



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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U of H: The University of Hypocrisy

"Men are born ignorant, not stupid. They are made stupid by education." So wrote the British historian Bertrand Russell, and if you've read the papers this week you may think he was absolutely right. Years of education do not translate into intelligence let alone an enlightened insight into truth.

I write specifically about the American Studies Association (ASA), a nationwide organization of university professors. In an effort to protest Israel's treatment of Palestinians, its members overwhelmingly voted to boycott Israel's academic institutions from collaborations with the universities here in the United States. Among local institutions affiliated with the ASA are New York University, Cornell, Columbia, SUNY Buffalo and SUNY Stony Brook. To be fair, the administrations of many of these affiliated universities have slammed the boycott but are just sitting on the sidelines.

What's so frightening about the entire scenario is the blatant hypocrisy that occurs in our university system seemingly unchecked. The ASA's news release states that their boycott "represents a principle of solidarity with scholars and students deprived of their academic freedom and an aspiration to enlarge that freedom for all, including Palestinians." So how did this enlightened band of philosophers choose to "enlarge that freedom"? By depriving Israeli students of it, essentially punishing an entire nation of innocent scholars. Now we may not all be professors, but I think it's easy to see the absurdity here. How dare they even use the words "freedom for all" then proceed to systematically diminish it for an entire country?

One would assume that scholars, above all, would understand that the key to change is cooperation and bringing opposition together in environments where they discover likeness and shared purpose. The academic forum has always been where that happens, yet the ASA seeks to negate that. Our U.S. Department of State has long known that when you bring young Israelis and Palestinians together here, and have them work side by side, these future leaders eventually return to their homelands with new ideas that dismantle old prejudices. Instead, the ASA's thoughtless approach flies in the very face of the academic tradition. As the City University's interim chancellor, William Kelly, so wisely observed, "The free exchange of ideas is at the heart of academic enterprise. Any effort to impede that flow is antithetical to the values that universities hold most dear."

So how does the ASA justify their ill-considered stance? They say they're standing up to human rights abuses, naturally. But as New York State Senator Jeff Klein pointed out, "No other nation — even those with far worse records on human rights and academic freedom than what the ASA has accused Israel of — is subject to a similar boycott by the ASA." They've taken no action against China, Russia, or North Korea — not a one. There are countries, as was well-publicized just last year, where women are stoned just for trying to go to school and yet the ASA turned a blind eye. Do human rights abuses get any worse than that? Clearly this is just more hypocrisy from the ASA, but we must ask ourselves why the double standard even exists.

Unfortunately, the answer is disturbing and yet often left unspoken. There is a growing trend that's taken hold of liberal academia and the media in the United States and Europe that embraces an anti-Israel stance and is, quite honestly, rooted in centuries-old anti-Semitism. It's now seems okay so long as you're liberal and have a degree. If this isn't the case, could anyone please explain why — just in this particular case alone — Israel is being held up for supposed infringement of academic freedom when countries that are far worse offenders get a pass? The answer is clear but you won't hear any explanation from the ASA.

Suffice to say we should always be wary of people who believe their education puts them beyond reproach.