

Combat antisemitism with education

We must fight rise in hate speech, Holocaust denial in mainstream culture



The Memorial and Reflection Room honors Dallas-area survivors of the Holocaust at the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum. (2019 File Photo/Tom Fox)

By NILS ROEMER

Adidas, the multinational sportswear company, recently announced it would cut ties with Ye (formerly Kanye West) following weeks of antisemitic messaging from the pop artist. But the action took too long and seemed to come from public pressure rather than doing the right thing.

It is time that companies and individuals work toward a future where bigoted rants are quickly recognized and condemned — because it's the right thing to do.

Ye's all-too-public antisemitic meanderings caught a lot of attention and demonstrated a lack of understanding. In an effort to educate the artist, the Holocaust Museum of Los Angeles recently offered him a private tour. Ye turned down the invitation and, subsequently, the museum was flooded with antisemitic hate messages via social media.

How are we even at this point? Seventy-seven years ago, American soldiers liberated numerous Nazi camps and became the witnesses to the Nazi atrocities. The then-supreme Allied commander, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, invited the media to document the atrocities to ensure that they could never be denied. National organizations such as the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., have safeguarded those memories together with local Holocaust museums in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and El Paso and institutions such as the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission and the Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Now, however, this work is facing an uptick in Holocaust denial and distortion because of new, unprecedented levels of antisemitism.

In addition, important works of Holocaust remembrance — such as the graphic novel *Maus* and an adaptation of Anne Frank's diary — were almost purged from a Texas school district library, even though Holocaust Remembrance Week is written into Texas law as a time “to educate students about the Holocaust and inspire in students a sense of responsibility to recognize and uphold human value and to prevent future atrocities.” We know that to prevent genocide, human rights atrocities and discrimination, education is the answer.

When our entertainers, athletes and other cultural lightning rods espouse hate speech while companies respond only when it impacts their bottom line, it challenges the work of educators and scholars and it sends the wrong message to our children. Ye's tweet that he was going to “go death con 3 on JEWISH

PEOPLE” prompted Twitter and Instagram to swiftly suspend his accounts. No stranger to controversy, prior to becoming the latest face of antisemitism, Ye was vocal in his support of anti-Blackness and slavery denial. His inane verbiages are uninformed, unoriginal opinions. His most recent ones are almost verbatim to long-standing antisemitic tropes and stereotypes.

Our greatest weapon against misinformation isn't a bigger bullhorn; it is discernment. Ensuring our children and our communities are educated about the legacy of the Holocaust, the causes of genocide, and how to recognize human rights violations lays the foundation for a future where bigoted rantings are acknowledged as such with fanfare focused on addressing and resolving the misdirected missives.

Yet Adidas, whose instantly recognizable logos festoon athletic competitions while its branding endorses and sponsors athletes the world over, is drawing our attention to the pervasive presence of antisemitism in our mainstream culture as well as the delayed-until-unprofitable action of questionable corporate social responsibility. This is a warning call of not just how acceptable Holocaust denial and distortion has become, but how easily it is accepted as truth because it is wearing couture and has a \$1.5 billion sneaker sponsorship.

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