



March 20, 2007

Dear Chancellor Blumenthal,

We are very disappointed that you did not reply to our letter dated 3/9/07 detailing our concerns about the conference entitled "Alternative Histories Within and Beyond Zionism", which took place on 3/15/07. We attended the 3.5 hour conference, and our fears as to its nature were confirmed in every detail. The attached report summarizes what happened at the conference. In brief, this event, which was politically motivated and directed, had an egregiously anti-Israel bias and lacked even a modicum of academic integrity and scholarship. In addition, the event left a number of students, faculty and community members in shock.

Our report provides clear evidence that a number of University of California rules and principles have been violated, specifically:

- 1) The conference used university monies, facilities, resources and reputation for an event that was unambiguously political in nature, in violation of:
 - **The Policy on Course Content of The Regents of the University of California, approved June 19, 1970 and amended September 22, 2005:** "They (The Regents) are responsible to ensure that public confidence in the University is justified. And they are responsible to see that the University remain aloof from politics and never function as an instrument for the advance of partisan interest. Misuse of the classroom by, for example, allowing it to be used for political indoctrination... constitutes misuse of the University as an institution."
 - **Directive issued by Charles J. Hitch, President of the University of California, September 18, 1970, "Restrictions on the Use of University Resources and Facilities for Political Activities" (still in effect):**
 - 1) "The name, insignia, seal, or address of the University or any of its offices or units shall not be used for or in connection with political purposes or activity except as consistent with University regulations."

- 1) "In correspondence, statements, or other material relating to political activities or issues, the University title of a faculty or staff member shall be used only for identification: if such identification might reasonably be construed as implying the support, endorsement, or opposition of the University with regard to any political activity or issue, the identification shall be accompanied by an explicit statement that the individual is speaking for himself and not as a representative of the university or any of its offices or units."
- 1) "University equipment, supplies, and services---duplicating machines, telephones, mail and messenger services, vehicles, computers, stationery, and other equipment, supplies or services---shall not be used for or in connection with political purposes or activities."

- **Academic Personnel Policy (APM) 015 - Faculty Code of Conduct:** Types of unacceptable conduct: "Unauthorized use of University resources or facilities on a significant scale for personal, commercial, **political**, or religious purposes."

1) The conference's egregious political bias and its lack of diversity of legitimate scholarly perspectives constitute a serious breach of academic integrity and a corruption of the ideals of scholarship, in violation of:

- **Preamble to APM-015:** "The University seeks to provide and sustain an environment conducive to sharing, extending, and critically examining knowledge and values, and to furthering the search for wisdom."
- **APM-010:** "The University also seeks to foster in its students a mature independence of mind, and this purpose cannot be achieved unless students and faculty are free within the classroom to express the widest range of viewpoints in accord with the standards of scholarly inquiry and professional ethics."

In a letter from UC President Charles J. Hitch to members of the Committee on Educational Policy dated September 11, 1970, he wrote: "There are both educational and legal reasons why the University must remain politically neutral. Educationally, the pursuit of truth and knowledge is only possible in an atmosphere of freedom, and if the University were to surrender its neutrality, it would jeopardize its freedom. Legally, Article IX, section 9, of the State Constitution provides in part that "The University shall be entirely independent of all political or sectarian influence and kept free therefrom in the appointment of its regents and in the administration of its affairs..."

This conference makes clear that the University has violated the educational and legal directives of both the University of California and the State of California. What transpired at this event is not right according to the law, it is not right according to the orders of the regents, it is not right according to the traditions of the academy, and it is not right according to what the taxpaying public expects and deserves. Moreover, these violations provide clear evidence that this University has a considerable sickness at the heart of its academic program. We believe that as Chancellor it is your responsibility to ensure that the institution functions far better than this.

Looking forward to your reply,

Ilan Benjamin
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cc: David Kliger, Executive Vice Chancellor

Report on “Alternative Histories Within and Beyond Zionism” conference
at UCSC on March 15, 2007

Submitted by Tammi Rossman-Benjamin and Ilan Benjamin

Approximately 100 people attended the conference -- about 70 students, 20 faculty members and 10 community members. UCSC Anthropology professor Lisa Rofel, the conference organizer and moderator, opened the event by saying that the conference was an historic one at UCSC, and represented the “highest ideals of academic freedom”.

The first speaker was David Theo Goldberg, Director of the University of California Humanities Research Institute, who spoke on “Racial Palestinianization”. Goldberg claimed that Israel was, from its inception, a racist entity, which used its racist state policies to protect the purity of the Jewish race and exclude and oppress the Palestinians. In his talk and accompanying slide presentation, Goldberg explicitly and implicitly linked Israel’s current state policies and practices to those of the Nazis. Goldberg concluded his talk by asserting that Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians was part of a race war begun by Israel in order to rid the land of a despised racial group, and that within such a context, suicide bombing was an understandable and even fair response.

Judith Butler, a professor in the departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley, was the second speaker. Her talk was entitled “Hidden Histories of Post-Zionism”. Basing herself in part on the writings of Edward Said and in part on those of Jewish thinkers in the first half of the 20th century such as Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt, Butler claimed that Zionism was a racist and therefore illegitimate ideology, and she argued for the creation of a secular democratic bi-national state, which would replace the Jewish State. While Butler complained that the debate about a bi-national state is often stifled with the argument that it will lead to the destruction of Israel, she did not address the issue of why this concern is unfounded, or how Jews would be able to live safely and securely in a state with a Muslim majority.

The third speaker was Hilton Obenzinger, Associate Director for Honors and Advanced Writing at the Stanford Writing Center. His talk, entitled “Jewish Opposition to the Occupation Since 1967, A Personal and Public Journey“, was indeed primarily a personal account of how, after growing up in a Zionist Jewish home, Obenzinger became an anti-Zionist activist who opposed the Jewish State and advocated Palestinian causes. Obenzinger also described and decried the opposition within the Jewish community to his anti-Israel pro-Palestinian efforts.

Terri Ginsberg, an adjunct professor at Purchase College, was the fourth speaker. In her talk, “Holocaust Film and Zionism: Exposing a Collaboration”, Ginsburg drew heavily upon the writings of Norman Finkelstein in claiming that Holocaust films have facilitated and justified the propagation of a racist Zionist ideology, which has resulted in the oppression, ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Palestinians. She noted that her ideas were very unpopular both in the academy and in the Jewish community, and she accused those who would discredit her work of being “McCarthyites”.

The fifth and final speaker was Ryvka Bar Zohar, a graduate student at NYU, whose talk was entitled “A History of Zionism and the Politics of Divestment”. Bar Zohar presented her own ideas about the history of Zionism, arguing that the ideology grew out of the attempt of Eastern European Jews to recover from the “shame” of the Diaspora and the Holocaust by finding pride in domination. According to her analysis, Zionism was an essentially racist doctrine, which led to the creation of an apartheid state. Bar Zohar used her analysis to argue that the movement to divest from Israel was a justified and effective strategy for mounting an opposition to Zionism for all anti-Zionist and anti-apartheid activists.

It wasn't until after the final speaker had concluded, with less than a half-hour remaining to the 3-and-a-half hours scheduled for the conference, that the moderator opened the floor for questions. Unfortunately, by that time most of the audience had left the hall, as well as one of the speakers. At the end of the event, a student approached one of the members of the audience who had, during the question and answer period, challenged the use of the term ‘Arab Jews’ by one of the speakers, and she yelled at him several times, “You are a racist”. Another student approached two men engaged in a private conversation about how egregiously biased the conference was, and she said in a clear and accusatory tone, “You have blood on your hands”.

The few pro-Israel students in the room were extremely upset after the event. One student was appalled that her own department, History, had sponsored this event. Another expressed outrage that her university tuition was supporting what she felt was anti-Israel propaganda.

There are four aspects of this conference that should deeply concern all university administrators and faculty, as well as members of the tax-paying public:

- 1) Although promoted as an academic event and sponsored by 8 UCSC departments and research groups (Institute for Humanities Research, Feminist Studies, Anthropology, CGIRS, Community Studies, Sociology, Politics and History), this conference did not adhere to even minimal standards of scholarship. First of all, neither the conference organizer nor any of the speakers is a recognized scholar of the history of Zionism or Israel, and collectively they boast few academic publications in this area. Secondly, only two of the five speakers referenced the scholarship of others. Of these, Ginsburg based much of her work on the highly questionable scholarship of Norman Finkelstein, and Butler's interpretation of one of her key sources was disputed by the book's editor, who happened to be in the audience at the time. Thirdly, the use of demonizing and vilifying language and slides in Goldberg's talk, the focus on personal anecdotes in Obenzinger's talk, and the justification of political activism that was at the heart of Bar Zohar's talk, all raise a number of serious questions about the academic quality of this event.
- 2) Far from representing a diversity of legitimate scholarly perspectives on the topic of Zionism, the speakers all articulated the same extremist view about Israel's founding ideology, namely, that it was racist and illegitimate, and called into question the legitimacy of the Jewish State itself. Indeed, this uniformity of perspective and expression of egregious anti-Israel bias, which violate the norms

of academic integrity, are not surprising, given that all five speakers identified themselves in the course of their talks as anti-Zionists, and two of them, Obenzinger and Ginsberg, openly expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people. It seems, however, that such a one-sided anti-Israel conference is just what the conference organizer, Lisa Rofel, had in mind. For when Jewish Studies director Murray Baumgarten offered to work with Rofel to create a more balanced event by bringing speakers with other legitimate scholarly perspectives about Zionism and Israel, she declined the offer.

- 3) It is clear that the conference was an event dominated by political advocacy. Most of the speakers were explicit about their political motivation and advocacy efforts: The talks by Obenzinger and Bar Zohar were wholly devoted to justifying and promoting their anti-Israel political efforts. Butler introduced her talk by saying that she had committed herself “to speaking out, and to encouraging other Jews to speak out”, and Ginsberg said that her goal was “to transform Zionism in the name of social justice”. Moreover, the anti-Israel political stands of the speakers must have been well-known to the conference organizer, as all of them had previously spoken out publicly against the Jewish State, either by signing divestment petitions and other public statements calling for halting all aid to Israel, boycotting Israeli academics, or organizing "Israeli Apartheid Week" events. Indeed, the conference organizer herself is a signatory the petition urging that the University of California divest from Israel.
- 4) The US Department of State, in its working definition of anti-Semitism, has included the following examples of the manifestation of anti-Semitism in public discourse:
 - Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination (e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor).
 - Applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
 - Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
 - Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.

The description of the talks above suggests that every one of these examples found expression at this conference. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that the speakers’ blatant anti-Israel bias and inflammatory rhetoric gave rise to the hostile behavior of some students in the audience towards the few people who openly expressed disagreement with the speakers.