



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

1219 N Santa Rita Ave
The University of Arizona
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850
520 626-9095 fax
sbs-mesa@email.arizona.edu
www.mesana.org



17 May 2012

Editor, *The New York Times*
620 Eighth Ave.
New York NY 10018
letters@nytimes.com

To the Editor:

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern about a recent advertisement placed in the *New York Times* by the David Horowitz Freedom Center. While we recognize and support the right of any person or group to exercise their freedom of expression, we are disturbed that the *Times* would publish an advertisement replete with ad hominem attacks on individual professors, some of whom are members of MESA, without offering those individuals the opportunity to respond in the pages of your newspaper.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote the highest standards of scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The Horowitz Center's advertisement suggested that anyone who supports the "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions" (BDS) movement established to protest Israeli policies toward the Palestinians is in effect justifying the murder of Jews, promoting anti-Semitism and helping to bring about a "new Holocaust." In fact, whatever one's opinion of the BDS movement and the positions it espouses, it is clear that its purpose is to promote non-violent political activism, not to incite any form of hate crime. While Mr. Horowitz has the right to publicize his perspective, the kind of extreme rhetoric used in this advertisement is clearly designed to stifle the expression of opinions different from his own, not to encourage open and free debate about this very important political issue.

Most significantly, the advertisement in question lists 14 professors by name, describing them (in most cases without any specific accusations) as people who "should be publicly shamed and condemned for the crimes their hatred incites." It thereby suggests that these scholars are complicit in hate crimes merely for expressing their support for the BDS campaign. The advertisement also encourages members of the public to call university presidents to complain about these faculty members. We regard such action as a threat to the academic freedom that is so crucial to the integrity, autonomy and, indeed, viability of our institutions of higher education.

In response to the Horowitz Center's advertisement, 151 faculty members signed a Letter to the Editor protesting what they regard as a slanderous attack. Unfortunately, the *Times* chose not to publish that letter. With this decision, the *Times* has failed in its duty to act in the public interest by fostering the open and vigorous exchange of ideas and opinions and by giving those who have been subjected to defamation by means of a paid advertisement a reasonable opportunity to respond.

Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times*
May 17, 2012
Re: Horowitz advertisement
Page 2

We call on the *New York Times* to offer the scholars and teachers who have been personally attacked, and those who support them, the opportunity to respond to the vicious allegations made against them by an organization which, unlike those of us in the academic world, seems to possess both the desire and the means to engage in character assassination in the pages of the *New York Times*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fred M. Donner".

Fred M. Donner
MESA President
Professor of Near Eastern History, University of Chicago

copy to: The Public Editor, *The New York Times* (public@nytimes.com)