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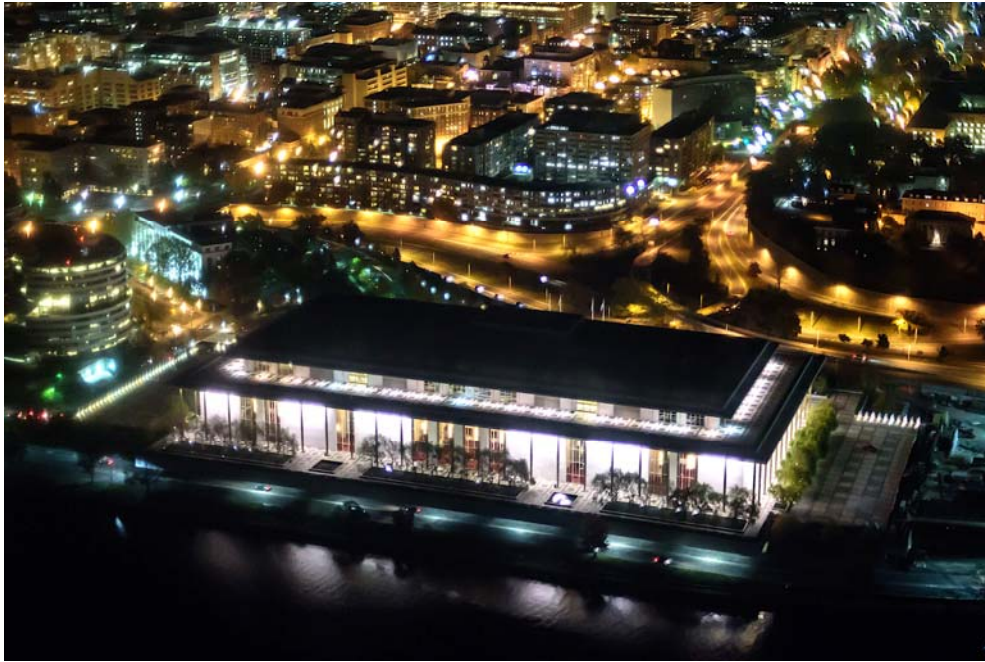
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Brett Wilkins

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The ‘Genocide Gentry’

Human rights groups are spotlighting weapons executives on the boards of schools and institutions to show the influence of the corporate, profit-fueled war machine on U.S. cultural life.



Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. (Der Berzerker, Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

A trio of human rights groups this week announced an interactive initiative exposing what the coalition is calling a “Genocide Gentry” of weapons company executives and board members and “54 museums, cultural organizations, universities, and colleges that currently host these individuals on their boards or in other prominent roles.”

The coalition — which consists of the Adalah Justice Project, LittleSis, and Action Center on Race and the Economy (ACRE) — published a map and database detailing the “educational

and cultural ties to board members of six defense corporations” amid Israel’s ongoing annihilation of Gaza, for which the U.S.-backed country is on trial for genocide at the International Court of Justice.

“Israel has destroyed every university in Gaza and nearly 200 cultural heritage sites since October 2023, using bombs and weapons manufactured by the companies included in the Genocide Gentry research,” the coalition said.

“As of April, these attacks have killed more than 5,479 students and 261 teachers and destroyed or critically damaged nearly 90% of all school buildings in Gaza.”

“Universities across the country including the likes of Columbia University, Harvard University, the University of Southern California, and New York University have remained largely silent on Israel’s genocidal campaign in Gaza,” the groups added.

“Behind closed doors, these same universities are hosting executives and board members of the companies manufacturing the weapons used in these attacks as board members, trustees, and fellows.”

Members of the Genocide Gentry include:

- Jeh Johnson, Lockheed Martin board of directors: Johnson, [a former secretary of homeland security] is currently a Columbia University trustee, and sits on the board of directors at MetLife and U.S. Steel. Columbia University notably shut down student protests demanding divestment from weapons companies like Lockheed Martin.
- Brian C. Rogers, RTX board of directors: Rogers is currently a trustee of the Harvard Management Company, tasked with managing the \$50 billion endowment. Notably Harvard administrators have cracked down on students demanding divestment from weapons companies like RTX, formerly Raytheon.
- Catherine B. Reynolds, General Dynamics board of directors: Reynolds is a trustee of the Kennedy Center and sponsors a fellowship at New York University, which has also cracked down on anti-genocide protests and recently enacted a policy equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

“Students on university campuses across the country have not only been demanding divestment, but transparency,” said Sandra Tamari, executive director of the Adalah Justice Project. “Transparency about their institutions’ investments, partnerships, donors, and decision-makers, and their connections to individuals and companies directly enabling and profiting off war and genocide.”

“This research helps provide some of this transparency by illuminating just how embedded the interests of the weapons industry are within our institutions, so we can begin chipping away at the power and influence that they wield,” she added.

ACRE campaign director Ramah Kudaimi noted that

“as part of its genocide since October 2023, Israel has targeted universities and cultural centers across Gaza, destroying campuses, museums, libraries, and more.”

“That this is all backed by the United States means U.S. educational and cultural institutions have a responsibility to consider what their role is in helping end these war crimes, and that starts with reconsidering their connections with the weapons companies profiting from the destruction,” Kudaimi said.

Munira Lokhandwala, director of the Tech and Training program at LittleSis, said:

“This research provides a view into just how embedded the corporate, profit-fueled war machine is in our higher education and cultural institutions. Through this research, we show how the defense industry shapes and influences our civic and cultural institutions, and as a result, their silence around war and genocide.”

“We must ask our institutions: What role are you playing in whitewashing war and destruction by inviting those who profit from manufacturing weapons onto your boards and into your galas?” she added.

Brett Wilkins is a staff writer for Common Dreams.

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