

An Open Letter to President Joseph Castro

Dear President Castro,

I am writing to you as the former director of the Middle East Studies Program (MESP) at California State University, Fresno, and in reference to your recent public comments concerning the cancellation of the search for the Edward Said Professorship. You have argued that: 1) there was no outside or inside pressure to cancel the search, 2) the cancellation was due to the search committee not being approved by the Department of Philosophy, and 3) an “unauthorized party” participated in the deliberation of the selection. Allow me to address the implausibility of your arguments, based on my decades of experience with such matters at CSU Fresno.

When a few of us started the Middle East forums after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003—to inform the Fresno public about the US and Israeli foreign policies in the Middle East—an email was sent out by a CSU Fresno faculty member in the Department of Education addressed to “Dear CSUF Jewish Faculty.” The email instructed the readers to take action against the forums and referred to an article written by a CSU Fresno professor of classics trying to defame me and other participants in the Middle East forums. The article appeared in the Zionist online magazine *FrontPage*, edited by David Horowitz, an individual with a long history of provocative acts. After the email, a campaign of harassment and intimidation started. The campaign was so intense that my life became a living nightmare. For a long time, and almost on a daily basis, there were attacks against me on numerous media outlets. I was called various names, including a communist, anti-American, anti-Israel, anti-Semite, supporter of terrorism, and eventually, a terrorist, by the likes of Sean Hannity. To this day, if you Google my name, one of the first references to me is from “discoverthenetworks.org,” a website run by David Horowitz intended to defame critics of Israeli policies in the Middle East. Indeed, Horowitz went so far as to name me as one of the most dangerous professors in the US in his “book” entitled *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*. Needless to say that to the end of my tenure at CSU Fresno, the campaign of harassment and intimidation, both from inside and outside the University, continued, especially every time that we had a program dealing with the Middle East. I have kept a detailed account of the history of Middle East forums and, if you wish, I would be more than willing to share it. Given such a history, it is difficult to imagine that the same forces who are still active in and out of the University would stand still and allow the establishment of a position in the name of Edward Said, an individual whom the Zionists and their rightwing allies considered as one of their most formidable foes.

With regard to your second contention, Professor Said was best known for his literary works on colonialism and Zionism. He was not known as a philosopher. So it is unclear why the Department of Philosophy should be in charge of a committee intended to select the Edward Said Professorship. What expertise do philosophers have in the US-Israeli policies in the Middle East? Should it not be the MESP faculty, with the right kind of expertise, to make such a selection? True, given that racism was so prevalent at CSU Fresno that no Middle East specialist was hired in the appropriate college, MESP was put under the tutelage of the College of Arts and Humanities in general, and the Department of Philosophy in particular. But this was merely a formality, and the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities had the authority to approve or disapprove of what the faculty in the MESP suggested. Was this not the procedure that was followed in the case of the search committee for the position of the Edward Said Professorship?

Your third argument, that an “unauthorized party” participated in the deliberation of the search committee, is even worse. In my tenure at CSU Fresno I served on various search

committees. I know that every action of the committees was always under the scrutiny of the administration, and no unauthorized party ever participated in the selection process. One must therefore conclude that the current administration at CSU Fresno is either so incompetent that unauthorized parties have access to confidential files and participate in the selection process, or the administration is simply concealing the truth.

Sasan Fayazmanesh, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus of Economics
Former director of the Middle East Studies Program
California State University, Fresno