

# Something Missing from the Holocaust

## A WHITE HOUSE PROCLAMATION PROBLEM

Last year, newly-elected Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a statement on International Holocaust Remembrance Day that drew some criticism. The problem with it? That it had left out any mention of Jews.

Trudeau apologized, but the omission was widely denounced by Jewish groups. That was one reason why it was so surprising—and to some, disturbing—that the Holocaust Remembrance Day proclamation this past week by the White House also failed to mention Jews.

“It is with a heavy heart and somber mind that we remember and honor the victims, survivors, heroes of the Holocaust,” the statement began. It went on to mention “innocent people” and “the perished,” but made no mention of who those might be, and it

failed to mention anti-Semitism.

Unlike Trudeau, the Trump administration doubled down on its omission when asked about it. Hope Hicks, an administration spokesperson, told CNN that the reason that no mention of Jews was made was that “despite what the media reports, we are an incredibly inclusive group and we took into account all of those who suffered.”

She then linked to a news story that noted that five million “priests, gypsies, people with mental or physical disabilities, communists, trade unionists, J’s Witnesses, anarchists, Poles and other Slavic peoples, and resistance fighters” were killed by the Nazis.

Reince Priebus, the White House Chief of Staff, also defended the statement in a Sunday morning interview with NBC.

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“I don’t regret the words,” Priebus said. “Everyone’s suffering [in] the Holocaust, including obviously all of the Jewish people affected and miserable genocide that occurs—it’s something that we consider to be extraordinarily sad.”

Presidential proclamations on Holocaust Remembrance Day have always included a direct reference to the Jews, and “de-Judaizing” the Holocaust is seen as one major form of Holocaust distortion. As Dr. Manfred Gerstenfeld, the former chairman of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and a world-renowned expert on anti-Semitism, explains in his book *The Abuse of Holocaust Memory*, lumping Jews in with other victims of the Nazis—a long practice of the Soviet Union and its satellites in discussing World War II—is problematic because, on a collective level, the Nazi campaign against the Jews was unique.

For example, not all Roma [Gypsies] were targeted by the Nazis; they were considered Aryan by some Nazi theorists and therefore were evaluated in regard to their behavior before being sent to concentration camps. Other victimized groups were only exterminated if they were German or “Aryan” or if they lived in Germany. But Jews everywhere were targeted by the Nazis.

But in an interview with *Ami*, Dr. Gerstenfeld said that he was not deeply concerned about the Trump administration statement.

“You have to see these things in the context of the total. It isn’t very nice, but it depends on what Trump will do over the course of the coming years.

“I’ll give you an example of something similar. In 1979, Pope John Paul II visited Auschwitz, and he spoke about six million Poles having been killed in the camp. Obviously, half of those were Polish Jews, but he didn’t mention the Jews specifically.

“But all in all, Pope John Paul II was one of the popes most open to the Jews. He was the first pope in history to visit a synagogue.”

He said that while the omission by the White House was bothersome, it pales in comparison with the Holocaust distortions that are rampant now.

“You have Holocaust denial. Even worse, you have inversion. Forty percent of the population of the European Union believes that we in Israel are exterminating the Palestinians. Kristallnacht memorials are regularly distorted to focus for instance on Muslims.

“I would not like to blow up the issue of Trump’s omission of the Jews beyond proportion, because it may not be justified. If he omits the Jews every year, then of course it would be a serious problem.”

