

8 February 2005

Lynne Withey
Director, UC Press
2120 Berkeley Way
Berkeley, CA 94704-1012

Dear Lynne,

This is a letter documenting that I am resigning from our editorial committee, effective immediately.

It has been an enormous pleasure working with you and your loyal staff at UC Press. They are an extraordinarily dedicated and talented group. Know that each of you will be missed.

The issue that compels me to resign is the Finkelstein manuscript that UC Press is preparing to publish. I agree and understand full well that it is nearly impossible currently to carry on a rational argument about the Israeli-Palestinian situation; it is obviously a highly charged and emotional issue. It is abundantly clear that the Palestinian reign of terror has been reprehensible. It is abundantly clear also, as this book documents, that the Israelis have done terrible things to the Palestinians. The argument should not be lowered to the level of "my holocaust is worse than your holocaust." That discussion is a bottomless pit, with no possible winners.

The entire Israeli situation is irrational. In Europe in the '30s and '40s, it was "Jews, go back to Palestine." And now, it is "Jews, get out of Palestine."

All of my grandparents, and nearly all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins were murdered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, except for my grandmother, Karolina Stern. That remarkable lady of 74 years, mother of nine children, a nurturing person her entire life, was beaten to death by a German camp guard in Teresienstadt because she insisted on caring for other prisoners.

For that reason, I cannot and will not, in good conscience, participate in a group that is willing to approve a book that unilaterally demonizes Israel. If there had been an Israel at the time, my relatives might have survived. As it is, there are no graves, and I do not even have a physical place to mourn my family. There are millions in my position, and millions of others for whom no one survived to do the mourning. Auschwitz is, finally, the apotheosis of European Christian civilization, which is, in turn, a stunning void for we Jews that had embraced it. Israel exists, in part, in an attempt to fill that void.

Of course, the academic arguments are all in place, specifically, that academic freedom must be maintained. While I cherish that right and that privilege, for others and for myself, there are circumstances -- and this is one -- where I choose not to participate.

I also accept that it is essential that we do not appear intimidated by threats from Alan Dershowitz.

Nonetheless, publication of this transparently one-sided document, however accurate its presentation, despite the importance of academic freedom, is one with which I could not possibly be associated. Remaining silent is no longer a choice. My resignation is an indication of my position, though taken with sadness and with reluctance.

With best regards,

Robert

Robert Stern, M.D.
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P.S. Be aware also that I have, on several occasions, lectured at Birzeit University in the West Bank, crossing several Israeli checkpoints in order to do so.

cc: Tamar Maimon
Director, Academic Senate, UCSF