



Are we in an age of intolerance?

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MARY SERREZE

Easthampton resident Andrew Goulet was one of several volunteers who hiked to the top of Mount Tom near the Connecticut River over the weekend to remove racist and anti-Semitic graffiti.

By Nestor Ramos

GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 15, 2016

Racist taunts ring out at a Cambridge gas station. Slurs and swastikas appear spray-painted on a

Western Massachusetts mountain. Letters arrive at a Natick home espousing a townwide ban on black people.

Even in Massachusetts, a locus of progressive politics, the days surrounding President-elect Donald Trump's victory on Tuesday have seen reports of incidents grounded in racial, ethnic, and religious bias.

Attorney General Maura Healey [announced a new hotline](#) to report harassment and intimidation on Monday — the same day the FBI said that reports of hate crimes had increased nationally in 2015, with anti-Muslim incidents at their highest level since a spike after 9/11 in 2001.

Local and national advocacy groups say they've seen huge increases in reports of such incidents in recent days.

Though the extent to which Trump's victory contributed to the influx of complaints was not clear, the alleged

perpetrators in several widely reported incidents have made overt references to him.



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“It's really frightening. The fears of people are real,” said Eva Millona, executive director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition. “It speaks to how divisive the campaign was. It's frightening that in our state — one of the most welcoming states in the country — we have seen that increase.”

Healey announces hot line to report harassment and

discrimination

In light of people feeling targeted and harassed after the election, Massachusetts residents can report incidents of bias-based threats to the Attorney General's office through a hot line.

In a statement citing reports of post-election incidents in announcing the hotline, Healey said the state “will protect people’s rights, fight discrimination, and keep people safe.” The hotline can be reached at 1-800-994-3228 or [online](#).

“Our office here in Boston is receiving a dramatic increase in phone calls reporting bias-related incidents — everything from vandalism to harassment to graffiti,” said Robert Trestan, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League of New England. He estimated the call volume, including donations and offers of help, has increased 10 to 20 percent over typical levels this week.

Created with Highcharts 4.0.4 **Anti-Muslim hate crime incidents reported in the United States, 1995-**

2015 2927282132334811551491561281561151051071601571131351542571995199619971998199920002001200220032004:

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Professor Brian Levin, director of the nonpartisan Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University San Bernardino, said research has shown that some major news events — high-profile trials, terrorist attacks — correlate with spikes in hate crimes.

“I think it’s clear that the election has been a catalytic event,” Levin said. “Not only for people who are targeting Muslims, immigrants, African Americans, and Jews, but for a small fringe of violent people who call themselves progressive.”

FBI statistics released Monday showed reports of hate crimes overall increased by about 6.7 percent nationally in 2015, largely due to a 67 percent surge in crimes against Muslims.

Massachusetts had the highest rate of hate crime reports per capita, though the FBI discourages such comparisons because documenting habits vary widely. Experts said Massachusetts routinely is at or near the top of the data set because the state — and Boston in particular — is committed to full and accurate reporting and prosecuting, while some entire states will report zero such crimes to the FBI.

And, Levin said, looking solely at hate crimes misses much of what’s going on.

“We are in such a highly charged world that traditional labels like ‘hate crime’ will leave out non-criminal incidents,” Levin said, as well as “cases that are politically motivated.” The burning of a Trump campaign office in North Carolina, for example, would not be classified as a hate crime but was plainly election-related.

On Friday, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a hate-watch group, said it had received 201 complaints of bias incidents, which includes reports that may not rise to the level of criminality. Six of the reports were from Massachusetts.



That swastikas and slurs would crop up in Massachusetts, where Trump lost to Hillary Clinton by a sizable margin, is unsurprising, Levin said.

“People who harbor those views might feel now that they have wider support,” Levin said, adding they may feel more free to express opinions that they had previously kept to themselves.

Several of the resulting incidents have received wide attention: A Natick man went to the police with letters he said were left on his porch warning him about bringing black friends into the town. A postal worker in Cambridge allegedly shouted racist epithets at a man who appeared to be Hispanic, a witness said.

Even before the election, ugly graffiti appeared at the top of Mount Tom, a rocky peak on the Connecticut River. On Friday, after reading about the anti-Semitic and racist messages on the mountain, a small group climbed to the top with buckets and brushes to scrub away the hateful messages.

Tom Peake, who lives nearby and can see Mount Tom from his window, said he had the day off — Veterans Day — and decided to spend it “scrubbing away some swastikas.”

Peake, 28, and a self-described progressive, said the view of the mountain is among his favorite things about his home.

“The way the light hits the mountain, it’s just really nice,” he said. “Someone made it ugly and sad and scary to a lot of people.”

He declined to speculate about why someone might deface a small Western Massachusetts landmark.

“I’ve been speculating all year,” he said, “and I’ve been wrong about everything.”

Matt Rocheleau of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Nestor Ramos can be reached at nestor.ramos@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@NestorARamos](https://twitter.com/NestorARamos).

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