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Book Review: The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel

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Civic Pedagogies in Higher Education: Teaching for Democracy in Europe, Canada and the USA provides a detailed look into the efforts of civic education around the world, outlining pedagogical practices that could be implemented in other programs and, perhaps more importantly, inspiring readers to imagine how they might attend more closely to teaching as a democratic practice. Although the content is organized in ways that sometimes make it difficult to see links between chapters, the authors and editors present an intriguing glimpse into the pedagogies of those who are committed to teaching for democracy. The diverse contributions help the reader to understand such pedagogies as deeply situated and complex. The differences between nations—in understanding, context, and practice—are informative and intriguing; they point out nuances that might have been missed in a more single-voiced text. We recommend this text to scholars with strong interests in civic pedagogies, especially as those pedagogies are currently theorized and practiced in higher education, and to those college and university educators who are committed to teaching as a democratic practice.

Cary Nelson and Noah Gabriel Brahm (Editors). *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel.* Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015. 550 pp. Paperback: \$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-9903316-0-5

REVIEWED BY DAVID B. LEVY, TOURO COLLEGE, CHIEF LIBRARIAN, LANDER COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

When the state of Israel was declared on May 15, 1948, she was invaded by six Arab armies who tried to destroy her. Following their failure, the Arab league tried to destroy Israel economically. They declared an economic and political boycott of the new born Jewish State. While Egypt and Jordan have since signed peace treaties with Israel, other Arabs states and the Palestinians have yet to make peace with the idea of Israel's existence. Israel is still subject to military attack from time to time. Economic war against her has similarly continued on and off since 1948.

Ten years ago, on July 9, 2005, a collection of 170 Palestinian activists and organizations decided to pick up where the Arab League boycott left off and launched a call for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) from Israel.

The book shows that BDS is not only about economic boycotts. BDS's agenda in the long hall is an attempt to erase 1948 Israeli Independence from history, marking the end of an Israeli state.

The book makes a positive contribution by exposing aims of the movement to boycott, divest

from, or sanction Israel. Books by Babbin (2014), Pollack (2011), Chesler (2003), Foxman (2003), and Gerstenfeld (2007) and articles by Bensoussan-Burstein (2014, 2015), Fishman (2011), and Sher (2014) also defend Israel from acrimonious BDS attacks of what is called the "new anti-Semitism." However, this book uniquely outlines and raises a balanced case against the BDS movement. It provides 34 scholarly essays by an international group of distinguished scholars from the United States, Britain, and Israel in 500 plus pages that analyze, debunk, and critique the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) Israel movement. It unmasks BDS as anti-Semitic in essence. It shows that holding Israel to a higher double standard than other nations with worse civil rights records by subjecting Israel to greater scrutiny, singled out attack, and pressure is unfair. Thirdly, this book contributes by revealing how the aim of BDS is to delegitimize and stigmatize the existence of Israel and thus exposes the BDS's denial of Israel's right to exist motivated by deep seated hatreds. The book demonstrates that the aim of the BDS movement is to delegitimize and stigmatize Israel. The BDS movement like the original boycott declared by the Arab league, aims at the destruction of Israel by first delegitimizing her right to exist.

The Case against Academic Boycotts of Israel unveils the BDS as an anti-Semitic movement. It demonstrates that many of BDS proponents act out of conscious hostility to the Jewish people. BDS encourages anti-Semitism at campuses all over the U.S. "Kill the Jews" is often heard at BDS rallies with the same passion it were heard in the streets of Paris "morts les Juifs" during the Dreyfus Affair. The student government at UCLA under BDS influence wanted to reject a most qualified candidate because she was Jewish and active with a Jewish pro-Israel student organizations.

The Case against Academic Boycotts of Israel argues that the BDS movement perverts the facts when it comes to Israel. It holds Israel to a higher standard than any other nation. For example, contributor Martha Nussbaum, drawing on her expertise on the Indian state of Gujarat in which thousands of Muslims were slaughtered, pogrom style, in 2002, shows that nothing comparable to the boycott of Israeli Universities was ever initiated in that atrocity. The book points out that BDS activists are also silent in the face of the mass killings in Syria and Iraq and the denial of human rights in Iran. BDS is also similarly silent regarding the use of human shields by Hamas in Gaza and its bombardment of Israeli cities with missiles in the war between Israel and Gaza.

The book tackles the role of anti-Semitism that calls for the abolition of the Jewish state. This hatred often taps into a longer deep seated hatred as described in books by Schaeffer (1997), Poliakov

(1977), Wistrich (1991), and Nirenberg (2013). As contributor Kenneth Marcus notes, BDS is anti-Semitic because some of its proponents act out of conscious hostility to the Jewish people, others act from unconscious or tacit disdain for Jews, and still others operate out of a climate of opinion that contains elements that are hostile to Jews and serve as conduits through whom anti-Jewish trope are communicated, while all of them work to sustain a movement that attacks the commitment to Israel that is central to the identity and purpose of the Jewish people as a whole, especially after the Holocaust. As Fackenheim affirms in his 614th Commandment, one must not give Hitler posthumous victories after the Holocaust, and that means support of the state of Israel which in part sprang from the ashes.

The book is organized in six parts. The first part is titled, "Opposing Boycotts as a Matter of Principle."

Part Two focuses on the American Studies Association (ASA) vote to boycott Israeli institutions of post-secondary education. This book stems from the votes in late 2013 by the American Studies Association (and other small Academic groups) to boycott Israeli academic institutions, and the anti-Israeli resolution and pro-boycott panel discussion at the January 2014 meeting of the Modern Language Association.

Part Three is titled, "the BDS Movement, the Left, and American Culture." Sharon Musher, in her essay, "The Closing of the American Studies Association's Mind," underscores Bloom's warnings of the politicization of Academia. She notes that the BDS movement today like many professions in the 1960s, use their classrooms as bully pulpits to further their own political ideologies and axes to grind, Musher shows that the BDS slogans "Zionism is racism" and "Israel is an apartheid state" effectively trade in pursuit of truth for parroting of sloganism. To compare South Africa apartheid to Israel is an Aristotelian category error. The politicization of academia is further addressed by contributor Russell Berman in "Scholars against Scholarship," which shows that BDS supporters impose a "political litmus test" into the scholarly world, coercing, that anyone who is accepted into the BDS gang, must denounce and demonize Israel. Berman notes that the boycott of Israel has let "the genie of bigotry out of the bottle" (p. 55). This carries over into violence as witnessed in the threats to the life of Daniel Pipes scheduled to speak at Berkley University, the destruction of the Hillel house at Concordia University when Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to speak, and countless other acts of violence, bullying, and vandalism. The BDS supporters believe themselves idealistically standing against "colonial aggression and exploitation." BDS supporters frequently project onto Israel

the label of being "a fascist Nazi aggressor," when, in fact, Israel represents a democratic resistance to just that totalitarian danger. BDS effectively enacts a Nietzschean reversal of all reversals and demonizes Israel. It attempts to reverse the image of David and Goliath and shut down Israeli voices without toleration of dissent.

Part Four offers five essays on Israeli Palestinian relations in the Israeli University system. For example, contributor Shira Wolosky teaches "feminist theory" at IUJ, however, according to the categorization of BDS supporters, "feminists" cannot support the state of Israel, which they claim represents "a patriarchal oppression of women." Wolosky's academic interests are one of many examples of how BDS' simple binary classification is out of sync with the realities of a transnational and trans ethnic Israeli state where Chinese, Ethiopian, Indian Jews, etc. live together. Contributor Rachel Harris, for example, focuses on the emerging Arab-Israeli literature that explores the complexities of the contemporary state. The book thus suggests that the categories of liberal versus conservative, dovish versus hawkish, and peaceniks versus militants are too simplistic, for the book's contributors represent a diversity of voices across the political spectrum.

Part Five, titled "A Concise History of Israel," gives a fifty five page history of Israel to attempt to set the historical facts straight.

Part Six gathers primary documents on the boycott featuring the ASA's final resolution and debates on this topic involving the MLA (Modern Language Association).

The book seeks not suppression and censorship but rather exposure and censure. As a whole, the diverse essays, ranging from liberal to conservative perspectives, including also Arab Israeli voices, demonstrate by facts and convincing arguments that BDS opinions are dangerously faulty and in essence and heart discriminatory and the reverse of "progressive" by threatening free speech and free exchange of ideas in the University.

The book exposes why the BDS movement is not just a threat to all Jews but to the University itself if it is to return to serving as a forum for genuine honest academic debate, free exchange of ideas, intellectual integrity, moral honesty, rigorous knowledge criteria of truth, and a beacon committed to the rights, dignity, and respect for all peoples. This book demonstrates this by evidence and proof, in the sense of the Wittgensteinian criteria for validity and soundness. It identifies elements of bigotry in BDS, by Quinian "speech acts."

The book shows that part of the anti-Zionistic ideology of BDS supporters of the progressive global left is alliance with Islamism. This alliance is also an attack on the West- particularly the United States. Anti-Zionism has become more

and more associated with the leftist progressive attacks against America. 911 followed soon after the Durban Conference. Durban foreshadows the growing anti-Semitism of the BDS movement. For the new left, the

Israelis are the prime example of Western-implemented neo colonialism. The Israelis gained this control [in conspiracy theory of the new left] by using the United States for support. The old left's focus on Marxist analysis of economy and capitalism has shifted to the new left's attack on Enlightenment culture, advocacy for the third world, and global village. The denunciation of American support for Israel is sloganized under the code word "AIPAC and special interest groups." Delusional collaboration theory, misattributes it as an instance of how Jews, as represented in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, control like puppets leaders of their host nations.

At the end of the day, the book asks the readers to have empathy for all parties, to see things from the perspective of the other, and take a hard look at realistic and possible solutions. It realizes that "we are in this together," and no one wins, but all loose, in a fighting cycle of violence, of blood drenched pavements fueled by hate, as noted in the lyrics of Jewish rap artist Matisyahu.

Today the world is plagued by anti-Semitic attacks in Europe and on American College campuses. With the recent murderous terrorist attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris or the synagogue attack that killed a Jewish man in Denmark, we are still reminded that the shadow of anti-Semitism is alive after the Holocaust. This book stresses the role of educating. It gives us cause to consider how the Nazis systematically corrupted the educational system in Germany and throughout the Third Reich by sowing the seeds of hatred, scapegoating Jews. We must recall that ninety-seven percent of all teachers joined the Nazi Teachers' Association. Higher education in America is no way near experiencing "Aryanization." There has been no "Rechtensrate Rede" banning Jewish students and professors. Biology is not being used to prove the existence of the social Darwinian "Master Race" affirming blood purity. The government is not denouncing Jews systematically by propaganda ministry. Eugenics does not abound as a governmental policy. There is no "Hitler Jugend" movement, which soared to 5.4 million members in 1936, which systematically carried out book burning rallies at Universities. However, the Nazi historical examples give us pause to consider how education can be corrupted by its ideological politicization. The book affirms that Universities should be a place where the intellectual exchange of ideas takes place or they can be the grounds for hatred and racism. Today the BDS movement in

the name of "anti-racism" viciously can foster a new Anti-Semitism. This book helps warn against the dangerous seeds of hatred in Academia today manifested by some BDS adherents that potentially could later erupt. The BDS movement and the Brandeis professor listserv where some faculty members viciously attacked both Israel and what they called "the Jewish leadership" of the University, are examples of an alarming trend of Jewish "self-hatred" as understood by Gilman (1986) that a BDS movement can further foster. The prevailing atmosphere and tendency on many University campuses has become anti-Israel and anti-Semitic. This book is a clarion call for fairness. The book, in part, attempts to right the media bias that has become "acceptable" on College campuses. The Holocaust and other atrocities against Jews should be remembered as examples of what can happen when baseless hatred runs unchecked and rampant. This book may be a first step in that "checking." It must, however, not be the last step in the call for fairness, judging from what Lehman (1991) calls the "signs of the times."

The editors are to be commended for compiling such a necessary, important, balanced, intellectually honest and fair book. My only caveat regarding what contributions were not made to the book is the lack of representation of the many viewpoints of the many sorts of religious Zionists including those of the Rav Kook, Mizrahi, Shas, Degel Torah, etc. camps and parties. Recent articles by Yeshiva University Professors that have examined the religious Zionist positions in Jewish law include those by Bleich (1979) and Schachter (1988).

The audience of this book will be of interest to laymen, historians, scholars of the Middle East conflict, political and social scientist, Middle East policy institutes, Educators, and scholars of the history of anti-Semitism.

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Michael S. Roth. *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014. 228 pp. Hardcover: \$21.47. ISBN: 978-0-300-17551-6.

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In an era of higher education increasingly marked by declining state appropriations, rising tuition and fees, and growing student debt, colleges and universities are facing increased pressure from policymakers, business leaders, and students to ensure that graduates are adequately prepared to enter the workforce and educational programs are aligned with the needs of the economy. But as Michael S. Roth cogently argues in *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters*:

the demand that we replace broad contextual education meant to lead to lifelong learning with targeted vocational undergraduate instruction is a critical mistake, one that neglects a deep American tradition of humanistic education that has been integral to our success as a nation and that has enriched the lives of generations of students by enhancing their capacities for shaping themselves and reinventing the world they will inhabit. (pp. 2–3)

In addition to the four chapters that comprise *Beyond the University*, Roth begins with an introduction in which he describes his conception of liberal education; experience promoting it as a researcher, teacher, and President of Wesleyan University; and primary rationale for writing this book in support of it. The unique American approach to liberal education, as Roth defines it, is a combination of both “philosophical” and “rhetorical” traditions. The philosophical approach emphasizes rationality, inquiry, and critique, while the rhetorical cultivates in students the ability to appreciate and participate in humanity’s great cultural traditions, both historical and contemporary. While the American research university has often been identified more strongly with the philosophical approach, undergraduate education still draws heavily from the rhetorical tradition, and Roth persuasively argues that the promotion of inquiry and critique must be balanced by helping students understand their own relationship with canonical works in various fields of learning. To underscore both the utility and feasibility of this approach to liberal learning, Roth describes his success teaching a traditional humanities class, “The Modern and the Postmodern,” in a very non-traditional format, as a massively open online course (MOOC) through the Coursera platform.

Each chapter then explores the ways in which liberal education has been defined, the key figures in its evolution, and the various sources of resistance to liberal education. Chapter 1 begins around the time of the founding of the new American republic and centers on Thomas Jefferson’s approach to education, heavily influenced by Enlightenment ideals. Jefferson believed that an educated citizenry was the cornerstone of a well-functioning democracy, and the future leaders of the United States would require a well-rounded education dedicated to promoting inquiry, curiosity, and self-determination. These beliefs thoroughly infused the University of Virginia, founded by Jefferson, in which students were free to choose whatever courses they pleased from a broad and diverse curriculum, including languages, mathematics, various sciences, ideology, grammar, ethics, literature, fine arts, and so forth. While Jefferson repeatedly stressed the