

Princeton University cancels discussion by Norman Finkelstein on the ongoing Gaza genocide

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On Tuesday evening, less than 24 hours before the scheduled event, student organizers at Princeton University announced on social media that a lecture by Norman Finkelstein had been abruptly canceled “due to unforeseen circumstances involving new University policy.”

The event was publicly advertised by several campus organizations as the “third annual” lecture by Princeton graduate Norman Finkelstein, to be held on Wednesday, February 11, at 4:30 p.m. in a campus building. The focus of the meeting, according to an advertisement for the event, was “Discussion on the ongoing Gaza genocide.”

Finkelstein was to speak alongside Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a Palestinian scholar of law and criminology, underscoring that the meeting was framed as a serious academic discussion of the ongoing crimes against Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli regime.

In their Wednesday announcement of the cancellation on social media, the organizers wrote:

We regret having to inform you on such short notice, but due to unforeseen circumstances involving new University policy, this event has been cancelled. There are no confirmed plans at this stage for a rescheduled date.

The last minute cancellation of the lecture by Princeton University on Wednesday is a calculated act of political censorship, aimed at silencing prominent and well-informed critics of Zionism and the US-backed genocide in Gaza. The “new University policy” refers to the battery of administrative measures adopted by universities across the US to throttle pro-Palestinian protests, police speech critical of Israel based on the false claim that such events are “antisemitic.”

This is not the first time Finkelstein has faced efforts to smear him or block his appearance on the Princeton campus. In 2019 he was the target of a slander campaign at Princeton following his appearance on a panel on black-Palestinian solidarity where he sharply criticized Israel’s siege of Gaza. He later denounced the campus newspaper’s attempt to label his remarks “antisemitic” as a “sustained libel.”

The latest cancellation extends this slander, this time under

conditions of the ongoing genocide in Gaza that the US political establishment and its faithful representatives in academia are seeking to shut down and silence.

For decades, Finkelstein has been subjected to a relentless campaign of vilification and repression by right-wing and Zionist forces precisely because he grounds his exposure of Israeli crimes in documented fact and in the framework of international law. In Germany in 2010, a coordinated operation by neoconservative and Zionist pressure groups, such as Honestly Concerned and BAK Shalom, forced the cancellation of several of his public events, with organizers parroting the claim that his “behavior and theses do not remain within the limits of legitimate critique” and thanking those who intervened to shut him down.

In the US, the most notorious example was the campaign spearheaded by Harvard law Professor Alan Dershowitz to block Finkelstein’s tenure at DePaul University following the publication of his book, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*. Finkelstein’s book exposed Dershowitz’s falsifications in *The Case for Israel* and demolished the standard apologias for Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

Despite strong support in the Political Science Department at DePaul, the university bowed to external pressure and denied Finkelstein tenure, effectively destroying his official academic career.

He has also been targeted directly by the Israeli state. In May 2008 Finkelstein was detained and interrogated at Ben Gurion Airport, deported from Israel and slapped with a 10-year ban on entry because of his contact with Hezbollah and, more fundamentally, his role in publicizing the record of Israeli war crimes.

In 2024, members of Betar, a fascist tendency founded by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, recorded themselves physically threatening Finkelstein in New York City, an incident that showed the increasingly open resort to Zionist thuggery against opponents of the Gaza genocide.

Everywhere the same political logic operates. Pressure groups, the Israeli state and their allies in the media denounce Finkelstein as an “antisemite” or “extremist,” demand cancellations and rely on cowardly administrators to do the rest. The aim is to criminalize historically accurate and factual criticism of Israel and to make an example of Finkelstein to intimidate students, academics and

workers who are speaking out at campuses around the world against the genocide.

Norman Finkelstein, the son of Holocaust survivors from Poland, emerged as a major polemicist in the 1990s and 2000s through his battles against historical falsifications that turned the Nazi genocide into a political instrument of US and Israeli policy. His 2000 book *The Holocaust Industry* showed how the memory of the Holocaust has been systematically exploited to legitimize Israel's role as a regional enforcer for US imperialism and to silence criticism of its treatment of the Palestinians.

He followed this with *Beyond Chutzpah*, which dissected the pseudo-legal defenses of Israeli violence and painstakingly compared official claims with the record contained in reports by human rights organizations and the UN. Most of his 14 books have consisted of such careful reviews of the documentary evidence of Israeli violations of international law, making him one of the most accomplished chroniclers of the crimes from within the US academic milieu.

In 2018, Finkelstein published *Gaza: An Inquest Into Its Martyrdom*, which analyzed three major Israeli assaults on the enclave between 2008 and 2014 and demonstrated how each was accompanied by a campaign of whitewashing in the media and diplomatic cover by the US and Europe.

In later interviews and lectures, Finkelstein has characterized Israel's policy as an attempt to render Gaza unlivable, forcing its population to "either stay and starve or leave," and he has insisted that the current offensive is a "slaughter" rather than a war, with a killing ratio he described as "1 Israeli to 225 Palestinians."

Finkelstein has emphasized that the US has "enabled the genocide in Gaza," explaining that Israel "could not act without American support" and that Washington's real concern is to restore Israeli "deterrence" as an instrument of US policy, not to halt atrocities.

In detailed public talks since October 7, 2023, he has repeatedly returned to the basic legal and moral question: that the deliberate destruction of civilian life and the blockade of food, water and fuel constitute the crime of genocide under international law, whatever pretexts are invoked by the Zionists and their supporters and apologists.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has consistently defended Finkelstein against state repression and right-wing campaigns aimed silencing him, while also pointing to the limitations of his political outlook. In a report on his February 2025 lecture "Free Gaza, Free Speech" at the University of Michigan, the WSWS described him as "an opponent and chronicler of the crimes of Zionism and the Israeli state" whose exposure of these crimes is "courageous and principled."

The meeting, which drew some 500 people on short notice, was noted as an expression of "broad popular anger and deep disgust" at the normalization of genocide and the role of the entire political establishment, including the Democrats, in backing it.

In that lecture, Finkelstein denounced the Biden administration for fully backing the Gaza genocide "with bombs, money and political and diplomatic support," and ridiculed Biden's posturing on academic freedom as the universities led an unprecedented crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests.

He condemned the fraudulent equation of opposition to genocide with antisemitism and attacked the use of billionaire donors like Bill Ackman to manufacture claims that students "feel unsafe" as a pretext to criminalize slogans such as "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

The WSWS drew attention to the fact that Finkelstein's critique does not go beyond middle class protest politics. In his Michigan talk, Finkelstein made no substantive reference to the working class or to the necessity of mobilizing workers internationally against imperialism and war.

He instead fostered illusions in figures such as Bernie Sanders, whom he presented as a representative of the "historic genuine left." This perspective leaves the global crisis of capitalism, and the drive of US imperialism toward world war and dictatorship, fundamentally unchallenged.

Finkelstein's meticulous documentation of Israeli crimes, his defense of academic freedom and his principled rejection of identity politics are significant. However, these positions must be linked to the development of a working class movement and the fight for socialism.

The shutting down of Finkelstein's lecture at Princeton is an attack on fundamental democratic rights and an integral part of the pro-Israel, pro-US campaign to criminalize opposition to genocide. It comes amid a nationwide offensive in which university administrations, acting on behalf of the state and under the direct pressure of billionaires, donors and the political establishment, have rewritten conduct codes, banned organizations and called in police against students and faculty who oppose the destruction of Gaza.

By invoking the "new University policy" to cancel a talk by one of its own graduates, Princeton has signaled that its campus is not a place for free speech about the crimes of US imperialism and its allies but an institution of ideological discipline aligned with the war aims of the Trump administration in the Middle East and beyond.

If a scholar whose entire career has been spent in painstaking documentation of human rights violations can be barred in this manner, every student, worker and academic who takes a stand against Israeli and American war crimes can expect the same treatment.

The working class and youth must reject all attempts to smear Finkelstein, students and other opponents of Zionism as antisemites and must insist on their unconditional right to speak, organize and demonstrate against the genocide in Gaza.



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