

An app that warns of ICE raids — inspired by the memory of the Holocaust

Rob Eshman



Federal immigration agents near MacArthur Park in the Westlake area of Los Angeles on July 7. Photo by Carlin Steihl/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images



Senior Columnist [Rob Eshman](#) July 9, 2025

Los Angeles is living a different reality than the rest of the United States right now.

The city has become the locus of President Donald Trump's efforts to deport undocumented people, with weeks of raids leading up to the alarming scene, on Monday, of heavily armed federal immigration officers and U.S. military troops [sweeping through a public park](#) near downtown looking to arrest people who they believed to be undocumented immigrants.

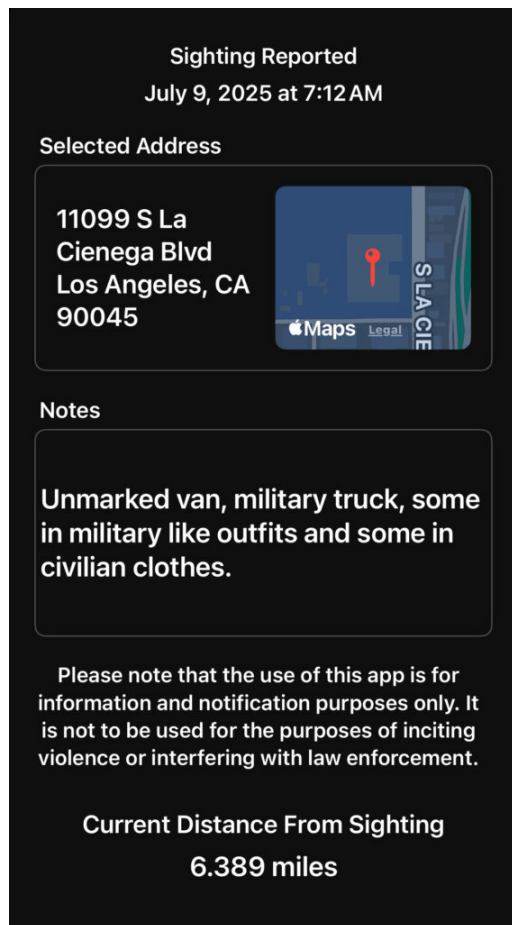
But mainstream national Jewish organizations have yet to come up with a comprehensive response, even though L.A. boasts the second largest Jewish community in the country. Institutions — many of which were created to fight exactly the kind of attack on civil liberties that is happening now — have been meek in the face of these detentions. Instead, the most vocal and effective activism has come from liberal congregations and movements, [relatively small progressive groups](#), and one guy named Joshua Aaron.



Forwarding the News

Aaron, 47, is the creator of [ICEBlock](#), an app that allows people to identify actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in real time. Users who spot ICE activity can, in two clicks, identify the time and location where it's unfolding so other users will get an alert, and undocumented people can know to stay away.

The app, which is free and only available on Apple, has been downloaded 750,000 times. It is the number one downloaded app for social networking, and number three most-downloaded app overall, ahead of Facebook and Discord.



ICEBlock app alerts users to ICE activity Photo by Rob Eshman

"I got a text from a Mexican-American guy who was at MacArthur Park two days ago," Aaron told me when we spoke on Wednesday. (We connected over Signal, an encrypted messaging app.) "He said everybody was using ICEBlock, like *everybody*. And oh, my God, I'm getting tears in my eyes. I mean, it's actually working. That was the whole intention."

'How Hitler rose to power'

For Aaron, that intention resonates historically.

The Trump administration "is taking a page from Goebbels," he said, referring to the infamous Nazi propagandist who demonized groups for persecution. "They went after immigrants, disabled."

Trump spent his campaign promising supporters that he would target undocumented immigrants who are violent criminals. But an estimated half of the [56,000 immigrants](#) currently being held in ICE detention have no criminal convictions, and more than 93 percent of ICE book-ins were never convicted of any violent offenses.

"You listen to Tom Homan and Stephen Miller, they're saying things like they are going after the worst of the worst, the people who are murderers," UCLA Professor [Graeme Blair told NPR](#), referring to President Trump's 'Border czar' Tom Homan and White House Aide [Stephen Miller](#). "That's just not what the data says about the people that they are actually arresting."

In media interviews, Aaron never fails to make the comparisons between the raids, detentions and deportations unfolding now, and the terrors of 20th century Jewish history.

“It is how Hitler rose to power in Nazi Germany, and what the Gestapo was doing when it first started out,” he said.

The administration’s efforts to send detainees out of the country to El Salvador, Venezuela and Africa also resonated with Aaron.

“These are all outside of the U.S., where these horrible things are happening to people without due process,” he said, “and they’re just taking them away.”

Aaron grew up in a traditional Jewish household in Cleveland: “To this day, I remember the man who came to our house to hang drapes had numbers tattooed on his arm,” he said.

When the raids and detentions started happening, he wondered what he could do to help. Though he spent most of his career as a musician, first in the band The Rosenbergs — no relation to Ethel and Julius, he said — then with [Stealing Heather](#), he had been tech-savvy since childhood. His parents sent him to coding camp at age 13, where he developed an online blackjack game.

He spent three months designing ICEBlock, making sure it protects user anonymity, before releasing it last April. “It’s 100% secure,” he said.

Inciting violence — or helping the vulnerable?

The app’s success has made Aaron himself a target. Social media is rife with calls for his arrest. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem called ICEBlock “sickening,” saying it “paints a target on federal law enforcement officers’ backs” and “incites violence.”

“I get two to three death threats a day via email,” Aaron said.

Last week he was doxxed: his personal information, including his home address, was hacked and released on the internet. He takes precautions — hence our interview on the encrypted Signal app — but said he ultimately isn’t too worried about threats or legal prosecution.

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“We’re not doing anything wrong,” he said. “We’re not doxxing agents, we’re not inciting violence. We’re giving people information.”

Aaron also doesn’t take payment or donations for the app. He said his career in the music industry has provided enough to support his current work.

“I could never accept a penny for this app,” he said. “Because that would be seen as profiting off of other people’s suffering.”

‘We have become so complacent’

The sharp uptick in action against undocumented people that prompted ICEBlock’s creation is about to get even more intense. The budget bill Trump recently signed into law [includes \\$170 billion for immigration enforcement](#), \$75 billion of which will go directly to ICE. The money will [expand ICE detention centers](#) to 100,000 beds over the next four years, and fund 10,000 additional deportation officers.

“ICE is now larger than all the other law enforcement in this country,” said Aaron. (The new funds will make ICE the

highest-funded federal law enforcement agency, by a significant margin.) “What do you think is about to happen?”

Aaron pointed to well-documented cases of ICE agents detaining [pregnant mothers](#), [children](#) and legal immigrants — along with tens of thousands of law-abiding, tax-paying undocumented men and women — as a sign of even worse to come.

In response, Aaron is working to refine ICEBlock, including by making it available in more languages and increasing its user capacity.

I asked him if the silence and inaction of many in the Jewish community has taken him aback. It turns out he was far less surprised than me.

“When we haven’t seen these horrific things come to our doorstep in the United States,” he said, “we have become so complacent. People just don’t think it’s really going to happen to us here.”

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[Rob Eshman](#) is a senior columnist for the *Forward*. For his food writing and recipes subscribe to his [Foodaism newsletter](#).

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