

# HOLOCAUST DENIAL, DISTORTION, AND INVERSION



**HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION** are examples of contemporary antisemitism that grew after World War II. They challenge the reality of the mass murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their allies during World War II, despite the fact that the Holocaust is the most well documented genocide that has ever occurred.

Holocaust denial and distortion are irrational and fly in the face of the facts. As such, Holocaust deniers and distorters generally are motivated by their hatred of Jews, and their denial has another motive. This may be delegitimization of the State of Israel by saying that the Holocaust was a “hoax” invented as a rationale to give special treatment to the Jews by giving them a State.

There are several streams of Holocaust denial and distortion. Some claim that the Holocaust never happened; that is, they deny the “fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g., gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).” They claim that true accounts of the Holocaust are lies made up by Jews for their own benefit.

Outright denial of the Holocaust is considerably less common than distortion of the Holocaust, which is not an attempt to deny that the Holocaust took place, but rather an attempt to rewrite the narrative of World War II and the annihilation of European Jewry. At its simplest, Holocaust distortion excuses, minimizes, or misrepresents the known historical record of the Holocaust. It may manifest itself as intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust; gross minimization of the number of victims; attempts to blame Jews for the Holocaust; using the term to describe related atrocities or by engaging in false comparisons with other mass crimes; casting the Holocaust as a positive historical event; or blurring responsibility for the murders of the Holocaust.

However it is expressed, Holocaust distortion minimizes the impact of the Holocaust. Distorters blur the role of Nazi Germany by casting blame on other nations or ethnic groups, or even blaming the Jews themselves for their own genocide. Common distortions include the claims that six million Jewish deaths is an exaggeration, that deaths in concentration camps were due to starvation and disease but not Nazi policy, and that the diary of Anne Frank is a forgery.

Jonathan Greenblatt, National Director of the ADL explains: “We are talking here about a conspiracy theory which argues that Jews around the world knowingly fabricated evidence of their own genocide in order to extract reparations money from Germany, gain world sympathy, and facilitate the theft of Palestinian land for the creation of Israel. It is founded on the belief that Jews are able to force governments, Hollywood, the media, and academia to promote a lie at the expense of non-Jews.”

Deniers present their distortions of history as historical fact, and have created prestigious-looking journals to support them. Deborah Lipstadt, Dorot Professor of Holocaust Studies at Emory University, knows this well. She successfully fought a libel suit brought against her by Holocaust denier, David Irving in 1996. “There are facts,” asserts Lipstadt, “there are opinions, and there are lies.”

**HOLOCAUST TRIVIALIZATION** refers to any analogy or comparison to the Holocaust or Nazism that diminishes the scale or severity of the atrocities. Studies have shown that many people don’t know a lot of the specific facts and figures about this era, but a majority do believe the Holocaust was the most evil event in human history, perpetrated by Hitler and the Nazis. When trying to describe something or someone as evil, it is a cheap, shallow, but sadly effective tool to brand it as Nazism or as terrible as the Holocaust. In recent

years, Holocaust rhetoric and imagery has been used to protest against vaccines, against politicians, and to advocate for animal rights.

Lazy analogies and careless comparisons can offend, demean, and cause harm to Jews and to larger society. They stifle dialogue and distract from the real issues a society is facing and are disrespectful to Holocaust survivors and the six million Jewish victims who were murdered in the Holocaust.



John Placek displayed this billboard outside his business in Worthington, PA, about 45 minutes outside of Pittsburgh. The image quickly spread online, photo by an Armstrong County Resident.



An anti-vaccination patch resembling the Star of David badge the Nazis forced Jews to wear, David Dee Delgado/Getty Images.

*These images show just two examples demonstrating how Holocaust imagery has been corrupted to voice various beliefs, in this instance anti-government and anti-vaccine positions. These are offensive tactics that trivialize the Holocaust and do nothing to help society.*

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**HOLOCAUST INVERSION** is the term used when the State of Israel is compared to Nazi Germany in the Holocaust. To use Holocaust imagery against the Jewish people and the State of Israel is especially incendiary and is generally loaded with antisemitic intent. Holocaust inversion distorts and diminishes the history of the Holocaust and causes pain to those who survived and their descendants. Holocaust inversion is not only inaccurate, but also antisemitic.

Holocaust comparisons have proliferated in anti-Israel rhetoric and other expressions of antisemitism across the entire political spectrum for many years. The rhetoric ranges from offensive Holocaust imagery to the equation of Zionism with Nazism and the accusation that Jews are treating Palestinians just as the Nazis treated Jews during the Holocaust. Often, the Holocaust is invoked and couched in criticism of Israel as a means to harm the broader Jewish community.

On October 7, 2023, the Gaza-based terrorist group Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, invaded Israel and carried out a brutal attack, killing more than 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, and taking more than 240 people hostage.

Immediately following the attack and resulting war between Israel and Hamas, anti-Israel protests, as well as rallies in support of Palestinian rights for self-determination and for humanitarian purposes spread throughout the United States and the world. These demonstrations have consistently included participants who embrace antisemitic views and make declarations advocating for the end of the State of Israel, thus crossing the line from legitimate criticism of Israel to antisemitism, even if not all participants agree with these views. Since October 7th, there has been an alarming rise in antisemitism in the United States and across the world, including violence.

Jewish history shows us that antisemitism can lie relatively dormant and be revitalized when anxiety, anger, and fear are present in a society, or when a specific event triggers its rise, which, for extremists, justify hatred and mass violence. As we think about these lessons from Jewish history, including the Holocaust, we have seen many of the same age-old antisemitic tropes being invoked today as were invoked then.



This image/poster was seen on social media and at a variety of rallies and marches in the United States throughout October 2023, in response to the war between Hamas and Israel.



This cartoon, equating an Israeli soldier to a Nazi, has been shared widely on social media since at least 2021.

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