



# ENQUIRY

A publication of the  
Alexander Hamilton Institute  
Undergraduate Fellows

VOL. III .... No. 9 | CLINTON, NY. MONDAY OCTOBER 25, 2015

Free thought and discourse

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## Review: *Submission* by Michel Houellebecq

By **MIKE ADAMO**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On the day that Michel Houellebecq's provocative new novel *Submission* was released in France, two Islamists murdered eleven people at the office of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. The January 7, 2015 issue of *Charlie Hebdo* showed a caricature of Houellebecq, one of France's most important living writers, making two predictions: "In 2015, I lose my teeth... In 2022, I do Ramadan!"

The first is a play on Houellebecq's appearance: he looks like the product of decades of heavy drinking and smoking, an image he was sure to take advantage of when he put himself as a character into his 2010 novel *The Map and the Territory*. The second refers to the central conceit of *Submission*: in 2022 France elects a Muslim president and rapidly becomes Islamized.

*Houellebecq provocatively creates an optimistic sense of Europe's future under Islam.*

But the Islamists who attacked *Charlie Hebdo* are not the face of Islam in Houellebecq's fictional France. The face of Islam, rather, is Mohammed Ben Abbes, the unifying leader of a new Muslim Brotherhood party with a pan-European-Arab vision. Their methods are non-violent, and their hope for social harmony in an Islamic West is sincere.

The cruder sorts of critics predicted that Houellebecq's novel would be a ranting polemic against Islam. He was, after all, taken to court in 2002 on charges of "inciting racial hatred" for insulting monotheistic religion in general and Islam in particular. His new novel, however, is plainly not anti-Islamic, and reflects a more nuanced approach to religion.

The main character, Francois, is a middle-aged professor of literature at the Sorbonne, and he, like almost all of Houellebecq's characters, is a thoroughly modern, irreligious person who is alone and unfulfilled. He's had many romantic relationships with his students, none of which lasts longer than a year. Occasionally he finds escorts online or browses YouPorn.

Francois greets the news of France's Muslim president, the result of high Muslim birthrates and a coalition against the National Front, with almost complete indifference. His only concern is that the public university where he works will now require its professors to be Muslim.

"But wasn't that how it already was with the Catholics?" he asks. "Did you have to be baptized to teach in a Christian school? On reflection, I realized I didn't know the first thing about it."

Many of Francois's coworkers convert to Islam, taking advantage of the new polygamy laws and the high university salaries offered by Saudi backers. Some become genuinely wedded to the religion, but others just seem to like the idea of having multiple wives, some as young as fourteen.

In some ways, the professors' material reasons for conversion represent a continuation of Houellebecq's favorite theme: the possibilities for love, sexuality, art, and now religion in a capitalist society. On those possibilities Houellebecq is decidedly pessimistic.

Houellebecq's cultural commentary does not just sweepingly condemn a society where market relations have encroached almost wholly onto social relations. His characters thoroughly enjoy the range of foods, sexual experiences, and

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## No Brass Ring for Women

By **ELIZABETH BARRY**  
STAFF WRITER

Despite the implementation of laws that aim to prevent discrimination in the workplace, the overwhelming majority of corporate America's executives are male. Women make up just 17% of the executive suite.

In America, there exists a culture of discomfort when it comes to female business leaders. According to Sheryl Sandberg, the founder of *LeanIn.org*, an organization dedicated to helping women achieve their professional goals, "women walk a tightrope between being liked and being respected where men do not."

Similarly, many believe that women lack both the confidence to be successful in executive roles and the ambition to get there. Yet others attribute the absence of women in top positions to the idea that women put their career plans on hold in order to spend more time caring for their families.

In conjunction with McKinsey & Co., *Lean In* recently conducted a study of 118 companies and more than 30,000 employees to capture data on the attitudes of working women. One goal of their study was to pinpoint the factors that keep many women from reaching the top of the corporate ladder and grabbing the metaphorical brass ring.

The results of this study

## This Week's News in 140 Characters

### EDITORIAL REPORT



**Tom Nichols** @RadioFreeTom · 28m

The fact that a raging narcissist like Trump is hitting a deep emotional chord with so many Americans tells you something awful about us.

40 43



**Stephen Miller** @redsteetzee · 45m

People have to have an incredibly short memory about how dysfunctional the Senate was under Harry Reid to care about votes Rubio missed.

34 34



**Ben Shapiro** @benshapiro · Oct 23

Lincoln Chafee dropping out of the race today will really disappoint his one supporter. Or 1.6 if you use the metric system.

104 172



**David Portnoy** @stoolpresident · 7h

The Pats would beat the Mets in the World Series. I honestly believe that.

1K 1.8K



**Ross Douthat** @DouthatNYT · Oct 22

I don't understand this "dropping out after one debate" thing. Being in the debates seems like the only fun part of running for president.

23 46



**daveweigel** @daveweigel · Oct 22

If you play hour 8 of the Benghazi hearing alongside "Dark Side of the Moon" it syncs up perfectly

222 265



**Kevin M. Kruse** @KevinMKruse · Oct 22

MSNBC has Brian Williams anchoring a hearing that's about the accuracy of reports over a war zone.

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*NO BRASS RING FOR WOMEN cont.*

contradict many preexisting ideas about women in the workplace. Women are not abandoning their careers in high numbers in order to spend more time with their families. Instead, motherhood actually increases a women's desire to be promoted. Having a family is expensive, so mothers have an incentive to work in higher paid positions.

*There needs to be a conscious, top-down shift that eliminates a work culture that disadvantages women.*

The data collected also indicates that a roughly equal percentage of men and women want to be promoted, with 78% and 75% desiring promotions respectively. However, this data also signal that, though they would like a promotion, many women would rather not take an executive position within their given company. Only 43% of women want to enter into top roles compared to 53% of men.

Many women cited stress as their main reason for not pursuing

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## Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Talk

By **RYAN GLENN**  
STAFF WRITER

Last Tuesday, Professor William Jacobson ('81) of Cornell Law School gave a lecture on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel and academic freedom.

Jacobson's lecture encompassed the historical and legal perspective of the BDS movement. He began with his experience studying in the Soviet Union, then progressed to the modern movement and how it restricts academic and economic freedom, eventually harming the international community.

Jacobson studied in the Soviet Union while he was a student at Hamilton College. Under Stalin, the Soviets killed millions, sent political and social dissenters to prison camps in Siberia, xenophobically deported entire populations, invaded sovereign nations, and restricted academia to the party line. Despite these atrocities and political hostility, domestic colleges and universities continued to promote academic freedom and exchange of ideas with Communist professors (all approved by the KGB,

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entertainment they can purchase. “I’ve always loved election night,” Francois says. “I’d go so far as to say it’s my favorite TV show, after the World Cup finals.” But the characters’ personal, or one could say spiritual, lives never approach the vibrancy of their consumer lives.

Francois’s main problem through most of the book is whether to join his colleagues in converting to Islam and teaching at the university. From Francois’s narrative perspective, we hear less about his conversion decision and more about how France and other countries got to the point where Islamic governments could be elected.

He points mainly to birthrates. The model of the family that the Muslim Brotherhood begins to encourage is one where a man can have several wives, all of whom are expected to do little other than stay home and raise children. Francois, in Houellebecqian manner, does not praise or condemn this model of a family (he comes off as a sexist and has few reservations about this role women), but only explains why it’s replacing the capitalist-era Western family in which men and women often both work and have few, if any, kids.

In spite of his pessimistic view of modern Europe, Houellebecq provocatively creates an optimistic sense of its future under Islam. He imagines the countries of Europe and parts of the Middle East joining together in a political union. “The logical outcome,” one character explains, “would be a president of Europe elected by the people of Europe.”

Houellebecq focuses on the perspectives of his male characters who have much to gain under the new Islamic regime. He leaves it to the reader, as he does in many of his novels, to decide whether this vision of the future is palatable.

*Submission: A Novel*  
By Michel Houellebecq  
Transl. Lorin Stein  
246 pp. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$25.

E. BARRY cont.

top positions. They are likely worried about balancing work life and family life. Even women without children and families indicated that stress is a major factor in their decision not to enter the executive suite. This suggests that the high-pressure aura of executive positions may be a turn off for women. As a result, senior women often end up working in staff roles, such as Human Resources, instead of upper management positions like their male counterparts.

The *Lean In* study also found that women encounter more challenges on their way to the executive suite than men. Roughly 25% of women feel that their gender has inhibited their professional progress. Women are also 15% less likely to be promoted

than men.

As proven time and time again, increasing diversity in the workplace can lead a company to become more successful. While three-quarters of the companies that Lean In studied named gender diversity a top priority, fewer than half of the employees interviewed said it was high on their own CEO’s priority list.

Dr. Correll, the director of Stanford University’s Clayman Institute for Gender Research, argues that managers need “to see that some of their actions are creating barriers to women in ways they don’t intend.” The Chief Executive of Tegna said a lot of companies would rather “pay lip service to gender diversity than to hold bosses responsible.” There needs to be a conscious, top-down shift that eliminates a work culture that disadvantages women.

Many large-scale banks, such as Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, and Bank of America have implemented programs aimed at informing women about the responsibilities of top executives in an attempt to quell notions that those positions are particularly stressful. Companies like Johnson and Johnson have begun working to change company culture by implementing quotas pertaining to the gender ratio of their executives.

While these companies have done much to improve the participation of women in their executive suites, gender equality in the American workforce is a long way off.

R. GLENN cont.

of course).

The recent movement to create a systematic academic boycott of Israel creates yet another highly polarizing issue, simplifying our international relationship into a demonizing, one-sided caricature of Israel. Jacobson remarked that he had never before seen such academic restriction. Only through interaction with diverse perspectives can we promote peace and understanding, if not acceptance.

The BDS movement began as a highly organized international movement in 1945 when the Arab League approved a boycott against Jews in the British Mandate of Palestine, several years before the establishment of Israel. This boycott extended to businesses and corporations in non-Arab nations that did business with Israel, which included Coca-Cola, Ford, and Toyota.

The United States responded with anti-boycott legislation, fining companies (like McDonald’s) that cooperated with the Arab League. The boycott lost influence, and nations ended the boycott from the 1970’s to the 1990’s.

Jacobson then described the modern BDS movement, which began at the 2001 Durbin Conference in South Africa. Initially an “anti-racism” conference, it quickly degenerated into an anti-Semitic

cesspool that equated Zionism to racism and labeled Israel as an apartheid state. Delegates from the United States and Israel promptly withdrew from the conference. In 2011, fourteen Western nations opted not to attend the latest iteration of the conference, Durbin III in New York City.

### *Most modern BDS movements may not be anti-Semitic in intent, but the movement as a whole has its origins in anti-Semitism.*

The BDS movement presents itself as an organic, grassroots movement—a boycott from “civil society.” It was, however, highly planned and organized.

The modern BDS movement not only promotes the economic exclusion of Israel, but seeks to ban study abroad opportunities, joint research, lectures and addresses, and even Israeli and Palestinian interaction and, where they come together to discuss their narratives and promote understanding between factions.

This kind of academic restriction ultimately damages students and faculty in the United States and abroad. These sanctions effectively restrict thought and collaboration, allowing the faculties to determine with whom and what their students can interact.

Most modern BDS movements may not be anti-Semitic in intent, but the movement as a whole has its origins in anti-Semitism. This begs the question: Why Israel?

To claim they are a colonial-settler national power would be hypocritical, especially for accusers in the United States, such as the American Studies Association. Any

professor working at an American institution should promptly resign if they truly supported the “imperialism” line of BDS movement.

Jacobson concluded by stating the movement clearly does not promote peace or a two-state solution, since it has anti-Semitic roots and its ultimate goal is the end of the Jewish State.

He then opened the event to questions from the audience.

Who benefits from the BDS movement? The Palestinians and other Arab nations certainly will not, since they benefit economically from trading with Israel. When the boycott was in effect, the Arab nations ultimately suffered. The real benefactors are the international non-governmental organizations who make money off of the BDS bureaucracy.

Apart from the academic restrictions, the BDS movement promotes several laughable causes. Take, for example, student groups’ boycott of Sabra hummus in the name of justice for Palestinians. Sabra, a U.S. based company mostly owned by PepsiCo, uses U.S. based farms and resources and is marginally connected to Israel through investors and charity.

The people promoting BDS against Israel are, for the moment, simply making noise and stirring up fear. Any university that officially creates BDS sanctions would create a monumental academic and legal backlash. Support for the BDS movement is still troubling, as the next generation of students and professors, goaded on by organizations like the American Studies Association, may be more inclined to radical views restricting academic freedom.

Thanks to the Hamilton Israel Public Affairs Committee (HIPAC) for hosting Professor Jacobson and the event.

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issue 9

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