

# Statement from Simmons College President Helen Drinan on ASA Boycott



BOSTON (January 23, 2014) — As everyone surely knows by now, in December the American Studies Association — an academic member organization dedicated to the field of American Studies — voted to boycott Israeli academic institutions, an action they have defined as refusing to "enter into formal collaborations with Israeli academic institutions, or with scholars who are expressly serving as representatives or ambassadors of those institutions, or on behalf of the Israeli government, until Israel ceases to violate human rights and international law." Numerous college and university leaders have denounced the organization for doing so. Several other academic associations have discussed the possibility of a similar boycott, though none have announced one as of this date. I believe it is regrettable that the ASA chose to adopt a boycott for this purpose, especially in light of human rights violations around the world that are not addressed by this specific attention to Israel. Because the boycott is clearly intended to function as a public expression of the ASA's values, which include "the right of students and scholars to pursue education and research without undue state interference, repression, and military violence, and in keeping with the spirit of its previous statements supports the rights of students and scholars to intellectual freedom and to political dissent as citizens and scholars," I do not believe that their action infringes on the academic freedom of individual scholars here or abroad. The ASA believes it should use its organizational platform to raise awareness about the effects of state policies in Israel that the ASA claims deny academic freedom to Palestinians. Certainly, awareness has been raised, while great confusion has also resulted. Some read anti-Semitism into the content, while others assert that there is no anti-Semitism there because the ASA's statements focus on the government of Israel and not on any specific group of people. Not being Jewish, I am sympathetic to the many Jewish people of goodwill who do indeed experience this as an anti-Semitic attack given the fact that Israel is the only Jewish state in the world; separating the Jewish heritage from the Israeli government seems to me a parsing only Jewish people can do for one another. I do encourage you to read the ASA statements in their original form, rather than relying on public summaries of them. I believe that analyzing the primary source — that is, the actual words of the ASA — is the most reliable way for each of us to come to our own intellectually honest conclusions. The ASA resolution can be found

[here](#). As Americans, we all understand that the ASA has a Constitutionally protected right to such expressions. Simmons College has no institutional affiliation with the ASA. Simmons College faculty, who may or may not hold individual ASA memberships, will exercise their individual academic freedom in making choices about their affiliation with ASA or other organizations similarly inclined in their beliefs. I speak as one individual who leads Simmons College and respects thoroughly the diversity and inclusiveness of our community. [Helen G. Drinan](#), President Simmons College Boston, Massachusetts January 23, 2014