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## **Strategic Rhetorics: Apartheid South Africa/Apartheid Israel: Address to Chapman University's Gaza Solidarity Encampment, May 2024**

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## Strategic Rhetorics: Apartheid South Africa/Apartheid Israel: Address to Chapman University's Gaza Solidarity Encampment, May 2024

### Comments

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## STRATEGIC RHETORICS: APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA/APARTHEID ISRAEL

### ADDRESS TO CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY'S GAZA SOLIDARITY ENCAMPMENT, MAY 2024

Ian Barnard, Chapman University



*Images From Chapman University's Gaza Solidarity Encampment. Photos by Ian Barnard*













On 2 May 2024, Chapman University faculty were asked to participate in a “faculty speak out” in support of the Chapman Students For Justice In Palestine’s Gaza solidarity encampment. We were invited to speak “from our expertise and/or personal experiences in a call for a ceasefire in Gaza” (Leitz, 2024). This is a slightly expanded version of what I said:

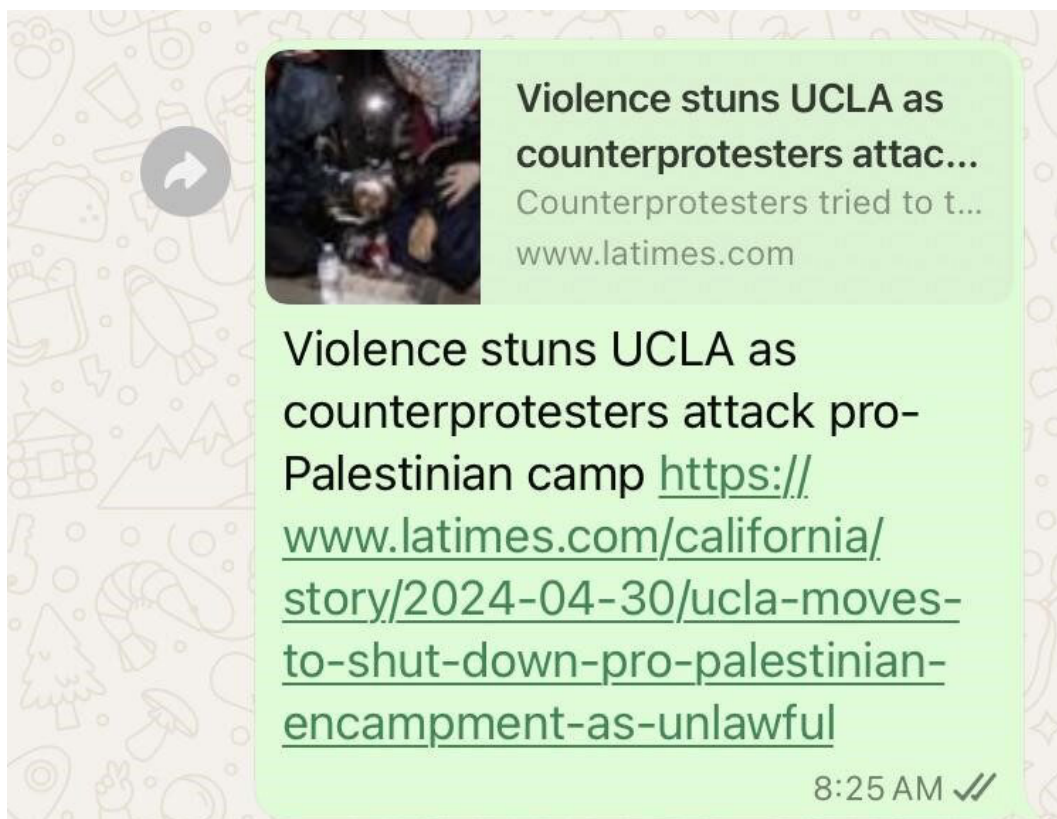
There are two things I know a bit about: rhetoric and apartheid. I was hired here at Chapman to produce scholarship in the field of rhetoric and to teach rhetoric, and I’m assuming that the faculty and administrators who hired me thought that I was competent in my field. So I will have a bit to say about rhetoric. And I grew up in apartheid South Africa, so I also know something about apartheid, though of course, as a white South African I don’t know it in exactly the same way as the Black South African majority who were its victims.

“Apartheid” is an Afrikaans word whose literal translation is “separateness,” and the way we use “apartheid” today derives directly from its euphemistic name for the terrible legalized apparatus of systemic racism that structured South African society from 1948 to 1994 (which is not to say that there was no racism in South Africa before 1948 or that post-apartheid South Africa is an anti-racist paradise). It’s no coincidence that, as a country that understands the horrors of settler colonialism only too well, South Africa was the one to charge Israel with genocide at the International Court of Justice earlier this year. (And it’s telling, too, that Ireland is one of the few western European nations

to stand with Palestine today—in fact, Irish leaders have talked about their country’s own history of being colonized as laying the groundwork for their empathy for Palestinians.[1])

Now, as those who know me can attest, I was initially quite resistant to talking about Israeli apartheid. Not because I doubted the magnitude or maliciousness of the horrors the State of Israel was committing against Palestinians, but because apartheid was such a specific term for me, and carried with it the unique history and situation of South Africa. I guess I didn’t want to share the word. But I have given up that initial resistance to using “apartheid” and “Israel” in the same sentence for two reasons: first, the growing parallels I’ve seen between apartheid South Africa and apartheid Israel and in the resistance movements against both, and, second, the rhetorical effectiveness of using the word “apartheid” to talk about Israel. As a rhetorician, I think of how words like “apartheid” and “genocide” can be used strategically. I think a lot about how the phrase “anti-Semitism” is weaponized to foreclose any criticism of Israel. And how the recent turn among progressive activists to using “IOF” instead of “IDF” to name Israel’s military machine, helps us to see things differently—a defense force sounds a lot different from an occupying force. Language is important in helping us to frame people and events, in mediating and shaping the realities we see/feel/experience, and, of course, in othering and demonizing people, non-human animals, places, and things.

A *Los Angeles Times* headline yesterday framed the shocking attacks on UCLA’s student encampment like this: “Violence stuns UCLA as counter-protestors attack pro-Palestine camp.”



Notice how, in this headline, it's the violence that stuns (not, for instance, the hoodlums who attacked the encampment), as if violence is its own actor, and notice how benign "counter-protestors" sounds, just like those benign-sounding "pro" and "con" arguments that my field of rhetoric is so fond of, as if every life-threatening emergency is merely one pole of an equally moral, politely disagreeing, perfectly balanced fulcrum. Or look at how the Modern Language Association, one of my scholarly homes, the largest professional organization of scholars and teachers in language and literature in the world, framed its recent call for papers in response to members' demands that the organization urge universities to protect faculty and students engaged in speech that is critical of Israel:



8:00

LTE 97

< Sent

Opportunity: Contri...



## Share Strategies for Action

Dear Colleague,

As we face this incredibly charged moment on campuses, the MLA wants to put members in conversation with each other. We want to hear your strategies for how to safeguard academic freedom, as well as how to interact with each other, with our students, with administrators, and with the public in relation to the many polarizing issues we confront.

The MLA Executive Council seeks your submissions for a [special issue of Profession](#) on the challenges facing us in the current political climate. We encourage those interested in submitting an article to explore questions like:

- How can we in our teaching and campus work engage deeply with the political and cultural complexities with which our students are wrestling?
- How can the skills we learn in the study of language, literature, writing, and culture help us unpack and teach the nuances of divisive political questions?
- What do we do when confronted with contradictory arguments that have compelling elements?

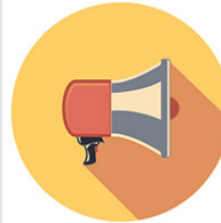
Submissions are due by 15 June.

We also encourage you to take advantage of the MLA's host of resources on academic freedom, shared governance, and free speech. A recording of our webinar [What You Need to Know about Educational Gag Orders](#) is available to the public, and members can view a recording of [Resisting Political Threats to Humanities Higher Education](#) to learn more about protecting academic freedom on your campus.

Thank you for your help in supporting your fellow members.

Sincerely,

Paula M. Krebs  
Executive Director



### Quick Links

To learn more about how to protect academic freedom and free speech, check out the resources listed below.

- [Resources on Academic Freedom, Free Speech, and the Right to Protest](#)
- [Tool Kit on Academic Freedom](#)
- [What You Need to Know about Educational Gag Orders](#)
- [Resisting Political Threats to Humanities Higher Education](#)

## Tracking Challenges to Academic Freedom

To stay up to date on the legislative challenges to academic freedom and campus threats, follow PEN America's [map of educational gag orders](#) and [legislative index](#), as well as Scholars at Risk's [Academic Freedom Monitoring Project](#). For additional context on how educational gag orders are affecting members' work, read the [Report on the Current State of Academic Freedom in US Education](#) from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights.



Here it's the refusal of specificity, the refusal to name Palestine, the fear of taking a stand, that is so damning, reducing members' urgent calls for action on a very specific global catastrophe to merely one of a number of unnamed and vacuous "political and cultural complexities with which our students are wrestling." (I'm not even going to get into the demand for "nuance" and the designation of certain political imperatives as "divisive.") My point with these examples is that they demonstrate how urgent it is that we as scholars, intellectuals, students, and teachers take on the job of identifying, exposing, critiquing, and countering these rhetorical strategies.

I'll have more to say about rhetoric later, but first I want to return to my second topic, apartheid, and to the parallels I'm seeing in the international campaign against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, and today's student movement in the US, but also worldwide, for divestment from Israel. Some of you know that the US, not surprisingly, was late to the table when it came to imposing sanctions against South Africa in the 1980s. I remember my surprise and delight when as an international graduate student from South Africa in San Diego in the 1980s, I was denied permission to enter Mexico because of my South African citizenship. I hadn't had any problems traveling to the US, so it didn't occur to me that Mexico could be a different story. But when I applied for a tourist card to travel south past Ensenada, the Mexican consulate in San Diego took one look at my South African passport before telling me that I wasn't welcome in Mexico and would be arrested if I set foot in their country. Now if only the US had imposed these kinds of sanctions against South Africa!

**Cougars roll over Aztecs, 28-0**

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**THE DAILY AZTEC**

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VOLUME 69 NUMBER 31      SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY      MONDAY OCTOBER 14, 1985

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**Anti-Apartheid Day termed a success**

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**by Bobbie Jo Lee**  
*Daily Aztec staff writer*

Rallies were held on campuses across the nation Friday in support of National Anti-Apartheid Day and International South Africa Political Prisoner Day, including an SDSU rally which drew a supportive crowd of about 400.

The Afrikan Student Union and MEChA coordinated the rally, which centered upon the theme that *now* is the time for students to speak out against, become aware of, and act against minority suppression and abuse.

The ASU called on students to boycott classes to attend the rally and delivered notices asking about 250 professors to excuse students for the rally or dedicate their classroom time to the issue of apartheid.

The rally began with a mock funeral procession, including two coffins, which signified the deaths of people in South Africa. The procession began at the Montezuma statue on the west side of Adams Humanities and ended at the free speech area.

"This rally will not kill apartheid," said Shirley Weber, an Afro-American Studies professor, who was the first in a long line of speakers at the rally.

"We did not kill it last semester; we will not kill it this semester, but it is about time that the students on this campus realize that they are connected to the rest of this world."

According to Weber, it is time to stop and shed the "trivia we have been involved in . . . the images of Betty and Joe College and the attitude that we are too cute or too irrelevant to matter."

"There really is no good time to deal with apartheid," she said. "There will never be a good time. We (blacks) have never been a timely agenda, so we have had to put ourselves on the agenda. We cannot bargain with the system of apartheid because there is no middle ground to freedom."

"I want you to check out the president of the University of California. I

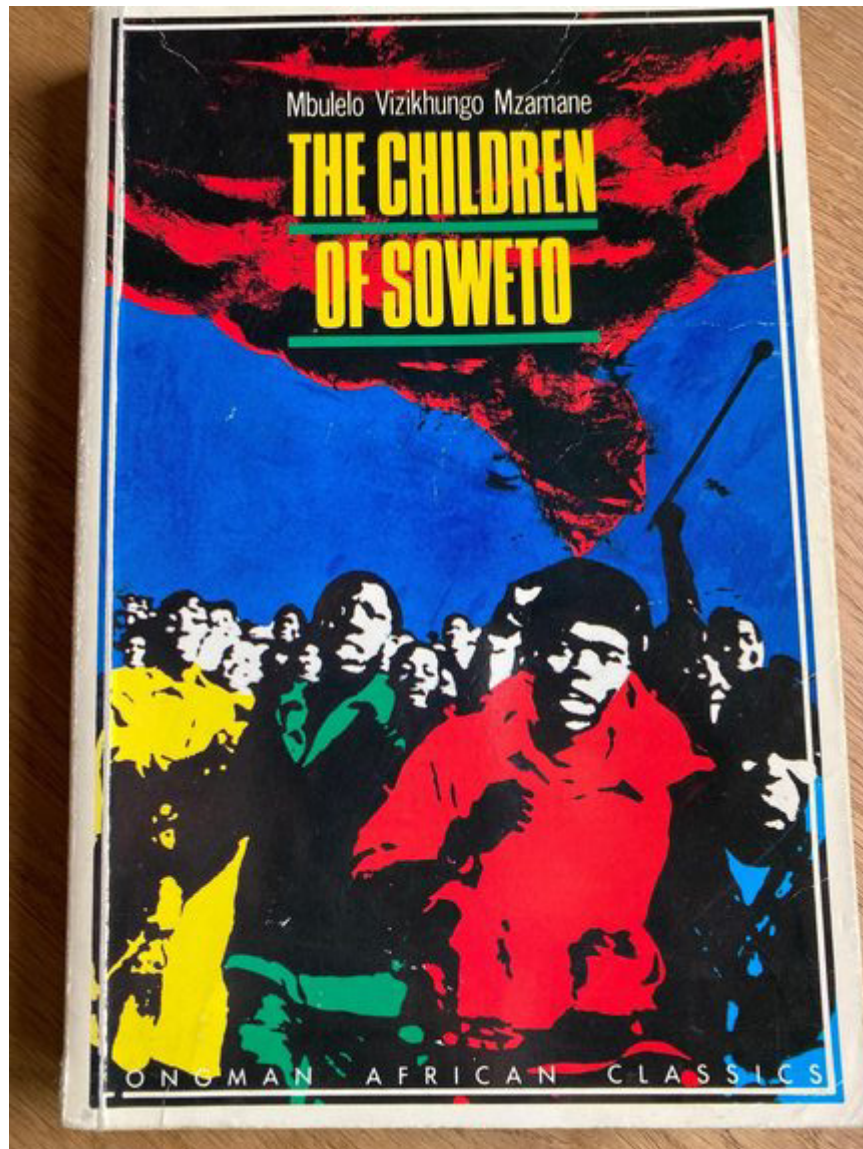
**San Diego State University Student Newspaper**

But already students in the US were active in the movement against apartheid South Africa and against apartheid Israel. I remember speaking at pro-Palestine events and at student rallies for divestment from South Africa as a graduate student at San Diego State University and the University of California, San Diego. I recall enraged students at one of these protests ripping a Bank of America ATM machine from the wall on the SDSU campus because of Bank of America's refusal to cut ties with South Africa. Protestors were targeting the whole range of US companies that enabled the machinery of apartheid to function, including Kodak, after it was revealed that the photos that were used in the "[passbooks](#)" that restricted the movement of Black South Africans were taken with Kodak cameras. Just two days ago, Joseph Massad published an [article](#) in *Middle East Eye* reminding us of the West's historical support for apartheid South Africa and apartheid Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe—so today's Western resistance to severing ties with Israel is perfectly consistent with past practice. It's also instructive to remember that the US had officially designated Nelson Mandela a terrorist and the African National Congress a terrorist organization before both were elected to power in the first democratic elections in South African history, and then suddenly became the darlings of the world. And then Mandela was invited on a triumphal tour of the US. Rhetoric again. Those words "terrorist" and "terrorism" are so easily weaponized—they were in the case of apartheid South Africa (both by the apartheid government and its US supporters), and they are today by apartheid Israel and its US enablers. Unsurprisingly, across all these historical political revolutions, student activists have always been on the right side of history. As the satirical *McSweeney's* article, "[A Message from the Chancellor on the Recent Student Protest](#)," reminds us, student protestors in the US have never been wrong, from Vietnam to apartheid South Africa to Occupy Wall Street to Israeli apartheid (Clark, 2023). And, as this article hilariously/poignantly/tragically prophesies, in 50 years' time, today's encampment students will be appropriated by neoliberalism's insatiable appetite for cooptation as they are immortalized on university websites as lauded symbols of the university's commitment to equity and social justice, as important markers in the university's proud history, as past students who emblemize the universities great alums. But always past. Universities needs to be on the right side of history NOW.

You student encampers are doing exactly what you should be doing as students, demonstrating your commitments to social justice, demanding that the spaces you inhabit follow through on their own trumpeted values, practicing your capacities for critical thinking and critical media analysis, and acting on your desire for and capacity for self-education. The wonderful South African novel, *Children of Soweto*, chronicles the stories of school children in apartheid South Africa who had to educate themselves in the face of a state education system that prepared them for subservience in the apartheid state (Mzamane, 1982). These were the school children (not university students like the Gaza encampers at university campuses) who became politically conscientized and spearheaded the Soweto uprising of 1976, who had to teach their own parents about their (the parents') political subordination, who formed their own Marxist reading groups to learn about the structures and systems that framed and determined their economic and social positions, and to learn the language to articulate their struggle. Students in the US today, like the students from previous protest movements, are also understanding the need to create the alternative educations that their formal university classes are failing to provide. We're seeing teach-ins at Gaza encampments, encampment libraries of Palestinian history books, [progressive presses](#) like Haymarket Books donating free books on Palestine to Gaza encampments, students demanding courses about Palestine (students at Soka University of America, not far from Chapman,



successfully lobbied for a course on Palestinian Literature and Film a few years ago), and students teaching themselves and each other. If you've seen the Columbia students' Gaza encampment newsletter you have a sense of the incredibly insightful and articulate student cohort that this self-education has developed.



So I'm seeing parallels between student protestors in South Africa and student protestors in the US, and between the US movements to divest from apartheid South Africa and apartheid Israel. But in some ways, given that the US is funding Israel and Israel's military campaign against Palestinians, US collusions with apartheid Israel are even more egregious than its collusions with apartheid South Africa--the calls for US divestment from Israeli apartheid thus have added urgency and legitimacy. As you all know, our Republican and Democratic congressmembers are equally

culpable here. In fact, just last month the US House of Representatives [voted 366 to 58](#) to send more money to Israel (seven members did not vote). We're talking about 366 Republicans and Democrats, including my representative, Democratic Congressman Jimmy Gomez.

This sounds depressing, so I also want to talk about change, since I think this is another important parallel between South Africa and Israel. When I came to the US as a graduate student 40 years ago, I never imagined that South African apartheid would end in my lifetime. After all, apartheid in South Africa was officially inaugurated in 1948, before I was even born. When I arrived in the US, student protests against South Africa and against US refusals to boycott and divest from South Africa were in full swing, and I remember reading Winnie Mandela's comment, "My God, this can only mean our freedom is near. I am very strengthened by student actions and our people are strengthened by your solidarity. Someday we will overcome and we will remember the friends who rallied in our support. And we have very long memories (*Guardian*, 1985). (Since Winnie Mandela was a "[banned](#)" person in South Africa, South African media were forbidden from quoting her, or broadcasting her image or voice, so I had to get to the US to hear this. And she gave interviews at great peril to herself in South Africa.) Folx in Gaza have heard about student protests in the US and have talked about how they are encouraged and inspired by them, by you. I remember clearly the day the US finally, belatedly, imposed sanctions against South Africa—Ronald Reagan had resisted for so long. I remember seeing the giant headline in the San Diego *Tribune* that morning:

Copyright 1985, The Tribune, San Diego

# THE TRIBUNE

San Diego's Pulitzer Prize-winning Newspaper

Monday, September 9, 1985

25 Cents A Copley Newspaper

**Night FINAL**

Fall fashion section today



Chargers open with a victory (See Sports)



Pete Rose ties Cobb's hit record (See Sports)



**Big Brother: His gaze is on your privacy**  
Computer linkups speed the spread of personal data

Rita Calvano  
Staff Writer

**M**AYBE you've forgotten about Big Brother and the ominous vision of society created by George Orwell in his 1949 novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four." Control of society through control of information. No privacy. No freedom of choice. People haven't forgotten. Government watchdogs, civil liberties attorneys and privacy experts all signs indicate the suffocating government-dominated society created by Orwell is becoming reality.

**Why?**  
Because somebody IS watching. Hundreds of people



## Reagan announces S. Africa sanctions

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan, backing away under pressure from his long opposition to sanctions against South Africa, today acted to economically punish the white-ruled government for its apartheid laws, which discriminate against the nation's black majority.

The president, using his executive powers, put into effect most provisions of widely supported sanctions legislation that has passed the House and is before the Senate.

Speaking from the Oval Office, he said in a national broadcast:

"The system of apartheid means separate, systematic, institutional-



**FINAL STOCKS**

Dow up 3.58 (See AA-1)



Reagan compromise is possible on state, local taxes, panel says

While I would not want to claim that US student protests, or sanctions against and divestment from apartheid South Africa were solely responsible for bringing down apartheid in South Africa, they certainly played a role. Less than ten years later, almost 30 years ago from today, South Africa held its first ever democratic election, where South Africans of all races were able to vote. The ballot from that day shows the variety of parties running, each party represented by a symbol as well as the alphanumeric party name, so that illiterate voters could vote for their party of choice according to that party's symbol. And you can even see the Inkatha Freedom Party painstakingly hand glued onto the bottom of each ballot, millions of ballots, after the IFP decided at the last minute to contest the election, reversing its previous decision to boycott the election.



RSA



1994

Make your mark next to the party you choose.  
 Etja leshwa pela mekgato on o o kgethang.  
 Yenza uphawu oceleni kwelimbuzi lokhethekako.  
 Endle mlangho «chelo ka vanda leri u ri hlalulaka.  
 Baya leshwa go lebagana lelekoko la gago.  
 Yenza uphawu lakho eduze nehlangano oyikhetshako.

Pissa u meri lang die party van u kenne.  
 Dirra leswao la gago go lebana le phatlhi-ya o o kgethago.  
 Kha vha ite luvwayo phangla ha deangano lona vha khotla.  
 Yenza uphawu lwakho aceleni kwegetzi eio oikhetshako.  
 Dweba uphawu esikhaleni eseduzi kwehlangano oyikhetshako.

PAN AFRICANIST CONGRESS OF AZANIA		PAC		
SPORTS ORGANISATION FOR COLLECTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS AND EQUAL RIGHTS		SOCCER		
THE KEEP IT STRAIGHT AND SIMPLE PARTY		KISS		
VRYHEIDFRONT - FREEDOM FRONT		VF-FF		
WOMEN'S RIGHTS PEACE PARTY		WRPP		
WORKERS' LIST PARTY		WLP		
XIMOKO PROGRESSIVE PARTY		XPP		
AFRICA MUSLIM PARTY		AMP		
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY		ACDP		
AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT		ADM		
AFRICAN MODERATES CONGRESS PARTY		AMCP		
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS		ANC		
DEMOCRATIC PARTY - DEMOKRATIESE PARTY		DP		
DIKWANKWETLA PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA		DPSA		
FEDERAL PARTY		FP		
LUSO - SOUTH AFRICAN PARTY		LUSAP		
MINORITY FRONT		MF		
NATIONAL PARTY - NASIONALE PARTY		NP		
INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY - IQEMBU LENKATHA YENKULULEKO		IFP		

I'm showing you this ballot because it reminds us that change is possible. Even when it doesn't seem possible.[3] Thirty years ago, the current US student encampments in solidarity with Gaza would have been unthinkable. Thirty years ago, the kind of public discourse about Israeli apartheid that we're having today in the US (including in the halls of Congress) was unthinkable. Change has already happened. You're on the right side of history.[4]

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[1] Update: in late May, [Ireland, Spain, and Norway formally recognized the Palestinian state](#).

[2] I thank Aneil Rallin for pointing me to this article, as well as to the *Los Angeles Times* headline discussed above.

[3] As I've said above, I don't want to romanticize post-apartheid South Africa. Indeed, I write this shortly after South Africans headed to the polls for an election that marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of apartheid. Amidst disillusionment with the persistence of unemployment, poverty, and inequity in post-apartheid South Africa, the African National Congress received [less than 50% of the vote](#) for the first time ever.

[4] I'm grateful to Maggie Jaffe, Aneil Rallin, Lisa Leitz, Chapman University's Students for Justice in Palestine and Chapman's Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine organizations for inspiration, resources, and ideas for this article.

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Alabama P, 2020), winner of the 2021 Conference on College Composition and Communication  
Lavender Rhetorics Book Award for Excellence in Queer Scholarship.



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