

The Trump Administration and the Holocaust

By Laurel Leff

For those of us who teach and research the Holocaust and antisemitism, the Trump administration's refusal to mention Jews in a January 27 statement commemorating International Holocaust Remembrance Day has been both horrifying and confusing. It has been horrifying because the failure to acknowledge that Jews were the overwhelming victims of Germany's genocidal campaign is unquestionably a form of Holocaust denial. It has been confusing because we haven't been able to understand why the administration would choose to engage in Holocaust denial nor begin to grasp the implications for the American Jewish community.

There had been warning signs throughout the 2016 campaign. In three years of teaching a course on America and the Holocaust at Northeastern, I have always treated American antisemitism as mostly a remnant of a darker time in American history that only manifested itself now on the extreme left or the extreme right of American politics. As I taught the course this fall, however, I had to confront Facebook memes depicting Trump critics in concentration camp uniforms behind Auschwitz's gates and Stars of David superimposed on Hillary Clinton's face in front of piles of money.

Still, I assumed that the problem was that Trump and his minions weren't doing enough to rein in their more vociferous supporters. After all, he has a Jewish son-in-law, daughter, and grandchildren.

Then came the Holocaust statement that didn't mention Jews. White House spokespeople quickly made clear the omission wasn't a mistake, but their attempt as "an incredibly inclusive group" to take "into account all of those who suffered." As Deborah Lipstadt, author of *Denying the Holocaust*, pointed out in an [Atlantic article](#), the "de-Judaization of the Holocaust" is a form of "softcore Holocaust denial."

In the days following the statement, Holocaust scholars did a good job tackling what was horrifying in what Trump said. But we haven't faced what was confusing. Why would the President of the United States in a public statement on a most solemn of days choose to identify with Holocaust denial and antisemitism? What was he trying to say and to whom? Was it just another example of this administration's intent to defy all societal norms, even seemingly the most sensitive and nearly universal ones surrounding Holocaust remembrance?

I don't know the answer or answers. But those of us who research and teach this most important and most profound of topics have an obligation as scholars, as Jews, as citizens, to do everything we can to find out.

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The Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper (Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a fuller discussion of this issue see, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/holocaust-scholars-new-task-under-trump/>