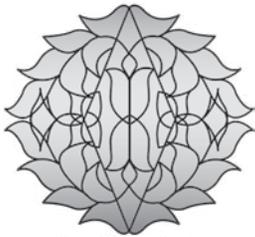


**Middle  
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**MESA '09**

23 April 2009

President John Bassett  
Clark University  
Geography Building, Room 202  
950 Main Street  
Worcester, MA 01610

via fax 508-793-8831 and email [presidentsoffice@clarku.edu](mailto:presidentsoffice@clarku.edu)

Dear President Bassett,

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association, I am writing to you to express our dismay at your decision to cancel a 21 April talk by Dr. Norman Finkelstein at your university. We regard your decision as a violation of academic freedom to which members of the Clark University community and Dr. Finkelstein are entitled.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote 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 more than 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.

According to a report in the Boston Globe, Dr. Finkelstein, who was invited to the campus by the Clark University Students for Palestinian Rights, was scheduled to speak on April 21. However, in your letter, you wrote that Dr. Finkelstein's lecture would conflict with a conference hosted by the university's Strassler Family Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies scheduled to begin two days later, on April 23, and continuing until April 26. Although Dr. Finkelstein's lecture was scheduled to occur before the conference, you wrote that in your judgment, "having Professor Finkelstein speak on the same evening as our planned conference would only invite controversy and not dialogue or understanding." Since the dates of Dr. Finkelstein's lecture and the university's conference do not conflict, your decision to cancel his lecture appears to be an act of political censorship that violates the academic freedom of Dr. Finkelstein, and deprives the students and faculty of Clark University of the opportunity to hear him.

We would also like to note that your decision to cancel the lecture came after Hillel objected to Dr. Finkelstein's appearance. We are further concerned, therefore, that by forcing a cancellation of Dr. Finkelstein's lecture, you are sending a message to the larger scholarly community that academic freedom does not extend to dissident voices on issues pertaining to U.S. policy in the Middle East and Israel.

In your letter to the university's campus newspaper, you wrote: "The University remains committed to inviting a wide range of speakers to encourage diversity of opinions on controversial topics." In keeping with this commitment, we ask that you reconsider the cancellation of Dr. Finkelstein's lecture.

Sincerely,

Virginia H. Aksan  
MESA President and Professor, McMaster University