

## Jews Highlights

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sh prizes awarded to AUB students for  
essays on Michel Chiha's writings

olas Saadeh's winning essay

te George's second place essay

in Hayden's third place essay

th Bonazza's fourth place essay

al Ramia's fifth place essay

rek Tutunji's sixth place essay

## \$11,000 in cash prizes awarded to AUB students for best essays on Michel Chiha's writings



Winners with their checks: [L-R] Bonazza, Hayden, Tutunji, George, Ramia, and Saadeh

Six AUB students were each awarded up to \$4000 in cash prizes for winning essays they submitted to the Michel Chiha competition about the late editorialist's newest published compilation.

Organized by the Center for Behavioral Research in collaboration with the Michel Chiha Foundation, the essay contest which was announced in February, was meant to encourage anglophone students to discover Chiha, a francophone writer. A renowned Lebanese thinker and one of the fathers of the Lebanese constitution, Chiha originally wrote his opinion pieces in the French language daily, L'Orient Le Jour, which he had partially owned.



Khalaf: For the first time, francophone Michel Chiha is being read in English

Published in English for the first time in 2008, as part of an anthology entitled *Palestine: Political Reflections, 1945-1954*, Chiha's visionary and prophetic editorials from the late 1930s until his death in 1954 were made accessible to a non-francophone audience, as Professor Samir Khalaf noted during the distribution of prizes.

More than 90 students initially registered for the contest and read Chiha's anthology. But only 23 met the May 15 deadline, producing essays from a variety of angles.

The six finalists chose to study Chiha's anthology from different perspectives, some political, some psychological or literary, and others more personal.

Winners, who were described as an eclectic group with diverse interests, were announced by Professor Khalaf at a ceremony on June 11, after they read excerpts from their essays to a large audience in College Hall.

Nicholas Saadeh, a first-generation Lebanese-American, an AUB medical student with a degree in aerospace engineering, and an avid ballet dancer, grabbed first prize of \$4000.

Nate George, a Lebanese-American studying at the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern studies, is also a DJ. He placed second with a \$3000 cash prize.

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John Hayden, a Canadian with a degree in history from Toronto, is a master's candidate in the political studies and public administration department and an active member of the AUB choir. He landed third, receiving \$2000.

Ruth Bonazza, a Canadian-American with a degree in international affairs, is currently focusing on social and behavioral sciences at AUB, after having studied in Japan and taught school children in several places. She is an avid reader and swimmer and came to Lebanon because she fell in love with its beautiful rocks in a picture atlas book. She won fourth prize, or \$1000.

Paul Ramia, a biology pre-medical student who loves public speaking and athletics, came in fifth with a \$500 prize; while Tarek Tutunji, a PSPA graduate who is currently pursuing a master's degree in comparative politics, is a member of the University Student-Faculty Committee, a writer for Outlook, and enjoys filming. He placed sixth, also receiving \$500.

A jury composed of Professor Bashshar Haydar (Philosophy), Professor Samer Ghosn (Dermatology) and Professor Roseanne Saad Khalaf (Creative Writing), and two representing Chiha Foundation, blindly evaluated the essays over several weeks before choosing the winner.

Nicholas Saadeh analyzed Chiha's prophetic editorials while interspersing his essay with personal accounts from his Palestinian maternal grandparents.

"Like [my grandfather], Chiha dreamt not of a land free of Jews but of 'Muslims, Christians, and Jews, collaborating in Palestine within one and the same government--giving Judaism 'the peace to which it is entitled'," he wrote.

Saadeh highlighted Chiha's anti-Zionist, though equally anti-racist political stances.

"Although Chiha, like all noble people decried the horrors imparted on Jews by the Nazi regime in reference to its use as a justification for the usurping of Palestinian land, he courageously warned: 'Pity and politics make strange bedfellows'," wrote Saadeh. "The mark of a statesman is the ability to rise above emotion and passion in times of crisis and remain loyal to the eternal truths which is the very definition of civility...Despite the atrocities being committed before his eyes and the certainty with which he predicted the arrival of its repercussions in his homeland Lebanon, Chiha never wavered from his differentiation of Zionism and Judaism," he added.

Meanwhile, George spotlighted Chiha's still-relevant anti-Zionist arguments, almost 65 years after the political thinker had first raised them. Focusing his analysis on one editorial, titled a "Hori Without a Sun," George considered Chiha's "scathing denunciations of the Zionist project," as "devastatingly prophetic." However, he concluded that all hope is not lost, and if the international community would stop supporting Israel militarily, peace would still be possible.

Hayden, on the other hand, chose to compare Chiha to Isaiah Berlin, a Latvian-born Orthodox Jew and Zionist who is believed to have had a profound and lasting influence on liberal theory.

Hayden argued that while Chiha represented the conservative Burkean side of liberalism, Berlin "embodied the more modern, left-leaning liberal outlook." However, he added, "Berlin's liberal values had made his ardent Zionism problematic." Hayden concluded: "What liberal values are possible then, which do not recognize the rights of Palestinians?"

Choosing a more literary approach, Bonazza compared Chiha to Cassandra, the Greek goddess who had the gift of prophecy but was cursed by Apollo so that no one would believe her. Similarly, Bonazza argued Chiha "could see the future but could not alter it."

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"Although many tried to mute the impact of Chiha's writing by closing their ears, its significance lasts and lights a path for future speakers of truth and heralds to follow," wrote Bonazza. "It is as if history is mocking its readers, revealing missed opportunities and alternative yet inaccessible paths," wrote Bonazza. "On September 26, 1945, Chiha asks, 'Whence the wrath ages which recurs throughout history like an incurable disease, heralding unbridled fanaticism. This 'wrath' comes from the failure of the international community to stop the creation of a singular Zionist state in Palestine,'" she continued.

As for Ramia and Tutunji, they both addressed Chiha's writings in the context of current events. Quoting Chiha, Ramia wrote: "The West has prevented the Jew, whom it has itself so often maltreated, from making peace with the Arab, his brother, who has never done him any harm."

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