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## News

### **N.Y. School Board Bans a Controversial Arab Professor**

By NATHANIEL POPPER

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A pro-Palestinian professor at Columbia University, hailed by some Jewish students as a model instructor, is being barred by the New York City Department of Education from lecturing public-school teachers.

A spokesman for the school board attributed the move against Rashid Khalidi, the Arab-American director of Columbia's Middle East Institute, to "past statements" on the Middle East. Khalidi "should not have been included" in a 12-week course for public-school teachers on teaching about the Middle East — and "he won't be participating in the future," the spokesman said.

The school board's decision was praised by some New York lawmakers with ties to the Jewish community, as well as by the American Jewish Committee. A number of other organizations and individuals, however, including Columbia University and the American Jewish Congress, have questioned the school board's decision.

The school board's decision appeared to be taken in reaction to an article in *The New York Sun*, which pointed to Khalidi's participation in the program and wrote that Khalidi had "called Israel a 'racist' state with an 'apartheid system.'"

Khalidi and his supporters reject that characterization of his views. Free speech experts have said that whatever Khalidi's political opinions, the school board may have violated his constitutional rights.

"They made a mistake in saying he can't teach because of his political views," said Nat Hentoff, a journalist and free-speech expert. Hentoff has been a strong supporter of Jewish students at Columbia who have alleged that they have been subject to intimidation by several Middle East studies professors. "That is a clear violation of his free-speech rights, and his academic freedom rights."

With the concerns the school board had, Hentoff said, "the school board should have brought in a team teacher for the course so that it wouldn't be one-sided indoctrination."

The barring of Khalidi is the latest development to result from the uproar at Columbia over the student's accusations. Although Khalidi has not been accused of any wrongdoing by the students, he has occupied a central position in press reports on the conflict. Many mention that his chair at Columbia was endowed with a gift from the United Arab Emirates and

named after late Palestinian intellectual leader Edward Said, and that he once worked as an adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization.

During the turmoil at Columbia, Khalidi has been held up as a model teacher by some of the pro-Israel students who have complained about other Middle Eastern studies professors. In a guide to university courses compiled by Columbia students, known as Culpa, Khalidi's teaching received a silver nugget, the second-highest award after the gold nugget, and one reviewer said, "Not one divisive issue was polemicized."

The enrichment course that Khalidi was barred from taking part in is a 12-week program with a different Columbia professor talking about a different aspect of the Middle East each week. The course is organized by the school district, but the professors are paid by Columbia University as part of their community outreach. A spokeswoman for Columbia, Susan Brown, criticized the school board's decision. "The fact that a respected professor and scholar would be summarily judged and dismissed, without consultation or discussion with him, or with us, is an issue of great concern."

This was Khalidi's second year taking part in the program, and he had given his contribution this year. On February 3, in the first lecture of the teacher-training course, Khalidi provided an overview of the geography and demography of the region. According to the teacher who organized the course and was present at the lecture, Khalidi's talk did not touch on any sensitive material.

"I am not unaware of the controversy surrounding him," said Mark Wilner, assistant principle for social studies at Brooklyn's Midwood High School, who also organizes a teacher enrichment course on the Holocaust. "But I can tell that that his session was completely apolitical. It was basically geographic information."

The school board's decision was immediately hailed last week by New York mayoral candidate Rep. Anthony Weiner and by the American Jewish Committee, which issued a press release saying that Khalidi should not have been offered the platform given his "record of brazen, openly biased and distorted statements about Israel."

When asked what statements of Khalidi's had been problematic, David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, declined to point to any specific statements and said that the problem was "where he stands on Arab-Israeli issues."

Wiener, when asked to identify objectionable statements, said, "I am by no means an expert on the guy's work, but what I have seen anecdotally on the guy is troubling."

The director of legal affairs at the American Jewish Congress, Marc Stern, said he did not agree with the tack chosen by these communal leaders and political officials. "It's not as if we're rejoicing that Khalidi gets an audience," Stern said. "But we don't think the way to go about it is by treating Khalidi as if he is not qualified to teach on the Middle East."

Greg Lukianoff, a constitutional lawyer for the group Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which has stood squarely with the Jewish students in the Columbia melee, said that "the department was under no obligation to hire him in the first place." But, Lukianoff said, "rescinding the invite after the fact does send a bad message."

Khalidi said he has not decided how to respond.

The problem with the whole debate that has sprung up around Middle Eastern studies, Khalidi said, is that it has taken professors' views on the Israel and used them to critique their entire body of scholarship.

"The Middle East is not the Israel-Palestine conflict," Khalidi said. "It's five millennia of history, and nearly 400 million people. People need to raise their noses from this tiny little spot."

The drumbeat against Khalidi has been increasing in a handful of newspapers since the dispute at Columbia broke out last October. In November, The New York Daily News profiled Khalidi in an article titled, "Vile Words of Hate That Shame Top University," and The New York Sun compared him to Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, whose views have been condemned widely as antisemitic.

The Sun published a column last year by Martin Kramer, a leader in a campaign against pro-Palestinian professors, in which he slammed Khalidi for warning Arab intellectuals against participating in events organized by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank supported heavily by pro-Israel donors and now run by former U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross.

"Its basic function is to spread lies and falsehoods about the Arab world, of course under an academic, scholarly veneer," Khalidi was quoted as saying during a panel discussion broadcast on Al-Jazeera. "Basically, this is the most important Zionist propaganda tool in the United States."

The Sun has repeatedly pointed to Khalidi's use of the words "racist" and "apartheid" in relation to Israel.

It is this characterization, Khalidi said, that most piques his anger.

"Everything that has been said has misrepresented the entirety of my work," said Khalidi, who specializes in Arab nationalism, the early 20th-century history of the Middle East and great power politics.

On the issue of whether Israel is racist, Khalidi says there are "scholars who will not talk about these things without using the word 'racist,' but I am not one of them." He said, "I do not think Zionism is racist. When we talk about some of the contemporary laws, there are policies that I consider racist and discriminatory."

Khalidi was at the front of an early group of Palestinian intellectuals calling for a two-state solution in the Middle East, though he has suggested recently that Israeli settlement expansion has made such a plan impossible.

He has defended the right of Palestinians to launch attacks against Israeli soldiers in the territories, but condemned Palestinian suicide bombings against Israeli civilians as "war crimes."

Many who are familiar with his politics said he is not the extremist that he has been made out to be in press accounts.

"He is about as virulently anti-Israel as the Likudniks are anti-Arab," said Arthur Hertzberg, who jointly taught a course on Zionism and Palestinian national identity with Khalidi when he was a professor at Columbia. "Have we decided that we are going to throw all the Likudniks out of public life?"

"My Arab students never tried to shut me up when I was teaching Zionism at Columbia," Hertzberg said. "We ought to be ready to brook disagreements."

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