

CARY NELSON

# ISRAEL DENIAL

*Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism,  
& The Faculty Campaign  
Against the Jewish State*



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Copublished by

THE ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT NETWORK

&

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

## ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *ISRAEL DENIAL*

*Israel Denial* is the first book to offer detailed analyses of faculty publications supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement; it contrasts them with options for promoting peace. These faculty have devoted a major part of their professional lives to delegitimizing the Jewish state. While there are beliefs they hold in common—including the conviction that there is nothing good to say about Israel—they also develop unique arguments to recruit converts to their cause. *Israel Denial* is also the first book to give substantial attention to anti-Zionist pedagogy. No effort to understand the BDS movement's impact on the academy and public policy can be complete without the insight offered here.

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“A substantial number of American university professors have dedicated themselves to achieving the elimination of the Jewish state. And Cary Nelson has done the worst possible thing that could ever be done to those people. He has read them. He has quoted their writings. He has analyzed the arguments. It is a demolition. It is bracing to see. It is inspiring.”

—PAUL BERMAN, author of *The Flight of the Intellectuals* and other books

“The Academic Engagement Network is pleased to support publication of Cary Nelson’s *Israel Denial*. The book is an intellectual *tour de force*, challenging work by leading scholars in the BDS movement who seek to shape public understanding of and teaching about Israel. If Holocaust denial promotes a false account about what occurred during World War II, failing all evidentiary tests, “Israel denial” reveals the academic invention of a nearly similar fictive account of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one designed to demonize Israel and dehumanize its people. Nelson brilliantly documents the shoddy, self-referencing nature of much of this scholarship. He identifies the impact these publications have on standards of academic integrity, on politicized teaching by BDS loyalists, and on the influence still others exercise in several prominent university presses. But Nelson is much more than a critic of BDS scholarship. He helps us see how the two-state solution can be revived, how both peoples’ desires for national sovereignty can be accommodated.”

—KEN WALTZER, Michigan State University,  
Executive Director, AEN

“Cary Nelson’s book is as important for the academy itself as it is for the study of the Israel-Palestine conflict. A distinguished scholar of literature and a major leader of the American academy, he has never wavered in defense of the values critical to sustaining the scholarly enterprise. Thus, with regard to Israel and its conflict with Palestinians, he recognized the need to document the absolute loss of the values upholding academic standards. A complicated battle over land has been turned into a morality tale accusing Israel of the very crimes—genocide, ethnic cleansing—historically unleashed against Jews. *Israel Denial* is a book of tremendous significance—as much a rescue of the academy as a meticulous analysis of what has become the major discourse distorting the study of Israel. His chapters—like those on Saree Makdisi and Jasbir Puar—demonstrate an incredible range of knowledge. They also show how careful he is with his own collection of data. This book deconstructs a conventional wisdom that has been stitched together with false analogies, misused data, and just plain ignorance in the mainstream media. On the one hand, *Israel Denial* is dispiriting in showing how deeply politics can intrude on and compromise intellectual projects. On the other hand, the book demonstrates what can be achieved with traditional scholarly skills and honesty. For that, all of us should be grateful to Cary Nelson.”

—DONNA ROBINSON DIVINE, Smith College; President,  
Association for Israel Studies

“In *Israel Denial*, Cary Nelson sets out ‘to take anti-Zionist faculty positions seriously and address them in detail.’ He accomplishes that objective and much, much more. *Israel Denial* is the most wide-ranging and incisive analysis of the academic movement to delegitimize and demonize Israel. With characteristic grace and insight, Nelson thoroughly exposes and refutes the arguments for boycotting the Jewish state, while also exploring pathways to actual peace and reconciliation.”

—STEVEN LUBET, Northwestern University School of Law,  
author of *Interrogating Ethnography: Why Evidence Matters* and  
other books.

“Once again, Cary Nelson steps up to the plate in the fight against BDS. *Israel Denial* presents detailed and thorough analyses of individual and collective “academic” publications in support of this dogmatic and intimidating movement. While it is sometimes difficult to blame young students, ignorant of the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for joining in the de-legitimization of the Jewish state, it is incomprehensible that faculty should devote their academic work and professional lives to justifying their anti-Israel ideology. Yet effective countering of the BDS movement warrants deep study and full understanding of the narratives and tactics academics use in the de-legitimizing campaign. Kudos to Cary Nelson on producing a brilliant book that challenges these anti-Israel publications and unmasks the false, misleading, and distorted nature of the facts and arguments faculty use in their allegedly scholarly work.”

—RIVKA CARMI, M.D., President, Ben-Gurion  
University of the Negev

“The campaign to boycott Israel wants to be seen as a symbolic marker of the true community of the good; it poses as the simple global resistance to the Israeli right. *Israel Denial* disrupts this dishonest and menacing positioning. It raises its banner within the community of the progressive, it articulates opposition to both the BDS and the pro-settler nationalist flag-wavers, it embraces a politics of peace and it consistently opposes both anti-Arab racism and antisemitism.”

—DAVID HIRSH, Goldsmiths University, author of *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*.

“This is a fine book on the strategies and argumentation of the BDS movement, and on some of its leading proponents. Nelson offers his readers powerful dissections and refutations of many of the BDS’s talking points, as well as some thoughts about moving towards accommodations regarding—if not a solution to—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

—BENNY MORRIS, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev,  
author of *One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict*  
and other books.

“Cary Nelson’s *Israel Denial* is a hard hitting, in depth analysis of the current opposition to Israel’s existence. While anyone who wants to uncover the inherent imbalance in the BDS movement would be well advised to read this book, it is also important for anyone who is concerned by a certain ‘group think’ that has permeated the academy. While this book is ostensibly about opposition to Israel, it is really about far more than that.”

—DEBORAH E. LIPSTADT, Emory University, author of  
*Antisemitism Here and Now* and other books.

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