

Personal Statement - Graeme Campbell

What is your personal connection to Zionism? How do you define Zionism, and what does it mean to you to be a Zionist today?

My relationship with Israel has grown substantially over the past seven years. After serving in leadership roles in the Jewish community at the University of Texas, I feel closer to Israel than ever before in my life. I grew up in a secular family in which my Jewish mother and non-Jewish father agreed that religion should not be forced on their children. Still, I couldn't help but feel Jewish, even if I did not exactly know what that meant in my youth. In high school, I began to explore the history of Jewish religion, peoplehood, and by result, the Jewish State. I felt an inexplicable connection and became fascinated with Zionism, consuming page after page of the ideological musings of early Zionist thinkers, piecing together how their dreams on paper transferred to reality. Today, I define Zionism as a movement in support of Jewish unity and self-determination-- manifested in the modern State of Israel. At University, I took advantage of Birthright, returned to Israel in a yeshiva-based experience, and put my ideology into practice volunteering with Jewish National Fund. Meanwhile, I earned a minor in Hebrew, enabling me to connect to Israeli culture in a more intimate way. My Jewish Studies courses immersed me in the immense collection of academic literature on the study of Israel, in all of its complexity. Just months away from my first steps after graduation, I know that Israel will be central to whatever I do. Still, I am frustrated by many things about Israel, and I could write endlessly about the issues that seem so dire and threatening to her future. Yet, instead of depressing me or pushing me to disconnect, those issues are exactly what excite me and make me feel blessed to have an opportunity to contribute to writing the next chapters of Israel's story.

Through my participation in the Israel Government Fellows program, I will offer my passion, unique perspective, written and oratory skills, and depth of knowledge to the Israeli bureaucracy. I hope to gain in return a higher dimension of understanding of the State of Israel: her institutions, her challenges, and her aspirations. To be a Zionist today means to be an active contributor to writing Israel's story. To be a Zionist means that Israel, Judaism, and Hebrew are central facets of everyday life-- whether one chooses to make that life in the Diaspora or in Israel. As Diaspora Jews, we have a particularly important role to play in the future of Zionism. We have so many opportunities to defend and protect Israel from afar, by just speaking about Israel, donating money, and being proud of who we are. Zionism represents the success of a dream of Jews over millenia to return to the Land of Jerusalem, where we could once again determine our own fate. So much more must be done by Zionists today, building on the work of those who came before, in order to realize that dream in its fullest potential. Through this year-long Israel experience, I hope to come one step closer to discovering my potential to impact the future of Zionism.