

Universities Cancel American Studies Association Memberships In Response to Boycott of Israel

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

A [previous article](#) discussed the American Studies Association (ASA). It's the nation's oldest and largest organization involved in the interdisciplinary study of US culture and history.

Members include academics, researchers, librarians, and public officials and administrators.

Academic ones represent many disciplines. They include history, literature, religion, art, architecture, philosophy, music, science, ethnic studies, anthropology, sociology, political science, education, and gender studies among others.

On December 16, ACA members voted to boycott Israeli academic institutions. They did so justifiably. They did so overwhelmingly.

Their December 4 resolution supported social justice. It opposed "all forms of racism, including anti-semitism, discrimination, and xenophobia..."

It stood in "solidarity with aggrieved peoples" everywhere. It did so righteously. It did it honorably. It did the right thing. It did it because it matters.

It said America "plays a significant role in enabling" Israel's occupation, its "illegal settlements and (its) Wall in violation of international law..."

It supports "systematic discrimination against Palestinians." It's had a "devastating impact on (their) well-being..." Their fundamental rights are denied.

Palestinian academic freedom is denied. ASA "is dedicated to the rights of students and scholars to pursue education and research without undue state interference, repression, and military violence" everywhere.

It "resolved (to) honor the call of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions."

It's justified, it said, for the following reasons:

- US military and other support for Israel;
- Israel's systematic violation of international laws and UN resolutions;
- the harsh impact of its longstanding occupation;
- "the extent to which Israeli institutions of higher education are a party to state

policies that violate human rights,” and

- strong ASA member support.

Their resolution is binding until Israel stops violating human and civil rights, as well as international law. It doesn't apply to Israeli scholars. ASA supports their academic and related rights.

In response to ASA's boycott, four US universities cancelled their memberships. They include Brandeis, Penn State, University of Indiana, and Kenyon College.

[Indiana University](#) president Michael McRobbie affirmed his support for wrong over right. He did so disgracefully. He issued a statement, saying:

“Indiana University joins other leading research universities in condemning in the strongest possible terms the boycott of institutions of higher education in Israel as proposed by the American Studies Association and other organizations.”

“Boycotts such as these have a profound chilling effect on academic freedom, and universities must be clear and unequivocal in rejecting them.”

“Indiana University strongly endorses the recent statement on this matter by the Association of American Universities and the long-standing position in this area of the American Association of University Professors.”

“Indiana University values its academic relationships with colleagues and institutions around the world, including many important ones with institutions in Israel, and will not allow political considerations such as those behind this ill-conceived boycott to weaken those relationships or undermine the principle of academic freedom in this way.”

“IU stands firmly against proposals that would attempt to limit or restrict those important institutional relationships or this fundamental principle.”

“Indiana University will contact the ASA immediately to withdraw as an institutional member. We urge the leadership of the ASA and other associations supporting the boycott to rescind this dangerous and ill-conceived action as a matter of urgency.”

Other US universities issued statements opposing ASA's boycott. Doing so supports Israel's worst crimes. It's done reprehensibly.

Culpable schools include Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Cornell, the University of Chicago, Northwestern, University of Maryland, University of Indiana, Wesleyan University, and New York University.

It bears repeating. Opposing ASA's courageous stand endorses Israel's worst crimes. It supports occupation harshness. It supports militarism writ large.

It opposes Palestinian liberation. It's against their right to live free on their own land in their own country.

It supports longstanding Israeli crimes of war, against humanity, and slow-motion genocide. It shames their academic reputation in the process. It destroys their credibility.

It gives pause to what they teach in classrooms. Supporting wrong over right has no place in academia. It has no place anywhere. It demands unflinching opposition.

[Harvard](#)'s Drew Gilpin Faust said the following:

"Academic boycotts subvert the academic freedoms and values necessary to the free flow of ideas, which is the lifeblood of the worldwide community of scholars."

"The recent resolution of the ASA proposing to boycott Israeli universities represents a direct threat to these ideals, ideals which universities and scholarly associations should be dedicated to defend."

[University of Maryland](#) president Wallace Loh and senior vice president/provost Many Ann Rankin issued the following joint statement:

"We firmly oppose the call by some academic associations – American Studies Association; Asian-American Studies Association – to boycott Israeli academic institutions."

"Any such boycott is a breach of the principle of academic freedom that undergirds the University of Maryland and, indeed, all of American higher education."

"Faculty, students, and staff on our campus must remain free to study, do research, and participate in meetings with colleagues from around the globe."

"The University of Maryland has longstanding relationships with several Israeli universities. We have many exchanges of scholars and students. We will continue and deepen these relationships."

"In the United States, we can disagree with the governmental policies of a nation without sanctioning the universities of that nation, or the American universities that collaborate with them."

"To restrict the free flow of people and ideas with some universities because of their national identity is unwise, unnecessary, and irreconcilable with our core academic values."

[Wesleyan University](#) president Michael Roth called ASA's boycott "a repugnant attack on academic freedom, declaring academic institutions off-limits because of their national affiliation."

He "deplore(s)" what he calls ASA's "politically retrograde resolution...Under the guise of phony progressivism, the group has initiated an irresponsible attack on academic freedom. Others in academia should reject this call for an academic boycott."

Roth ignores important facts.

The Alternative Information Center (AIC) explained. It published a [report titled](#) "Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories."

Numerous Israeli universities have long disturbing histories. They support colonization,

occupation and apartheid.

They turn a blind eye to Israeli crimes of war and against humanity. They include:

- Tel Aviv University;
- Bar-Ilan University;
- Hebrew University;
- Haifa University;
- the Weizman Institute;
- Peres Academic Center;
- Technion;
- the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center;
- Haddasah College;
- Judea and Samaria College for Engineering;
- Jordan Valley College; and
- Hollon College among others.

Nearly all Israeli academic institutions give IDF soldiers academic benefits. Doing so increases in times of war. It shows support for lawless aggression.

At the same time, many Israeli academics oppose their government's policies. They do it in writing. They do so publicly. They courageously support right over wrong. They risk their careers doing it.

Israeli Arab citizens comprise over 20% of Israel's population. Less than 10% have BA degrees. Less than 5% have master's degrees. Around 3% hold doctorates.

Only about 1% of Israeli institutions of higher learning are Palestinians. Israeli colleges and universities reject three times as many Arab applicants as Jewish ones.

Blatant discrimination is policy. Hebrew and Arabic are official Israeli languages. No major Israeli academic institution offers courses conducted in Arabic.

Palestinians not registered as students are treated differently from Jews. Hebrew University requires police-issued character references to visit its campus. It's to ensure they're not "terrorists."

Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University and others have separate campuses in Occupied

Palestine. They're situated on stolen Palestinian land.

High ranking military and security officials hold positions in Israeli universities. Doing so legitimizes their crimes of war and against humanity.

Academic freedom is a universal principle. Not in Israel. Political dissent is discouraged. It's stifled. Anti-government activism risks trouble.

Students face disciplinary action. Academics are shunned by their colleagues. Some risk dismissal. Israeli academic freedom is more illusion than reality.

The campaign against South African apartheid included academic boycotts. Numerous well-known organizations supported it.

It was harsher than the global BDS campaign. It virtually spurned South African colleges and universities altogether. It did so for their complicity with apartheid. It was a model for future boycotts.

Israel is more vulnerable economically than South Africa. BDS and supportive boycotts are politically and psychologically damaging.

They build on their own momentum. Their pressure is effective. Doing the right thing is more than its own reward. When sustained, it gets results.

BDS is stronger and more effective than ever. Omar Barghouti co-founded the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI).

On December 13, he [headlined](#) "On Academic Freedom and the BDS Movement," saying:

ASA's "academic boycott of Israel provides fresh evidence that (BDS) may be reaching a tipping point on college campuses and academic associations."

Israel "treat(s) (it) as a 'strategic' threat." John Kerry called it an "existential threat" to Israel.

BDS "represents the overwhelming majority of Palestinian society," said Barghouti. It "seeks to realize basic Palestinian rights under international law."

It does so by "applying effective, global, morally consistent pressure on Israel and all the institutions that collude in its violations of international law..."

Judith Butler is a UC Berkeley philosopher. She co-directs its Program of Critical Theory. She calls BDS:

"the most important contemporary alliance calling for an end to forms of citizenship based on racial stratification, insisting on rights of political self-determination for those for whom such basic freedoms are denied or indefinitely suspended, insisting as well on substantial ways of redressing the rights of those forcibly and/or illegally dispossessed of property and land."

Supporting it is a universal imperative. ASA supports justice. It's not alone. In April, the Association for Asian-American Studies endorsed an academic boycott.

It was the first US academic association to do so. It won't likely be the last. Justifiable initiatives have legs. They attract growing numbers of followers.

Sunshine is the best disinfectant. Truth drowns out misguided illusions. Spreading it is essential. Influential voices do it best.

The Teachers' Union of Ireland unanimously called for "ceas(ing) all cultural and academic collaboration (with the) apartheid state of Israel."

The French-Speaking Belgian Students (FEF) represents 100,000 members. It adopted "a freeze of all academic partnerships with Israeli academic institutions."

UC Berkeley and other North American universities called for divesting from Israeli companies. Those profiteering from occupation were targeted.

Calls for boycotting Israel are increasing. Legal scholar Noura Erakat says doing so represents "an ethic of legitimate dissent."

Francis Boyle supports BDS based on the South African anti-apartheid model. So do many other distinguished academics and public figures.

It's no longer taboo to do so. It's a vital imperative. It's important to urge others to do it. It's essential to hold Israel accountable.

BDS has nothing to do with compromising academic freedom. It has everything to do with demanding long denied justice.

Barghouti calls boycotting Israeli academic institutions vital. They're complicit "in planning, implementing, justifying or whitewashing aspects of Israel's occupation, racial discrimination and denial of refugee rights."

Collusion takes many forms. Doing so spurns Palestinian rights. Zionism harms Jews and Arabs alike. It's the enemy of peace, equity and justice.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UNESCR) calls academic freedom:

- "the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work,
- to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the state or any other actor,
- to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and
- to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction."

The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights said:

"All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated."

“The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis.”

Academic freedom requires letting all views be aired freely. It obligates institutions of higher learning to do so.

Peace, equity and justice requires holding Israel accountable. Ignoring its crimes of war and against humanity no longer is acceptable.

Academic institutions and others need to be in the forefront for justice. Failure to do so destroys their credibility.

A Final Comment

On December 27, Francis Boyle wrote Harvard president Faust. He responded to her opposition to ASA’s academic boycott. He wrote as follows:

Dear President Faust:

“I notice your condemnation of the ASA Boycott against Israel in today’s New York Times.”

“I note for the record that Harvard has never once apologized to those of us Harvard Alums who participated in good faith in the Harvard Divestment/Disinvestment Campaign against Israel when your predecessor Larry Summers accused us of being anti-Semitic – a charge which he refused to defend against me as related below.”

“As a matter of fact, Harvard is so notoriously anti-Palestinian that the late, great Edward Said refused to accept Harvard’s top chair in Comparative Literature when Harvard offered it to him.”

“As a loyal Harvard alum I spent an entire evening with Edward at a Chinese Restaurant in Manhattan trying to convince Edward to take this Chair.”

“I thought it would be good for Harvard to have Edward teaching there. As a lawyer and a law professor, I can be quite persuasive.”

“But Edward would have none of my arguments. As Edward saw it, Harvard was so anti-Palestinian that Harvard would have thwarted his intellectual creativity to move there.”

“So Edward stayed at Columbia. Of course Edward was right. And the anti-Palestinian tenor and orientation of Harvard has certainly gotten far worse since when Edward and I were both students at Harvard.”

“Harvard should be doing something about its own longstanding bigotry and racism against the Palestinians. Not criticizing those of us trying to help the Palestinians suffering from Israeli persecution, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and outright genocide.”

Yours very truly,

Francis A. Boyle

Professor of Law

Harvard isn't alone among major US academic institutions. Support for Israel's worst crimes is widespread. So is spurning fundamental Palestinian rights.

International law affirms them. It high time discriminatory US academic institutions did so. Nothing less is acceptable! Not now! Not ever!

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His new book is titled "Banker Occupation: Waging Financial War on Humanity."

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Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network.

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