

## **ASA Turpie Award Winners in Opposition to Israeli Boycott Resolution**

As long-time members of the American Studies Association, we are writing to protest its decision to boycott Israeli academic institutions. We are recipients of the American Studies Association's Mary C. Turpie Award, founded in 1993, to recognize American Studies professors for outstanding teaching and program development. Having devoted our academic careers to building American Studies on our campuses and as an international field of study, we wish to express our concern about the future of the ASA and of our shared intellectual enterprise. We are not convinced that the boycott resolution expresses the sentiments of a majority of the ASA. Out of a membership of nearly 5,000, 828 members voted for this resolution.

We object to the boycott resolution on several grounds.

First, it is at odds with the purpose of the American Studies Association, which the ASA Constitution defines as "the promotion of the study of American culture through the encouragement of research, teaching, publication, the strengthening of relations among persons and institutions in this country and abroad devoted to such studies, and the broadening of knowledge among the general public about American culture in all its diversity and complexity." The boycott resolution divides the membership of the association by taking a political position that is extraneous to its statement of purpose, and impedes the "strengthening of relations among persons and institutions in this country and abroad devoted to such studies."

Secondly, The ASA National Council's call for a boycott is wrong in principle. We are strongly opposed to the Israeli occupation and the Israeli government's policies in the Occupied Territory, including the continued expansion of settlements. But the principle at stake here has nothing to do with the merits of arguments about Israeli policy. A professional organization is supposed to foster and protect academic freedom – the right of scholars and teachers to pursue inquiry without political interference or censorship. Such an organization has every right to take a political stand on matters that directly affect the freedom of faculty,

scholars, and students to study, teach, and pursue scholarship. Indeed, Article XI of the ASA By-Laws empowers the Executive Committee “to speak for the association on [such] public issues . . . as academic freedom; freedom of access to information; appointments to and policies of granting and funding agencies.” While that mandate is not limited to these matters, it is, in our view, unwarranted to claim that Israeli policies in the Occupied Territory “directly affect our work as scholars and teachers” of American culture.

Third, the proposed boycott may undercut the very groups in Israel working for dialogue and peace with the Palestinians. Israeli universities are one of the primary loci of opposition to government policies, and of joint projects in aid of Palestinian scholars, students, and educational institutions. The boycott would block American scholars’ participation in any conferences sponsored by Israeli universities, even if they are held in the interest of peace and reconciliation.

The AAUP (The American Association of University Professors) has rejected academic boycotts (however delimited) because they do not affect oppressive governments, but instead impede the forming of relationships and the exchange of ideas that build support for the protection of human rights. For that reason AAUP backed the economic boycott of apartheid South Africa, which directly affected the interests of the government and its supporters, but refused to impose an academic boycott.

We believe that this call for a boycott does a grave disservice to an organization and an academic field to which we have devoted our professional lives. We therefore ask the President and Council of the ASA to reopen the discussion for a longer and fuller conversation among the membership, allow a new vote, and restore our proud tradition of full and free discussion, tolerance, and dissent. Failing such an outcome, we call upon members of American Studies departments and programs to express, in whatever form they prefer, their disapproval of the boycott.

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