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Op-Ed: Save Stanford's world-class press



by Op Ed — April 30, 2019 [3 Comments](#)

Dear President Tessier-Lavigne and Provost Drell,

I am writing to you as a scholar of the Holocaust and as a two-time Stanford University Press (SUP) author. I was distressed to read this past week in various news sources that you plan to significantly cut support for the press. According to those who work closely with SUP, this cut could lead to the demise of one of the nation's premier outlets for academic scholarship. It is difficult for me to understand how one of the world's richest educational institutions could be so shortsighted as to risk such a dire outcome, even in a budget year that you have described as "tight." I am writing in the hope that you can still be convinced to reverse this misguided decision and save the reputation of your university.

Many colleagues have already written to you and I have seen some of your responses that call for the press to develop a sustainable business model. I can understand that a university must have a sustainable budget, but it is equally true that a great research university must, above all, be dedicated to the production, conservation and dissemination of knowledge. In its contribution to that mission, the press plays an unparalleled role — one that cannot simply be subordinated to the calculus of a yearly balance sheet.

I am sure that such arguments are already familiar to you, so let me offer a more personal account of the value of the press. Ten years ago I published a book with SUP called “Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization” in the highly regard series “Cultural Memory in the Present.” The book took almost ten years to write, but having the opportunity to publish with SUP made that investment of time worthwhile. A top-tier press like SUP provides superior editorial guidance and production value, and it ensures a serious readership for one’s work. Indeed, since publishing that book, I have been invited to speak all over the world—in Europe, Africa and Asia. The book has been cited thousands of times, translated into French and Polish, and now, 10 years after publication, a German translation is in the works. The stellar reputation of SUP has helped me reach a worldwide audience and thus to transform the way that scholars think about Holocaust memory—and collective memory in general.

Everywhere I go to speak I meet scholars who see me as an ambassador of the press and would love to publish with Stanford in the “Cultural Memory” series. It is impossible to put a dollar value on that kind of impact. Of course, my book is only one of many, many works that SUP has published that have had transformative effects on a wide range of scholarly fields. Because of the experience I had publishing “Multidirectional Memory” with Stanford, I chose to publish my follow-up book “The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators” with the press as well. This book, too, represents almost 10 years of work. I worry about what your decision—apparently made without consulting anyone at the press—will mean for the continued impact of my work and that of my many colleagues who are working with SUP.

It saddens me deeply to see the Provost quoted describing SUP as “second rate”—a claim that is patently false and insulting to Stanford’s hundreds of authors who have invested years of their lives in producing field-defining work. SUP is the home not only of established scholars like myself, but also up-and-coming, first-time authors whose work will define the future of knowledge.

It is no secret that the world currently faces unprecedented challenges — challenges such as the growing climate of hate and intolerance, the radical questioning of scientific knowledge and truth, and the impending threat of environmental crisis. SUP authors are at the cutting-edge in confronting these issues. At this perilous moment, we need scholarly, evidence-based knowledge more than ever. I truly hope you will reconsider your decision before the damage to your institution’s reputation grows.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Rothberg

1939 Society Samuel Goetz Chair in Holocaust Studies and Professor of English and Comparative Literature at UCLA.

Contact Michael Rothberg at [mrothberg ‘at’ humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:mrothberg@humnet.ucla.edu).

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