

ALUMNI FOR YALE'S FUTURE

November 16, 2015

Dear Fellows of the Yale Corporation:

The C. Vann Woodward Report, which to this day remains on Yale's website, is a milestone in the history of American higher education, and its reasoned commitment to academic freedom is a source of honor to the University. It is painful not only to the sons and daughters of Yale but to all of higher education when free expression and the free exchange of ideas are imperiled on campus. We therefore applaud President Salovey and Dean Holloway for their recent statements and actions upholding the core values of the University. We, proud alumni, encourage the Yale Corporation to work with the administration to use the recent campus turmoil as a teachable moment for the campus community and to maintain Yale's leadership in fostering a campus that is truly open to intellectual diversity and individual expression.

The principles of the Woodward Report—itsself written at a time of campus upheaval over the invitation of speakers with opinions deemed offensive by many—are timeless. Most importantly, it recognizes that a university's primary function, unlike that of any other institution, requires that the free exchange of ideas take precedence over accommodating personal sensibilities. The functions of the University should never be paralyzed by unreasonable demands for the removal of University staff or for mandatory “sensitivity training”—all of which deflect attention from the core mission of the University: teaching and learning.

To cite from the Woodward Report: “If a university is a place for knowledge, it is also a special kind of small society,” but one that is “not primarily a fellowship, a club, a circle of friends, a replica of the civil society outside it”—or in today's parlance, a “safe space.”

The Report goes on: To make “the fostering of friendship, solidarity, harmony, civility, or mutual respect” the “primary and dominant value” on campus risks “sacrificing [the University's] central purpose” and does nothing to prepare students for a world in which they will be forced to confront unsettling and uncomfortable ideas.

As the Report makes clear, the University “has a special obligation to foster free expression and to ensure that it is not obstructed.” In an academic community, the appropriate response to the expression of ideas that one deems false or offensive is more discussion, not less. We urge, therefore, the Yale Corporation and the University administration to stand firm in support of the distinguished master and associate master of Silliman College who have taken a principled stand in support of vigorous discussion and debate. Failure to do so will have a chilling effect on those in the faculty and administration who would choose to challenge opinions popular on campus. And we further urge the Corporation and the University administration to revisit the Woodward Report and to call for a University-wide teach-in to reaffirm the principles therein. The Report, which is excerpted in the enclosed volume, *Free to Teach, Free to Learn* (pp. 23–30), also outlines procedures for ensuring that the campus environment fosters an open debate and respects the right to dissent.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

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