



Lemkin Institute
for Genocide Prevention
and Human Security

Red Flag Alert for the Genocidal Rhetoric of US President Trump's 4 March Address

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US President Donald Trump's 4 March address to a joint session of Congress reads as a textbook example of what we in Genocide Studies call "perpetrator speech." The President's words would not sound strange coming from the mouth of Adolf Hitler in 1933, Slobodon Milošević in 1992, or countless other past genocidal leaders. The genocidal allusions of Trump's past addresses have now become blatant statements of genocidal intent as Trump directly targets undocumented immigrants and trans people in his speech.

Genocidaires commonly depict a targeted group as invaders or a foreign threat. Early in his address, Trump referred to immigrants crossing the southern border as an "invasion of our country." Soon after, he said that most undocumented immigrants are "murderers, human traffickers, gang members, and other criminals." Throughout the rest of his speech, Trump used words like "monster," "savages," and "terrorists" to describe undocumented immigrants. Trump then suggested that these so-called invaders "are now strongly embedded in our country." He also referred to the "migrant occupation" of Aurora, Colorado and Springfield, Ohio. This rhetoric created the delusion that supposedly dangerous immigrants are everywhere, encouraging Americans to feel fear and suspicion of people who seem different. This could potentially encourage vigilante violence towards anyone Americans suspect to be undocumented.

By portraying undocumented immigrants as a dangerous invading and occupying force, Trump generates public support for his violent measures against immigrant communities. He told listeners "we are getting them [undocumented immigrants] out and getting them out fast." He bragged about signing a law mandating the "detention of all dangerous criminal aliens who threaten public safety." Because the Trump administration characterizes crossing the US border without the proper legal documents as a crime, this law could be used to detain anyone suspected of being undocumented.

Genocidal leaders frequently justify violence in the name of protecting women and children, which is exactly what Trump does by weaponizing the stories of murder victims Laken Riley and Alexis Nungaray. He concluded his immigration discussion on 4 March by promising that he and Congress “will eliminate these threats to protect our homeland and complete the largest deportation operation in American history.” In this last statement, Trump made clear his eliminationist, genocidal agenda.

Throughout his 100-minute address, Trump also openly discussed his plans to eliminate trans people. While Trump did not call for the direct violence often associated with genocide, he did lay out an agenda that fits with the 9th Pattern of Genocide: Denial and/or Prevention of Identity. In this pattern of genocide, the existence of an identity is actively and systematically denied or obstructed from manifesting itself within the social world. This is done through laws, decrees, speech acts, and practices of groups in power. Trump has already denied the existence of trans people by signing an executive order mandating the federal government to only recognize two genders, male and female as assigned at birth. In his speech, he bragged about this order along with orders that ban trans women from playing on women’s sports teams, forbid schools from teaching about “gender ideology,” and cut federal funding to institutions that provide gender-affirming care to minors, which Trump describes as “the sexual mutilation of our youth.” Already, Trump has acted to deny and prevent the existence of trans identities.

But the President is clearly not done. During his address, he once again used the common tactic of calling for the protection of women and children by telling the story of a nonbinary 13-year-old whose gender identity was socially affirmed by their school. While gesturing at the child’s tearful mother in the balcony, Trump described the school’s appropriate behavior as devious, conspiratorial, and “child abuse.” He then asked Congress “to pass a bill permanently banning and criminalizing sex changes on children,” despite the fact that doctors virtually never perform sex reassignment surgery on minors. The Lemkin Institute fears puberty blockers will also be criminalized by this proposed legislation. Trump finished his discussion of transgender people by denying outright the existence of trans people altogether and asserting that he and his congressional allies are “forever ending the lie that any child is trapped in the wrong body. This is a big lie.”

President Trump’s March 4th address to a joint session of the US Congress contained many more references to the suppression of political opposition, the territorial expansion of the US, and his God-given destiny to return the US to an imagined past. References like these appear often in the speeches of fascist leaders and have emboldened genocidaires to undertake transgressive violence against ordinary human beings. President Trump alluded to targeting other vulnerable groups, such as Indigenous communities, Black Americans, women, and the disabled. As other genocides have shown us, the Trump administration will likely expand their campaigns of denial, exclusion, and elimination to other groups. It is imperative that the American people realize that the President's speech contained several red flags common to genocidal processes. Americans must make clear to this Administration that they will not accept hate speech and discriminatory legislation or policy. Action must be taken while there is still time to prevent the worst atrocities from taking place.