
The Foundations of Academic Freedom

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Academic freedom is founded on two fundamental principles: professional autonomy and the public good. These dual foundations are necessarily in tension with each other. Academic freedom is not a civil right, as is freedom of speech, nor is it an individual employment benefit provided to those in a restricted number of academic appointments. It is, instead, a freedom belonging to the academic profession collectively to pursue inquiry and teach freely, limited and guided by the principles of that profession and of a scholar's respective disciplines. Academic freedom guarantees both faculty members and students the right to engage in intellectual inquiry and debate without fear of censorship or retaliation. It grants considerable scope to the consciences of individual teachers and researchers, but functions ultimately as the collective freedom of the scholarly community to govern itself in the interest of serving the common good in a democratic society. Academic freedom must protect not only independent research and classroom teaching, but a scholar's expression as a citizen of both the university and the broader polity. Hence, to thrive, academic freedom depends on a democratic and constitutional system that guarantees the rule of law. Academic freedom has always been contested and vulnerable, to be sure, but in recent years it has faced a series of escalating challenges almost everywhere, amounting to a major crisis. In this context, calls for 'institutional neutrality' must be critically examined.

Sometime around 1206, the philosopher Amalric of Bena at the University of Paris was convicted of advocating pantheism, condemned by the pope, and forced to recant in front of a body of his academic peers. In 1210, a provincial council ruled that 'neither the books of Aristotle on natural philosophy nor their commentaries are to be taught at Paris in public or privately'. In 1228, Pope Gregory IX renewed the ban once more, accusing the university's scholars of 'committing adultery with philosophical doctrines'. The next year, after students and faculty at Paris went on strike to protest the killing of student rioters, the University of Toulouse offered

striking scholars a more favourable environment where ‘those who wish to scrutinize the bosom of nature to the inmost can hear the books of Aristotle which were forbidden at Paris’. Just three years later, however, Gregory issued the papal bull *Parens Scientiarum*, which affirmed the rights of students and faculty and ‘served as an important precedent for legitimizing future university strikes’ (Mchangama 2022: 47; Young, 2014: 64).

Still, in 1277, the Bishop of Paris, in charge of the faculty of arts, banned a list of 219 philosophical and theological concepts. (By contrast, the state of Florida has so far sought only to ban eight, about which more later.) Indeed, a total of 16 lists of banned ideas were issued at the University of Paris in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As Jacob Mchangama (2022: 48–49) observes in his recent history of *Free Speech*, the fact that such bans needed continued repetition suggests that, even during an era of strict clerical control of learning, efforts to keep ideas from being studied and taught were not always successful. Indeed, despite all the noise, we know of only about 50 cases of academically related judicial proceedings for erroneous teaching during those two centuries.

Academic freedom can be said therefore to have deep roots in Western society and culture. Ever since the founding of the first European universities, scholars have bristled at external controls by powers both theological and political and have fought for the ability to test and at times to cross intellectual boundaries. As early as 1155, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I issued the *Authentica Habita* or *Privilegium Scholasticum*, establishing the first rights and privileges for European universities. Frederick gave scholars a status like that of the clergy, a privileged group with its own rules of self-governance, including immunity from reprisals for what they studied and taught (Bradford 2024).

It was only in the nineteenth century, however, that doctrines of academic freedom became more formalized. A critical moment came in Prussia, where, in the wake of humiliating losses to Napoleon, the state called on the philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt to reform the education system. In addition to founding the University of Berlin, Humboldt articulated a distinctive vision of the purpose of education. In a letter to the Prussian king, he wrote (quoted in Günther 1988: 132):

There are undeniably certain kinds of knowledge that must be of a general nature and, more importantly, a certain cultivation of the mind and character that nobody can afford to be without. People obviously cannot be good craftworkers, merchants, soldiers or businessmen unless, regardless of their occupation, they are good, upstanding and – according to their condition – well-informed human beings and citizens.

Such a vision of education as central to the development of ‘mind and character’, but also of citizenship, Humboldt believed, required a system in which external constraints were limited, if not entirely absent. In his vision, which he sought to implement in Berlin, the university was to be free of outside governmental and economic constraints so that it might constructively and independently pursue both

research and instruction. Humboldt demanded that the university free itself ‘from all forms within the state’ (Mueller-Vollmer and Messling 2023).

In 1811, the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, serving as rector of the University of Jena, endorsed the ‘free investigation of every object of thought’ as a universal human right essential to the pursuit of scholarship (Finkin and Post 2009: 19). For men like Humboldt and Fichte, academic freedom encompassed both *Lernfreiheit*, the freedom of the student to seek knowledge without restriction, and *Lehrfreiheit*, the freedom of the professor to teach in accordance with the precepts of a scholarly discipline. This vision of education and academic freedom had a profound impact on universities throughout Europe and especially in the United States, where first the University of Virginia and then the Johns Hopkins University led the way in adopting the Prussian model, at least with respect to *Lehrfreiheit*.

Academic Freedom Defined

Thus, the concept of academic freedom is founded historically on the claim that in both their pursuit of new knowledge and the propagation of their findings scholars must be free of external theological, political, and economic constraints. To quote Albert Einstein (Reichman 2017):

By academic freedom I understand the right to search for truth and to publish and teach what one holds to be true [...]. It is evident that any restriction of academic freedom acts in such a way as to hamper the dissemination of knowledge among people and thereby impedes rational judgment and action.

But if academic freedom in research and teaching is founded on the freedom of scholars to publish and teach, does that mean, as some suspect and others fear, that privileged professors should be free to say and write, in class, or in their research, or even as citizens, whatever comes to mind? To be sure, academic freedom is supposed to guarantee freedom from outside interference in research, in teaching, and in a professor’s right to speak as a citizen. But academic freedom is not the same as free speech; a scholar doesn’t have the right, for example, to publish blatant nonsense as research and expect to get a job. Nor can a teacher, say, teach the Bible in Biology class.

Academic freedom has always been as much an aspiration and ideal as concrete reality. Still, here’s a definition that I used in my book, *Understanding Academic Freedom* (Reichman 2021: 4):

Academic freedom [...] is not a civil right, as is freedom of speech, nor is it simply an individual employment benefit provided to those in a restricted number of academic appointments. It is, instead, a freedom belonging to the academic profession as a whole to pursue inquiry and teach freely, limited and guided by the principles of that profession. Academic freedom

guarantees to both faculty members and students the right to engage in intellectual inquiry and debate without fear of censorship or retaliation. It grants considerable scope to the consciences of individual teachers and researchers, but it functions ultimately as the collective freedom of the scholarly community to govern itself in the interest of serving the common good in a democratic society.

Let's examine the last sentence – 'the collective freedom of the scholarly community to govern itself in the interest of serving the common good in a democratic society' – because there's something of a contradiction here. On one side, that formulation sets the scholarly community apart from society, giving it the right, in effect, to decide for itself what's acceptable and what's not. In that sense, it's rather elitist and undemocratic. And it clearly would be undemocratic if it were solely the claim of the academic profession that it should have special privileges, perhaps because, well, we're special people. But then there's that part about 'serving the common good in a democratic society'. That's the justification for the privilege of self-government, and it's of critical importance.

In 1915, when a group of professors founded the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and issued a historic manifesto that sought, for the first time in US history, to define and defend academic freedom, they addressed this contradiction between elite privilege and democratic service. Their effort reflected two movements at that time. On the one hand, the founding of the AAUP was part of a broader trend among professionals – doctors, lawyers, scientists, etc. – to declare their professional independence, with the rights and privileges to which professionals must be entitled. Doctors proclaimed, *we* should define who can become a doctor and what proper medical treatment should look like, *not* patent medicine salesmen and the like. Professors were thinking similarly: it's up to *us* to define genuine scholarship, not businessmen, politicians, or clergy, nor, for that matter, students, alumni, or wealthy benefactors (Tiede 2015).

At the same time, this was the Progressive Era, with great pressure to expand democracy. It's when we in the United States got popular election of senators, anti-trust legislation, the first labour protections, and women's suffrage. These professors were part of that progressive movement. But if you're for greater democracy, as these professors were, why not then let the public, which supports the universities, at least the public ones, decide what's appropriate to be researched and taught? And isn't that what we're hearing today? 'These professors, with their "critical race theory", their diversity programs, and their liberal gay agenda are indoctrinating our children!' we're warned. 'They work for *us*, and they should reflect *our* values and beliefs. *That* would be true democracy.' Or so the thinking goes.

So how did the AAUP's founders deal with this, given that they thought of themselves as *both* elite professionals and democratic progressives? Colleges and universities, public or private, the AAUP's 1915 *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure* proclaimed, are 'a public trust' devoted to advancing 'the sum of human knowledge', providing instruction to students, and

developing experts for public service. These functions, the *Declaration* continued, cannot be fulfilled

without accepting and enforcing to the fullest extent the principle of academic freedom. The responsibility of the university as a whole is to the community at large, and any restriction upon the freedom of the instructor is bound to react injuriously [...] upon the interests of the community. (AAUP 2015: 8)

As a public trust, the AAUP's founders continued, universities must be

so free that no fair-minded person shall find any excuse for even a suspicion that the utterances of university teachers are shaped or restricted by the judgment not of professional scholars, but of inexpert and possibly not wholly disinterested persons outside of their ranks.

This is critical because, they added, 'there is a real danger that pressure from vested interests may, sometimes deliberately and sometimes unconsciously, sometimes openly and sometimes subtly and in obscure ways, be brought to bear upon academic authorities' (AAUP 2015: 8).

The sense that education must be seen as a public trust extends as well to the classroom, where the *Declaration* echoed Humboldt in recognizing that education cannot be limited to the dissemination of facts and familiar beliefs but must foster 'a genuine intellectual awakening' and 'a keen desire to reach personally verified conclusions'. The *Declaration* continues (AAUP 2015: 7):

No man can be a successful teacher unless he enjoys the respect of his students, and their confidence in his intellectual integrity. It is clear, however, that this confidence will be impaired if there is suspicion on the part of the student that the teacher is not expressing himself fully or frankly, or that college and university teachers in general are a repressed and intimidated class who dare not speak with that candor and courage which youth always demands in those whom it is to esteem.

The *Declaration's* authors also acknowledged what they deemed 'the dangers connected with the existence in a democracy of an overwhelming and concentrated public opinion'. Hence, colleges and universities must provide 'an inviolable refuge from such tyranny'. They declared (AAUP 2015: 8–9):

[The university] should be an intellectual experiment station, where new ideas may germinate and their fruit, though still distasteful to the community as a whole, may be allowed to ripen until finally, perchance, it may become a part of the accepted intellectual food of the nation or of the world. Not less is it a distinctive duty of the university to be the conservator of all genuine elements of value in the past thought and life of mankind which are not in the fashion of the moment. [...] One of [the university's] most characteristic functions in a democratic society is to help make public

opinion more self-critical and more circumspect, to check the more hasty and unconsidered impulses of popular feeling, *to train the democracy* to the habit of looking before and after. It is precisely this function of the university which is most injured by any restriction upon academic freedom. (Emphasis added)

Academic Freedom and Democracy

I really like that phrase ‘to train the democracy’. For if democracy is to survive, it must be informed by more than the vagaries of popular opinion, or the output of profit-seeking media outlets. The conservative critique of democracy has always focused on the fear of ‘mob rule’ and on the inability of most of the population to make informed decisions. That critique ultimately fails, I believe, but one reason it does so is because democracy demands – and must support – an educated populace. Charles Eliot, Harvard University’s longest-serving president, observed more than a century ago that American colleges and universities are ‘filled with the democratic spirit. Teachers and students alike are profoundly moved by the desire to serve the democratic community.’ In 1947, the Truman administration’s report on *Higher Education for American Democracy*, declared, ‘The first and most essential charge upon higher education is that at all its levels and in all its fields of specialization, it shall be the carrier of democratic values, ideals, and process’ (quotation from Becker 2024).

But if education is to serve democracy it must – as much as possible – be free from interference by special interests and free from the influence of unchecked and ill-informed public opinion.

If, as I am arguing, academic freedom is first and foremost a collective right inextricably linked to the defence and advancement of democracy, it must in addition necessarily have the responsibility to defend not only the rights of the academic community but also democratic governance itself. Hence, academic freedom is not only essential to democratic decision-making – an argument made persuasively on legal grounds by Yale University law professor Robert Post (2013) – but is a freedom tied inextricably to facilitating the advance of *all* democratic rights.

The ideal of the university as an ‘ivory tower’ standing outside the political structures of power has long been discredited. It is now commonplace to recognize, in Berkeley scholar John Aubrey Douglass’s words, that

the national political environment, past and present, is perhaps the most powerful influence on the mission, role, and effectiveness of universities, and the higher education system to which they belong – more than internally derived academic cultures, labor market demands, or the desires of students. (Douglass 2021: 23)

Hence, the independence of the university, its insulation from improper external interference, must be understood as always constrained by the political environment.

There is, however, a great deal of variation among national political environments and, more notably at the current moment, between illiberal and more open regimes. If the university can be understood as ‘a microcosm of the structural and material conditions’ in society writ large, it may at times also ‘function as a unique site through which to refract, resist, shape and translate social processes’ (Darian-Smith 2025). While our educational systems may be justly critiqued as overly protective of property and privilege – even as at times oppressive institutions themselves – they still shelter islands – whole archipelagos even – of dissent, critique, and even resistance. And it is these, above all, that academic freedom must strive most to protect.

Institutional Neutrality

In this context, current and often heated debates in the US (and, perhaps, elsewhere) over the principle of ‘institutional neutrality’ bear consideration. The debate is not a new one. In 1970, the AAUP published two opposing statements on the topic. One argued that academic freedom ‘requires the university to provide a setting for the study of various ideas, however controversial’ but obligates it as ‘a corporate body to refrain from official pronouncements on disputed political, moral, philosophical, and scientific issues’. The other held that ‘there are occasions in academic life today when political and moral issues are so inextricably tangled with issues of educational policy that faculties are not only justified but indeed obligated to take positions, particularly since not to do so may be in itself the taking of a position, that of appearing to condone if not approve the *status quo*’ (Koster and Solberg 1970: 11–13).

Today, calls for ‘institutional neutrality’ are frequently justified by reference to the University of Chicago’s 1967 ‘Kalven Report’, issued in the context of student demonstrations against the Vietnam War and calls for colleges and universities to end cooperation with the military. That report recommended that, to protect both academic freedom and the ‘full freedom of dissent’, universities must avoid advancing institutional positions on matters of public controversy. When institutional leaders speak on such matters, the report argued, they do so ‘at the price of censuring any minority who do not agree with the view adopted’ (Kalven Committee 1967).

There is considerable wisdom to this position. Because colleges and universities must be devoted to the unfettered search for truth, as institutions there are very few controversial topics on which they should take ‘official’ institutional positions. Institutionally, the university stands apart from the ideas of its faculty. When scholars exercise their academic freedom, it is not the institution’s role to weigh in on their choices, but to defend their right to choose. Yet almost all decisions and choices universities make as corporate bodies also involve choices and hence cannot be truly neutral. Moreover, calls for institutional neutrality may also, in some circumstances, disguise censorious efforts to silence expression. While there is surely a danger in

allowing institutional leadership to opine on every current conflict, forced imposition of neutrality may pose an even greater threat.

Some legislators who have sought to control the curriculum have done so in the name of institutional neutrality, perhaps with the intent of weakening resistance to their own political interference. In 2023, for example, the state of North Carolina enacted a law declaring that all University of North Carolina campuses ‘shall remain neutral, as an institution, on the political controversies of the day’ (North Carolina General Assembly 2023). In Indiana, a 2024 law requires that public colleges

must limit the circumstances in which an employee or group of employees from the institution may establish an official institution, school, college, or department position on political, moral, or ideological issues to only those circumstances that affect the core mission of the institution and its values of free inquiry, free expression, and intellectual diversity. (Senate Bill No. 202 2024)

Such laws could render the academic community all but defenceless in the face of external assault when political actors embrace positions that undermine faculty expertise and knowledge.

Even the Kalven Report acknowledged important exceptions. ‘From time to time instances will arise in which the society, or segments of it, threaten the very mission of the university and its values of free inquiry,’ the report acknowledged. ‘In such a crisis, it becomes the obligation of the university as an institution to oppose such measures and actively to defend its interests and its value.’

If there ever was such a time, it is surely now. ‘Protecting a broad array of views does not always mean institutional neutrality,’ writes educational theorist and philosopher Sigal Ben-Porath (2023: 132): ‘sometimes it means representing its values, including the expansion of the boundaries of knowledge and a commitment to inclusion’. Writing about European institutions, Wilhelm Krull and Thomas Brunotte (2021: 108 and 111) offer a critical insight, noting that

[Universities are founded on] a social contract in which the state and society give universities their freedom and autonomy so that they, in turn, can benefit as much as possible from them. For universities, though, this means that their actions cannot be guided by academic interests alone. Universities must be open to society and its concerns and questions. They must be responsible actors in society and educate concerned citizens, who are not only focused on academic issues but also social, environmental, and global challenges.

[...]

It is evident that universities can no longer be considered neutral institutions at the margins of the political sphere – if they ever were. For quite some time we have focused on institutional autonomy and perhaps forgotten that

universities are institutions that are deeply rooted in civil society and their local environment.

The Crisis of Academic Freedom

I turn now from my main theme to what I am calling the ‘crisis of academic freedom’, a crisis that has compelled us – for, perhaps, the first time in decades – to think deeply about academic freedom’s foundational principles.

Academic freedom has always been contested and vulnerable, to be sure, but in recent years it has faced a series of escalating challenges almost everywhere. As Jonathan Becker, vice-chancellor of the Open Society University Network, put it (quoted in Greenfield [2023](#)):

The sad truth is that authoritarians are targeting higher education around the globe, be it in Russia or Hungary, the Philippines or Afghanistan, or now the United States. Leaders of these countries want a compliant and not an engaged citizenry. They see professors as hostile and students as a potential source of idealistic and, thus, fearless opposition.

In the United States, which I know best, this crisis now exceeds the dangers that motivated the AAUP’s founders to issue the 1915 *Declaration* and establish a professional association to defend its principles. It is worse too than the patriotic panics of the First World War era and the 1950s. The danger now is more perilous because, unlike in those earlier eras, the challenges are part of a broader crisis of democracy and the constitutional order. Although portents of the crisis could be seen as early as the 1990s in the impact of the ‘culture wars’ of that period, as well as in actions of the Trump administration from 2017 to 2020, the crisis itself only emerged full-blown during the COVID-19 pandemic, the racial awakening following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, and most intensely in the response and backlash that have followed.

Brazen political interference by politicians and governing boards in college and university affairs, including in curricula, has been a principal hallmark of the crisis. An initial turning point came in 2010 when the Republican Party gained full control of the General Assembly in North Carolina. As an AAUP special investigation, in which I participated, would document (Bulletin of the AAUP [2022](#)), ‘governing board appointees were now more uniformly Republican, more interested in the political ideologies of campus actors, and less experienced with higher education than their predecessors’ and the state Board of Governors ‘began wading into campus-level matters [...] in thinly veiled defense of the legislative leadership’.

The AAUP report

detailed patterns of political interference by the North Carolina legislature into the administration of the UNC system, overreach by the board of governors and boards of trustees into specific campus operations, outright

disregard for principles of academic governance by campus and system leadership, institutional racism, and a hostile climate for academic freedom across the system.

The most conspicuous move was the rejection of a tenured appointment for Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, motivated in part by improper interference by a wealthy donor, which ‘amounted to a rebuke of the judgment and actions of the faculty, the dean, the provost, and the chancellor’.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a new and unusual environment that further strained conditions for academic freedom, leading to significant conflicts between the faculty and political leaders. A 2021 AAUP special investigation of COVID-19 and academic governance, in which I also participated, concluded that the pandemic ‘presented the most serious challenges to academic governance in the last fifty years’. The investigation found that too many presidents and trustees faced with stressful conditions ‘suddenly began operating in a state of panic after years of fiscal mismanagement’, claiming the pandemic as justification to ‘unilaterally alter their institutions’ governance structure, curriculum, and labor force, thus creating an acute crisis in academic governance’. These actions, and the traumatic impact of the COVID years on society and culture more broadly, exacerbated and accelerated the erosion of other academic and societal norms, including conditions essential to academic freedom (Bulletin of the AAUP 2021).

The apotheosis of the crisis came in Florida, where Governor Ron DeSantis had been among the most aggressive political leaders during the pandemic in dismissing the public health concerns of faculty members and the public, and appointed as state Surgeon General a prominent vaccine denialist, who was named as well to a lucrative professorship at the University of Florida. Starting in 2021, DeSantis and his allies in the legislature and on governing boards enacted a series of laws and took administrative actions that, collectively, led an AAUP special investigation, which I co-chaired, to conclude in December 2023 that (Bulletin of the AAUP 2024):

Academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance in Florida’s public colleges and universities currently face a politically and ideologically driven assault unparalleled in US history, which, if sustained, threatens the very survival of meaningful higher education in the state, with the direst implications for the entire country.

Much can be said about the details of this assault, described in the AAUP report, but it should be noted how Florida’s 2022 law, known as the ‘Stop WOKE Act’, echoes those medieval decrees that I mentioned earlier in banning any instruction that ‘espouses, promotes, advances, inculcates, or compels’ belief in eight specified concepts, although it does permit teaching these concepts ‘in an objective manner’. Academic freedom does not require ‘objective’ instruction, whatever that might mean. It requires instead that instructors educate rather than indoctrinate. It is certainly inappropriate for instructors to ‘compel’ beliefs. But it is not clear what it might mean to bar instruction that ‘espouses, promotes, or advances’ the eight

specified concepts. Yet lack of clarity itself may be the point. Florida faculty members express realistic fears that their teaching will be restricted in ways that they cannot foresee. It is that uncertainty that is designed to encourage self-censorship.

Control of the curriculum and the classroom have been central to legislation adopted by the DeSantis regime and adopted or introduced in at least a dozen other Republican-dominated states, which aim to restrict the teaching of allegedly ‘divisive concepts’. The writers’ group PEN America calls such legislative initiatives ‘educational gag orders’ and has documented their spread from K-12 schools into colleges and universities across the country (PEN America 2022, 2023). The initiatives have often targeted so-called Critical Race Theory, a bogeyman sharing only a name with a respected body of legal thought, and other programmes in ethnic studies, as well as scholarly study or teaching about US history that acknowledges racial conflict and other negative features of the country’s past. Gender studies programmes and classes or support structures that recognize and serve the needs of transgender students have been targeted as well.

The Gaza war dramatically intensified and complicated the crisis of academic freedom. When, in December 2023, Republicans in Congress grilled the presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania, demanding that they denounce and, by implication, suppress pro-Palestinian sentiments on their campuses, conflating political slogans with harassment, the presidents’ attempts at nuanced response were evasive and ineffective. More important, as Len Gutkin noted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the hearing marked ‘the appearance on the national stage of the political interference state legislatures have been bringing to bear on colleges for the last several years’ (Gutkin 2023). In its aftermath, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce launched a ‘formal investigation’ of the universities, demanding documents and materials on alleged antisemitic incidents. When Committee chair Virginia Foxx (R-NC) deemed Harvard’s response ‘woefully inadequate’, she threatened the university with ‘compulsory measures’. Given that these hallowed institutions are among the oldest, most prestigious, and wealthiest in the country, the message to less influential institutions could not have been more obvious.

The Congressional hearings highlighted the seeming impotence of much higher education leadership, a phenomenon bemoaned as well in the AAUP’s Florida investigation. When, months later, the committee called in Columbia University President Minouche Shafik, she not only condemned student protesters but threw both academic freedom and the faculty ‘under the bus’, to quote AAUP President Irene Mulvey’s conclusion (AAUP Updates 2024). It was without doubt one of the most embarrassing displays ever seen in the embarrassing history of such Congressional show trials. It was soon followed by mass arrests and expulsions of protesting students participating in a nonviolent and largely non-disruptive encampment, which in turn led to Shafik’s resignation in August.

Apparently, decades of acceding to the demands not only of legislators but of major donors, of running campuses ‘like a business’, and of treating students as

‘customers’ to be coddled rather than learners to be challenged have created an academic leadership class overly disposed to striving for conformity from those below them while making comfortable those to whom they report, especially when they hold the power of the purse.

If, as I have been arguing, academic freedom is founded on *both* the desire for and necessity of professional and institutional autonomy *and* on democracy’s need to develop in its citizens, to quote Humboldt, ‘a certain cultivation of the mind and character that nobody can afford to be without’, then today it is not only academic freedom in practice but those very foundations that are under assault. For if academic freedom – indeed, education itself – cannot thrive without democracy, democracy cannot survive without academic freedom.

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Henry Reichman is Professor Emeritus of History at California State University, East Bay. He is the author of *The Future of Academic Freedom* (2019) and *Understanding Academic Freedom* (2021, 2nd edn 2025) and co-editor of and frequent contributor to the Academe blog (academeblog.org). He has served as first vice-president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and chair of the AAUP Foundation. From 2012 to 2021 he chaired the AAUP's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure. In 2023 he cochaired the AAUP's special investigation of academic freedom and political interference in Florida's

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