

Unintended ironies

A GOP Congressman (Clay Higgins, LA) decided to film a selfie movie in the gas chamber at Auschwitz (no, [really](#)), in which he tells constituents that the horrors really spoke to him:

"A great sense of dread comes over you in this place," Higgins says, leading the viewer on a five-minute, nine-second tour of the site, with a dirge-like solo violin playing in the background. "Man's inhumanity to man can be quite shocking."

So far, so good. It's hard to argue with that. I watched the entire five minutes and am glad I did, because I was ready to ridicule him for glibly appropriating the Holocaust to make a political point. That was unfair. He is appropriately somber, even horrified, and he makes no attempt to make light of or dismiss the enormity of what happened there.

But the lesson he takes away is not that we all have an obligation to each other, that evil arises anywhere and must be resisted everywhere, or that the world must not stand silent and willfully blinded while horrors unfold. No, he thinks somehow that Auschwitz reinforces his own jingoistic isolationist slant on things. He thinks that we must wall ourselves off, lock ourselves away, and fear outsiders (all outsiders) as morally equivalent and morally suspect, even dangerous:

"This is why homeland security must be squared away, why our military must be invincible," says Higgins, a former law enforcement officer who serves on the House Homeland Security Committee. "The world's a smaller place now than it was in World War II. The United States is more accessible to terror like this, horror like this."

Somehow, in five minutes, he can't quite bring himself to say that the victims were Jews, and that they were victims *because* they were Jews -- that they were the targets of unreasoned, dehumanizing, *state-sponsored* fear and hate. That they had been painted by a broad brush as dangerous, subversive, and threatening, blamed for all the woes of a drifting nation in the throes of economic and demographic change ... and that many of them were not snatched from abroad but were victimized by the country of which they were citizens.

The lesson of Auschwitz, or at least one of them, must be this: It's not about "keep that evil out". It's about "It must never happen here". We mustn't fool ourselves

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that we, or anyone, are intrinsically immune to the cancer of spirit that led here.

The camps were not built by disenfranchised, diffuse foreign hordes but by one of the preeminent powers and cultures of Europe. It's likely that many of the victims he laments found their way to safety barred by an America too focused on its "homeland security" to allow anyone past the golden lamp.

So, unexpectedly, I respect the emotion that this man clearly felt, the horror and even perhaps empathy for the victims of the Holocaust. But I think these chambers stand as a stark challenge to his philosophy, not as an endorsement of it.