

An Open Letter to the Director of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum

[Omer Bartov](#), [Doris Bergen](#), [Andrea Orzoff](#), [Timothy Snyder](#), and [Anika Walke](#), et al.

On June 17, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrat of New York, posted an Instagram live video discussing the detention camps along the southern US border as “concentration camps” in which she used the phrase “Never Again.” This drew sharp criticism the following day from Representative Liz Cheney, Republican of Wyoming, and others for allegedly misappropriating a slogan associated with the Holocaust. After several days of heated media and political debate, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [released a statement on June 24](#) condemning the use of Holocaust analogies. We received the following open letter addressed to the director of the museum, Sara J. Bloomfield, delivered by the signatories on July 1.

—The Editors

To Director Bloomfield:

We are scholars who strongly support the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Many of us write on the Holocaust and genocide; we have researched in the USHMM’s library and archives or served as fellows or associated scholars; we have been grateful for the Museum’s support and intellectual community. Many of us teach the Holocaust at our universities, and have drawn on the Museum’s online resources. We support the Museum’s programs from workshops to education.

We are deeply concerned about the Museum’s recent “[Statement Regarding the Museum’s Position on Holocaust Analogies](#).” We write this public letter to urge its retraction.

Scholars in the humanities and social sciences rely on careful and responsible analysis, contextualization, comparison, and argumentation to answer questions about the past and the present. By “unequivocally rejecting efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary,” the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is taking a radical position that is far removed from mainstream scholarship on the Holocaust and genocide. And it makes learning from the past almost impossible.

The Museum’s decision to completely reject drawing any possible analogies to the Holocaust, or to the events leading up to it, is fundamentally ahistorical. It has the potential to inflict severe damage on the Museum’s ability to continue its role as a credible, leading global institution dedicated to Holocaust memory, Holocaust education, and research in the field of Holocaust and genocide studies. The very core of Holocaust education is to alert the public to dangerous developments that facilitate human rights violations and pain and suffering; pointing to similarities across time and space is essential for this task.

Looking beyond the academic context, we are well aware of the many distortions and inaccuracies, intentional or not, that frame contemporary discussions of the Holocaust. We are not only scholars. We are global citizens who participate in public discourse, as does the Museum as an institution, and its staff. We therefore consider it essential that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum reverse its position on careful historical analysis and comparison. We hope the Museum continues to help scholars establish the Holocaust's significance as an event from which the world must continue to learn.

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- *First signatories*

July 1, 2019, 8:30 am