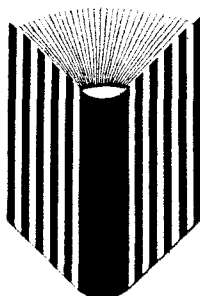

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ACADEMIC FREEDOM?



1. *The Four Academic Freedoms*

By RICHARD M. NIXON

THE WAR in Vietnam has triggered a crisis throughout America's academic community. The University of California at Berkeley has been rocked by riots and demonstrations; at the University of Chicago, students seized the administration building in a draft protest; at Amherst and NYU, Defense Secretary McNamara watched students walk out on commencement speeches. In many cases, demonstrations were incited by faculty members.

One natural reaction is to demand a "crackdown" on those responsible; the opposite reaction is to consider any outburst to be an expression of academic

freedom and therefore sacrosanct. Now is the proper time to examine the guarantees and the limitations of academic freedom.

Academic freedom is no "academic question"; it is one of the most powerful forces in human history. Princes, presidents, even generals tremble in its presence. Academic freedom is a free society's greatest single advantage in its competition with totalitarian societies. No society can be great without the creative power it unleashes. Yet while it can create, it can also destroy and it can consume itself.

A generation ago, "Four Freedoms" became a rallying cry for the forces of democracy: freedom of speech and of worship, and freedom from fear and from want. Today let us examine the Four Academic Freedoms.

► There is the academic freedom of

the student to investigate any theory, to challenge any premise, to refuse to accept old shibboleths and myths.

► There is a second academic freedom of the student to espouse any cause, to engage in the cut and thrust of partisan political or social debate, both on and off campus, without jeopardy to his or her academic career.

► The third academic freedom is that of the teacher—freedom from fear of reprisal while speaking or publishing the truth as he sees it, governed by the dictates of his own intellect and of the disciplines of scholarship.

► Finally, there is a fourth academic freedom—this one within the academic community—that is, the freedom of the student from tyranny by the faculty, and, conversely, freedom of the faculty from student tyranny.

These four academic freedoms underlie the concept of American educa-

This article is based on remarks by Mr. Nixon to the graduating class of the University of Rochester.

tion; without these freedoms, teaching becomes indoctrination—a mockery of education. Wherever academic investigation has been suppressed or a climate hostile to scholars created, society has suffered. On the other hand, those societies that protect academic freedom are able to mine human resources most effectively.

This special status granted the academic community does not result from some abstract principle, a privilege to be enjoyed merely at the sufferance of others. The strength of academic freedom is that it has been earned. History has taught us that teachers do their job best when they are free. The special rights and privileges of academic freedom are conferred not so much for the benefit of the academic community but for the benefit of the society which the academic community serves.

The American scholar stands at the height of his power. His prestige and influence reach into every sector of our national life. In all the turbulence of crisis and change in recent years, students and teachers throughout this country have been a tremendous force—more so than any academic generation since the American Revolution. Woodrow Wilson's distinction between men of thought and men of action can no longer be made. The man of thought who will not act is ineffective; the man of action who will not think is dangerous. Today's scholar has become a man of action as well as a man of thought. The challenges he faces have become infinitely more difficult.

This generation will have to maintain and extend freedom under conditions of utmost peril. It will have to learn to distinguish not only among friends, but among enemies, as the effort to secure a lasting peace without sacrificing freedom goes on. This generation will have to live with the thought that there will never again be a declared war. A limited conflict would be escalated by a declaration of war; a major conflict would be over before war could be declared.

A paradox confronts the academic community today and presents all of us with real problems of choice. The power of the scholar in the United States has never been greater. Yet that enormous power of the academic community, which is the product of academic freedom, potentially threatens academic freedom.

LET us remember that we are considering here a freedom that derives its protection not from the law but from the respect and confidence the academic institution enjoys in the community in which it is located. Members of the academic community have a special status in our society for two reasons. One, a

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2. The Nature of Academic Freedom

By HENRY STEELE COMMAGER

LET US BEGIN with the academy itself, and then consider the nature of the freedom which it enjoys. What is a university, and what are its functions?

A university is a place where young and old are joined together in the acquisition of knowledge and the search for truth.

Its functions are three-fold. First, to transmit knowledge imaginatively from one generation to the next. Second, to provide society with a body of trained professionals—originally priests, doctors, lawyers, and scholars—which is why Old World universities still have only four faculties. In modern times, and particularly in the United States, the university is expected to train for many other professions as well—architecture, journalism, teaching, forestry, engineering, and so forth, but the purpose is the same. The third function of the university is rapidly becoming the most important: to expand the boundaries of knowledge through research and to discover new truths.

Now, these functions imposed on the university by history and by circumstances mean that the university is to be a special kind of institution. It is the only institution in Western society whose business it is to search for and transmit truth regardless of all competing or conflicting pressures and demands: pressures for immediate usefulness, for social approval, pressures to serve the special interests of a government, a class, a professional group, a race, a faith, even a nation. If the university performs its duty it will, of course, serve all of these interests, for we must believe that the search for truth is useful to all groups, but this is a by-product of the larger achievement of the training of the young to wisdom and the search for truth.

The university is the chief instrument whereby society provides itself with independent criticism and advice, and with a continuous flow of ideas. It maintains the university as it maintains scientists, doctors, judges, and priests, not to minister to its passions but to serve its deeper and more permanent needs. Society does not impose its will on scientists because it wants to discover the secrets of the universe; it refrains from bringing pressure on judges because it wants to see justice done; it leaves doctors alone because it wants to discover the causes of and the cure for diseases; it permits religious freedom because it wants spiritual solace. Society provides freedom for scholars and for the university as an institution for the same ele-

mentary reason, because it wants to discover truth about as many things as possible.

It is out of this situation that the concept and the practice of academic freedom emerges, and on these principles that it rests. If society is to assure itself of a new generation trained to understand the world in which it will live, it must leave teachers free to transmit truth as they see it; if society is to have the benefit of disinterested advice, it must protect scholars who give that advice even when it is unpalatable; if society is to have the advantage of a flow of new ideas and discoveries, it must leave scholars to carry on research in their own way. At its peril does any society interfere in any way, at any time, through pressure, intimidation, distraction, or seduction, with these sovereign functions of the academy.

ONCE the nature of the university is clear, particular problems of "academic freedom" present few real difficulties. Consider, for example, two questions which have greatly agitated our society of late: the problem of student rebellion and student discipline, and the larger problem of alleged subversives on university faculties who justify their advocacy of unpopular causes—Negro rights in the South, opposition to the war in Vietnam, the recognition of Communist China—by the plea of academic freedom. The principles which must control our attitude toward these problems are rooted in the nature and function of the university.

We can dispose briefly of what now troubles a good many well-meaning people—manifestations of student freedom that seem (or are) excessive, bad-mannered, or unpatriotic. It should be remembered that academic freedom was born, some seven centuries ago, as student freedom, with the insistence by students in Italian and French universities on the right to have a decisive voice in choosing professors, arranging for courses of lectures, controlling all their housekeeping affairs, and securing certain political rights in their communities. The notion that the university should act *in loco parentis* to its students is a relatively new and limited one; to this day it is confined pretty much to English-speaking countries, and unknown elsewhere. The principle of *in loco parentis* was doubtless suitable enough in an earlier era, when boys went to college at the age of thirteen or fourteen; it is a bit ridiculous in a society where most students are mature enough to marry and raise families.

No one will deny that manifestations of student independence occasionally