driven by anger and division, the cattle car organized by the

nonprofit Hate Ends Now demonstrates the power of education, meaningful conversation and shared humanity.

Jewish American Heritage Month is not only about reflecting on painful chapters. It also is about celebrating the extraordinary contributions, culture, resilience and stories of Jewish Americans who helped shape our communities, our state and our country for generations.

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We each see those contributions through very different perspectives.

One of us, Judith Zaffirini, is the dean of the Texas Senate, a Catholic, Democrat and a Laredo native whose ancestry includes Sephardic (Spanish) Jewish roots.

The other, Kenneth E. Goldberg, is a Dallas-based son-in-law of Holocaust survivors and the Jewish Republican chair of the Texas Holocaust, Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Commission, which the Texas Legislature created to fight antisemitism through education and awareness.

In a state shaped by generations of migration, faith, language and cultural exchange, our experiences are a reminder that Jewish history is not separate from Texas history. It is woven into it.

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In Laredo and South Texas, for example, the oft-forgotten Jewish history dates to the 1500s with the arrival of crypto-Jews who maintained their identities in secret even as they outwardly embraced a different faith after the Spanish Inquisition.

In Dallas, Central European Jewish settlers first arrived in the mid-1800s, becoming merchants (including the founders of Neiman Marcus) who helped plant the city's commercial roots.

In both of our roles, we meet Jewish Texans from a wide range of backgrounds. We also have the privilege of meeting Texans from every faith and community who want to learn more about Jewish history and culture because they believe understanding one another makes stronger communities possible.

We saw that firsthand, watching students quietly step out of the cattle car exhibit in our own corners of the state, carrying conversations that continued long after the tour ended.

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We saw how meaningful these conversations could be for younger generations. When students engage with Jewish stories, traditions and history in thoughtful and personal ways, something important happens: Stereotypes begin to fall away, curiosity replaces distance, and people see each other as neighbors.

Jewish American Heritage Month is about connection. It is about recognizing the Jewish experience is not a side story. It is part of the American story and the Texas story. Across our state, Jewish communities for generations have helped shape civic life, education, business, medicine, philanthropy, the arts and public service.

That is how understanding begins. More important, that is how Texans continue building stronger communities together.

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*State Sen. Judith Zaffirini represents District 21 and is the dean of the Texas Senate. Kenneth E. Goldberg is chair of the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission.*

May 26, 2026

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**Judith Zaffirini**

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**Kenneth E. Goldberg**

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