

Richard Landes, *Salem on the Thames: Moral Panic, Anti-Zionism and the Triumph of Hate Speech at Connecticut College* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 200 pp., ISBN 9781644690994

Kenneth S. Stern, *The Conflict Over the Conflict: The Israel/Palestine Campus Debate* (Toronto: New Jewish Press, 2020), 296 pp., ISBN 9781487507367

Academic freedom, freedom of speech, and hate speech are contentious issues on North American university campuses. This is especially true regarding the Israel/Palestine debate. Stern's monograph examines the overall campus conflict, while Landes' edited volume presents the specific case study of the accusations against Professor Andrew Pessin. Although these books are primarily situated within the American higher education context, Stern's book includes a broader historic, legal, administrative, and international examination of the Israel/Palestine controversy. Landes's dissection of the Pessin case cites other incidents of both anti-Israel animus and its antisemitic undercurrents, specifically highlighting *the how not to* administrative approach.

Landes's candid writing style is reminiscent of the late Robert Wistrich, while Stern is more nuanced, careful, but still forthright. Landes is very clear about the issues concerning Israel and their connections to antisemitism, whereas Stern is more cautious about making this connection. Interestingly, they take different routes to arrive at similar conclusions to ensure that students and the academy are exposed to accurate and evidence-based academic freedom, free speech, and an understanding of what constitutes hate. What differentiates these books is Stern's "blueprint for rational campus discussion on Israel and Palestine" as a way forward and Landes' offering an alternative approach to learn from the Pessin affair. Stern's book highlights the opportunities campuses may offer students as forums to openly examine all issues using an evidence-based approach that specifically employs critical and rational thinking to create a safe space in order to "explore unsafe ideas." These books are timely and ask the reader to consider the implications of the campus Israel/Palestine conflict.

Landes assesses Connecticut College Philosophy Professor Andrew Pessin's "public shaming" over accusations regarding some anti-Hamas Facebook postings. The volume probes the perceived campus social justice, injustice, and moral panic that impacted open dialogue, academic freedom, and free speech. Landes argues that the Pessin case is an example of a mismanaged and poorly investigated incident due to misleading, omitted, and eventually erased online information. The moral panic

argument includes an examination of the misguided action and inaction by the Connecticut College community, including the President, the deans, most of the professoriate, and many students, as well as Pessin's colleagues and friends. Essentially, the crux of Landes's argument is the comparison of Chamberlain's appeasement to misguided campus decisions based on a Faustian bargain of "social justice" versus verifiable evidence.

Stern recounts his years of experience with hate issues on and off campus and explores the value of evidence-based rational and critical thinking. As a backdrop, he discusses Zionism, the 2001 Durban World Conference against Racism, the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, and the U.S. Antisemitism Awareness Act. In many ways, Stern's book provides a roadmap for campuses to safely examine controversies in order to carefully prepare students for a *learning moment*. Stern argues that to prepare students to challenge and debate on

and off campus hate, they need to be carefully exposed to all sorts of ideas, including BDS and related issues such as antisemitism. His blueprint for rational campus discussion culminates in his final chapter with the question: "How can the campus dynamic around Israel/Palestine be changed?" Stern emphasizes the importance of thoughtful presidential, decanal, and faculty guidance to promote critical thinking, taking risks, and demonstrating what a debate looks like. Hearing from all sides in order to have difficult discussions would, he argues, increase clarity. Stern's path forward is the difficult high road that would require a cerebral, nuanced, and a more innovative approach such as that offered by courses that he and colleagues have created, which puts the students in the position of the "other." This could include having pro-Israel students taking on the historical position of the Mufti of Jerusalem and pro-Palestinian students understanding the viewpoint of David Ben-Gurion. Another course mentioned includes learning about the history of hate. He advocates for holding workshops, seminars, classes, and programs that help students enjoy learning how to safely function in unsafe intellectual spaces. Stern's goal is to have students think rather than just react, in order to gain a better understanding of the conflict. He also advocates for a joint field of Israel/Palestine Studies and realizes there are many challenges but is hoping for strong leadership to bridge the separation between these areas. Overall, he asks that critical thinking based on an evaluation of both sides be used instead of a one-sided identity politics.

Most importantly, both Stern and Landes want students to be adequately equipped to grapple with controversial and unsettling ideas instead of avoiding intellectual stress. The key is not to coddle students but, as Stern points out, instead expose them to challenging ideas by teaching them in the first year about free speech and academic freedom (that is free of ideology). They both use the term "herding cats" to describe the professoriate, and I would extend this to some university administrators.

These books are essential reading for understanding the anatomy of the on-campus conflict and ideas toward resolutions either as a case study or an overview. Both works consider Palestinian viewpoints to varying degrees, include differing perspectives concerning Israel, and are open about their opposition to BDS. Their specific views of the Israel/Palestine conflict, with Landes taking note of anti-Israel and antisemitic bents, and Stern pointing out the divisiveness and imbalances of the conflict. Overall, there are several aspects of the conflict that need to be considered such as its impact on students, faculty members, staff, and those who perpetuate hate in the name of academic freedom and freedom of speech.

While seminars, courses, and other initiatives are innovative ideas, students may not feel comfortable participating, especially if a course is for credit and their grades are impacted. Also, faculty may not feel comfortable or confident teaching these courses. If students are not prepared, they also may not fully understand the notion of freedom of speech, academic freedom, and the limits of hate. Both books provide guidance for future Canadian cases such as that of Anthony Hall at the University of Lethbridge, who may serve as an example of perpetuating Holocaust denial, as well as anti-Jewish and anti-Israel rhetoric. These books can be guides for post-secondary institutions to promote academic freedom and freedom of speech through creative and critical thinking, as well as evidence-based approaches that fully support students. Navigating faculty through the high road of preserving academic freedom, free speech, and challenging hate, without taking the low road of censorship and dismissal without due process, may also be a way forward.

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