

# Palestine and Free Speech: The University of Illinois' Decision to Fire Prof. Steven Salaita on Behalf of the Israel Lobby

By [Margaret Kimberley](#)

Global Research, August 13, 2015

[Black Agenda Report](#) 11 August 2015

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

*Zionist power engenders "fear, silence and acquiescence" in every sphere of U.S. political life, making a mockery of freedom of speech and hallowed notions of professional ethics. Just ask Steven Salaita, a renowned Palestinian academic who discovered that, in U.S. academia, anti-Zionists have no rights that universities are bound to respect.*

Steven Salaita is a renowned academic in the field of Native American Studies. That is why the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) hired him in 2013 as a tenured associate professor in the American Indian Studies Program. Salaita resigned from his previous position and had every reason to believe that he was on his way to Illinois. However he was terminated on August 1, 2014.

In the summer of 2014 Israel was in the midst of a murderous campaign in Gaza which killed more than 2,000 people, including 500 children. Steven Salaita is a Palestinian-American and like millions of people he vented anger and outrage as the horrific war crime continued. His posts on twitter garnered the attention of the administration and donors at the University of Illinois and he was fired before he even began working.

From the beginning Salaita waged a courageous fight to prove that he was in fact already an employee and to see that the university paid a price for mocking academic freedom, ruining his career and upending his personal life. He has succeeded in some of those efforts. The university experienced nearly universal condemnation and was censured by the American Association of University Professors for violating the principles of academic freedom. In addition, prominent persons such as Cornel West are boycotting the University of Illinois and have cancelled appearances in support of Salaita's struggle.

UIUC has been on the losing end of the court battle, with one judge ordering the university to release emails related to the case and another ruling that [Salaita's lawsuit](#) can proceed. That decision renders as patently false the university's claim that he was not yet an employee. Salaita is enjoying legal victories and has secured a temporary position at the American University in Beirut, but his difficult experience points out that in America speech isn't so free if powerful interests are taken to task.

Criticism of Israel is the third rail in American life. Politicians dutifully toe the line and either praise Israel without question or say nothing and hope to be unnoticed. Even local elected officials who have no role in foreign policy secure campaign funds and protection from political challengers if they support Zionism. They may face defeat should they do

otherwise.

The Salaita case shows the insidious nature of the censorship that is imposed from without which inevitably creates self-censorship for millions of people. Even as Israel wages a very public campaign against congressional approval of the P5+1 nuclear energy agreement with Iran, the president still gives words of support to a country which boldly and blatantly interferes with his policy agenda.

Not only did president Obama praise Israel even after he was [publicly humiliated](#) by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but he claimed an equivalence between that country's apartheid system and the [black American struggle](#) for freedom. Among the many shameful things he has said in his political life that is among the worst.

Taking on Israel in a public forum is a daunting task. The rules may be unwritten but they are real and Salaita's experience is not lost on others. There is no other issue that engenders so much fear, silence and acquiescence. So great was the fear of retribution that the university's trustees and administration made a decision which they should have known would come back to haunt them. Such incompetence only happens in an institution operating in a state of corrosive group think, outside pressure and systemic rot.

The university has spent more than \$843,000 in public money to defend its losing cause. The soon to be former chancellor and other staff tried to hide their dirty work by using [personal email](#) addresses and not just in regards to the Salaita case. This inherently unethical behavior was meant to thwart any search for public information but shoes have begun to drop as more wrong doing comes to light. Chancellor Phyllis Wise, who [orchestrated the firing](#), recently resigned but she will still have a \$300,000 faculty salary and receive a \$400,000 golden parachute.

When Salaita chose to fight for his right to work and to speak freely he revealed a lot more about the rotten state of academia and its connections with wealthy donors. Even public institutions are beholden to big money and live in fear of losing favor and funding. In an era of triumphant neo-liberalism everything is a commodity, including higher education.

Salaita could have condemned any country other than Israel using the same language and would not have lost his job. Such is the power of Zionism and its defenders. They have what amounts to a gangster protection racket, enforced not with guns but with money and positions for those who go along. Those who don't are made to suffer.

The right to speak freely does not extend to everyone in this country, but then again it never did. Because of people like Steven Salaita some of that injustice is out in the open for all to see. American politicians, the corporate media, and big universities may still genuflect in Israel's direction but that obedience shouldn't extend to every citizen. Salaita is fighting not just for himself, but for true democracy for everyone.

*Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in BAR, and is widely reprinted elsewhere. She maintains a frequently updated blog as well as at <http://freedomrider.blogspot.com>. Ms. Kimberley lives in New York City, and can be reached via e-Mail at [Margaret.Kimberley\(at\)BlackAgendaReport.com](mailto:Margaret.Kimberley(at)BlackAgendaReport.com).*

The original source of this article is [Black Agenda Report](#)

[\*\*Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page\*\*](#)

[\*\*Become a Member of Global Research\*\*](#)

Articles by: [Margaret Kimberley](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)