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TRUMP FLIRTS WITH THEOCRACY

By David Leonhardt

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Let's not mince words. President Trump's recent actions are an attempt to move the United States away from being the religiously free country that the founders created — and toward becoming an aggressively Christian country hostile to other religions.

On Friday, his White House deliberately excluded mention of Jews from its statement on Holocaust Remembrance Day. A Trump aide, Hope Hicks, [explained](#) that mentioning Jews would have been unfair to the Holocaust's other victims — a line that happens to be a longtime trope of anti-Semites and Holocaust deniers in Europe.

“The Holocaust was about *the Jews*,” former Reagan speechwriter John Podhoretz [wrote in Commentary this weekend](#), “There is no ‘proud’ way to offer a remembrance of the Holocaust that does not reflect that simple, awful, world-historical fact.”

On Friday afternoon, of course, Trump signed [an executive order](#) barring refugees and citizens of seven majority Muslim countries from entering the United States. It was his way of making good on a campaign promise to ban Muslims from the country.

The order also said it would eventually give priority to religious minorities from these countries. And if anyone doubted who that meant, Trump gave an interview Friday to the Christian Broadcasting Network, explaining that its goal was indeed to help Christians. Fortunately, many Christian leaders are [opposing the policy](#).

I expect that Trump's attempts to undermine the First Amendment will ultimately fail. But they're not guaranteed to fail. He is the president, and he has tremendous power.

The attempts will fail only if Americans work to defeat the White House's flirtations with theocracy — as so many people [began to do](#) this weekend. This passionate, creative opposition may help explain Trump's [weakening of the ban](#) on Sunday. Yet the struggle to defend American values is clearly going to be a long and difficult one.

As for reading suggestions, I recommend that you study up on recent history. On Friday, Vice President Mike Pence and Defense Secretary James Mattis stood beside Trump, clapping and nodding as he signed the executive order (while Paul Ryan and other top Republicans were largely quiescent).

A year ago, however, Pence [thought](#) that calls to ban Muslims were “offensive and unconstitutional.” Last summer, Mattis [said](#), “This kind of thing is causing us great damage.” In June, Ryan [said](#), “I do not think it is reflective of our principles, not just as a party but as a country.”