

# Friends of the AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

## SUPPORT THE ASA

**Background:** In an act of international solidarity, congruent with its historic mission to advance social justice, the American Studies Association (ASA) announced on December 16, 2013, that it endorses an academic boycott of Israeli universities. This decision came about following an open public debate at the national convention in November 2013 and an unprecedented membership-wide vote. More ASA members voted on this resolution than in any previous ballot in the association's history. A significant majority (66.05% "yes" to 30.5% "no") of the voting members endorsed the boycott resolution. Read the ASA [National Council statement on the Resolution](#).

The ASA's position is coherent with its long-standing commitment to social justice issues in the United States as well as in international sites where the US has significant political involvement. See for example, [What does the academic boycott mean to the ASA](#). The association's endorsement of the boycott is an expression of the academic freedom, whose commitments to social equality, anti-racism and anti-colonialism have been at the forefront of critical transformations in the humanities and the social sciences. A similar resolution was passed in April, 2013, by the Association of Asian American Studies in 2013 and another was recently passed (December 2013) by the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association. Numerous internationally renowned scholars, such as Judith Butler, Angela Davis, Richard Falk, Robin D. G. Kelley, George Lipsitz, and John Carlos Rowe, have endorsed the ASA's position. But most importantly, the ASA's endorsement of the academic boycott of Israeli universities reflects the democratic will of the voting membership in December 2013. The ASA endorsement is part of a growing movement among professional academic associations in the United States and Europe that question Israel's policies toward Palestinians and the US government's unconditional support. Individual members are not required to

Many in the US are unaccustomed to public criticism of Israel. Some organizations and individuals are now mounting a campaign to discredit the ASA. The ASA's elected leaders have been harassed and are receiving hate mail. The ASA office is being flooded with insulting and threatening phone calls. The ASA Facebook page has been subject to a barrage of inflammatory attacks. National organizations, including Stand With US, are mounting campaigns to undermine the ASA in the academy by appealing to donors and students to call on university administrators to withdraw support from ASA: <http://www.standwithus.com/news/article.asp?id=2944> The Caucus on Academic and Community Activism has already published a press release responding to these attacks <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15687/the-time-for-intimidation-is-over> but we need more support.

## What Can You Do?

**Renew your membership in ASA, especially institutional members of the organization, and encourage other programs to become institutional members.** (ONLY 83 schools are institutional members.)

To renew Institutional Memberships: [http://www.theasa.net/pages/institutional\\_membership\\_invitation/](http://www.theasa.net/pages/institutional_membership_invitation/)

To renew Individual Memberships: [http://www.theasa.net/pages/membership\\_invitation/](http://www.theasa.net/pages/membership_invitation/)

**Announce your support of the ASA and the right of the association to act according to the will of the membership.**

Academic freedom guarantees not only the individual right of faculty members to express their views, but also the autonomy of professional associations.

**Support ASA-related activities.** The ASA remains at the forefront of critical scholarship in many areas crucial to the study and teaching of labor relations, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, popular culture and technology, political organizing and social movements. ASA scholars' interdisciplinary work addresses US history, politics, and culture, both within and beyond its borders. Over the last two decades, American Studies has internationalized, responding to the global conditions of the present. And as [Richard Falk, the international legal theorist, has noted](#): "The ASA outcome is part of a campaign to construct a new subjectivity surrounding the Israel/Palestine conflict. It is the sort of act that lends credibility to claims that a momentum is transforming the climate of opinion surrounding a conflict situation. Such a momentum is capable of breaking down a structure of oppression *at any moment*."

**Defend the right of the ASA to develop independent political positions based on the scholarship and research of its members.** The resolution is based on documented history of Israeli human rights abuse and violations of international law, which are acknowledged in the Israeli press and by scholars. For example, Professor Henry Siegman, the well-known scholar of Mid-East politics and former National Director of the American Jewish Congress, has written in an article titled "[There is no Bigotry in the Boycott](#)," (*Haaretz* Dec 20, 2013): "As to Israel's democratic credentials, there is no more egregious violation of elementary democratic norms than a predatory occupation that denies an entire people all individual and national rights, confiscates their properties, bulldozes their homes and dispossesses them from their internationally recognized patrimony east of the 1967-border."

**Denounce the campaign of intimidation against the ASA.** The ASA is a small academic professional association, but because it dared to express criticism of Israel, powerful and well-funded academic and non-academic organizations have mounted a public campaign aimed at destroying the Association. These organizations falsely accuse the ASA membership of being anti-semitic, bent on the destruction of Israel. But the goal of the boycott is to show solidarity with the beleaguered Palestinians, who have been subject to decades of occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Many Jewish members of ASA support the resolution. These include Eric Cheyfitz, who posted this comment to the ASA website: "I am a Jew with a daughter and three grandchildren who are citizens of Israel. I am a scholar of American Indian and Indigenous studies, who has in published word and action opposed settler colonialism wherever it exists, including of course the Palestinian West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem." See [http://www.theasa.net/from\\_the\\_editors/item/asa\\_members\\_vote\\_to\\_endorse\\_academic\\_boycott/](http://www.theasa.net/from_the_editors/item/asa_members_vote_to_endorse_academic_boycott/)

**Write to your congressional and state representatives and urge them to do the following:**

- *Defend the academic freedom of the ASA and its membership.* The campaign against the ASA as an organization and the attacks against the national leadership and harassment of individual members, some of whom are graduate students or junior faculty, is an assault on academic freedom in the US and violates the basic principle that the American education system should not be held hostage to foreign interests.
- *Ensure that ASA activities are not subject to discriminatory practices.* All university programs receive federal and/or state funding. Government officials should not discriminate in the allocating of public funds simply because they disagree with the positions of a professional association.
- *Encourage and facilitate more critical discussions of the US-Israeli relationship.* See for example [Sarah Roberts's recently published essay](#) in support of the boycott resolution.

**For more information or to report intimidation:**

Contact the ASA Activism and Community Caucus ([asaactcaucus@gmail.com](mailto:asaactcaucus@gmail.com))

