

December 11, 2013

To Members of the American Studies Association:

As eight former presidents of the American Studies Association (ASA), we write to urge members to reject the "[Proposed Resolution on Academic Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions](#)," which the ASA's National Council recently approved and has put to a membership vote.

We believe academic boycotts to be antithetical to the mission of free and open inquiry for which a scholarly organization stands. For all the reasons outlined in a [letter to the Council](#) signed by many ASA members including the eight former presidents writing you today, we see an academic boycott as setting a dangerous precedent by sponsoring an inequitable and discriminatory policy that would punish one nation's universities and scholars. Our task is to open conversation, not to close it off, and to do so with those who reflect ideas (and support policies) with which many of us may strongly disagree.

We are also deeply concerned by the process by which the ASA Council has put this decision to the membership. ASA Members were provided only the resolution and a link to a website supporting it. Despite explicit requests, the National Council refused to circulate or post to the ASA's website alternative perspectives.

That the membership vote is being undertaken with only one side of a complex question presented seems to us to amplify the profound contradictions of the academic boycott strategy, and to compound its potentially pernicious consequences. This can only damage the ASA and further deflect attention from the serious moral and political issues proponents seek to raise. We believe there are far more effective and constructive ways than a hollow, divisive academic boycott for ASA to engage these important concerns.

We provide here links to documents opposing an ASA academic boycott, and urge members to study them carefully: A [letter to the Council](#) by ASA members opposed to academic boycotts, a [solidarity letter](#) signed by Americanists who also oppose academic boycotts, and the AAUP's [Open Letter to ASA members](#) urging them to reject this and all academic boycotts.

Members have until 11:59PM on Dec. 15th to vote. You need your ASA membership number (provided on the ASA e-mail announcing the vote) to cast your vote. If you cannot find it, e-mail Kathy Gochenour (KAG@press.jhu.edu). Vote here: http://asa.press.jhu.edu/cgi-bin/2013_israel_asa_vote.cgi.

The National Council has agreed to reject this resolution if less than 50% of voting members explicitly approve it. We urge ASA members to vote to reject this divisive and discriminatory resolution. If members remain uncertain, we urge them to register their votes as abstentions.

Sincerely,

Shelley Fisher Fishkin
Joseph S. Atha Professor of Humanities
Professor of English
Director of American Studies
Stanford University
ASA President, 2004-2005

Michael Frisch
Professor of American Studies and Senior Research
Scholar
University at Buffalo, State University of New York
ASA President, 2000-2001

Karen Halttunen
Professor of History
University of Southern California
ASA President, 2005-2006

Mary Kelley
Ruth Bordin Collegiate Professor of History,
American Culture, & Women's Studies
University of Michigan
ASA President, 1999-2000

Linda K. Kerber
May Brodbeck Professor in the Liberal Arts, Emerita
University of Iowa
ASA President, 1988-1989

Alice Kessler-Harris
R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of History
Columbia University
ASA President, 1991-1992

Patricia Limerick
Professor of History, Faculty Director and Chair of
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ASA President, 1996-1997

Elaine Tyler May
Regents Professor, Departments of American
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University of Minnesota
ASA President, 1995-1996