



SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

Concerning the Recent HUC Graduation

The Coalition for Jewish Values would like to share with you this report on the recent graduation speech hosted by the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College (HUC). The speaker was a well-known anti-Israel activist, who used the opportunity to not only demonize Israel's self-defense, but even to oppose Jewish endogamy, Jews marrying Jews. The Interim President of the HUC, Rabbi David Ellenson, both welcomed the speaker and reaffirmed the decision to host him afterwards.

On May 14 at the Stephen S. Wise Temple in Los Angeles, California, the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion held its annual graduation and ordination ceremony. The invited speaker was Michael Chabon, a known anti-Israel activist and author.

Chabon's hostility towards Israel and its self-defense is well-known, especially due to his collaboration with "Breaking the Silence" (BtS), an anti-Israel organization that claims a domestic mission, "to expose the Israeli public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories," but receives [two-thirds of its funding](#) from European governments and the New Israel Fund, and refuses to share evidence with the IDF for critical examination.

Chabon and his wife, Ayelet Waldman, met with BtS members before compiling an anthology called "[Kingdom of Olives and Ash: Writers Confront the Occupation](#)." The book claimed to offer true accounts, although the spokesman for Breaking the Silence, Dean Issacharoff, was denounced by members of his platoon, including his commander, on video [stating that he had lied](#) about incidents in which he claimed to have participated and followed orders.

Chabon led a tour of Judea together with BtS, during which he called the occupation "[the most grievous injustice I have ever seen in my life](#)." Regarding the Cave of the Patriarchs, "[where supposedly Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Rebecca and Leah are all buried](#)" per his distorted account, he said: "to see that place being dishonored and made less sacred and less holy by the presence of this incredibly cruel and unjust machinery, some literal machinery and figurative machinery of oppression, it offends me." He would have preferred to see Hebron with no "machinery" there to prevent a repeat murder of its Jewish visitors and residents. He claimed the Jews of Hebron see Arabs as "less truly human."

After all of the above, HUC Interim President Rabbi David [Ellenson introduced Chabon](#) as a "moral voice," emphasizing his book dealing with "fifty years of Israeli occupation in Palestine" — the aforementioned work inspired by BtS — and pointing out the current relevance of the book due to the relocation of the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

Taking to the stage, [Chabon wasted no time](#) condemning Israel's security barrier, built to prevent further atrocities such as the Dolphinarium, Sbarro and Park Hotel suicide bombings. "Anywhere you look, it is and has always been a hand of power drawing the boundaries, putting up the separation barriers and propagandizing hatred and fear of the people on the other side of the wall. Security for some means imprisonment for all."

He then went on to say that intermarriage is "the source of all human greatness," while "endogamous marriage is a ghetto of two." He condemned Judaism in particular by saying that "any religion that relies on compulsory endogamy to survive has, in my view, ceased to make the case for its continued validity in the everyday lives of human beings."

At least one graduate, Morin Zaray, left in protest. In an [op-ed in the LA Jewish Journal](#), Zaray wrote: "I know that the same wall he said he despised enabled me to live a normal life and to use the bus as a young girl... It was as if horrific terror attacks have never occurred against these Jews — this 'sorriest' and most 'riotous' group of 'convicts' Chabon has ever seen. Maybe he hasn't seen the virulent Jew-hatred that permeates Palestinian society.

"I turned back to look at my brother, who served in a combat unit in the Israel Defense Forces. He looked sick to his stomach. I got up from my seat and approached my family... I asked my mother if not seeing me graduate would disappoint her. She responded that she would feel ashamed to see me walk on that stage after what had been said. We stood up and left the sanctuary. Standing outside, I was nearly brought to tears as I heard the crowd of Jews give Chabon a thunderous applause.

"For someone who presents himself as an intellectual — steeped in nuance — Michael Chabon has a remarkable ability to present a one-dimensional reality in which the Jews are evil oppressors and the Palestinians are powerless victims, with no agency, no responsibility and no blame. Such a careless disregard for depth and complexity dishonors an institution of higher learning — particularly a Jewish one — particularly on a graduation day."

Ellenson [responded](#): "it does not occur to us at HUC-JIR to quash or vilify political criticism of Israel out of a preemptive fear of controversy." He even claimed that Zaray's tearful essay, bemoaning how Ellenson and Chabon "ambushed" and ruined her graduation, was testament to the diversity of opinion at HUC-JIR.

These are the people demanding Israel bow to its wishes concerning Israel's security, the peace process, the Western Wall and matters of Jewish status.

Rabbi Pesach Lerner, President
Rabbi Yaakov Menken, Managing Director
[Coalition for Jewish Values](#)