



FACULTY SENATE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

30TH ANNUAL

**DAVIS, MARKERT, AND
NICKERSON**

ACADEMIC FREEDOM LECTURE

**Challenges to Academic Freedom
in a Changing Landscape,
at Home and Abroad**

Webinar

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

4:00 – 6:00

Panel Discussion Featuring

Nadje S. Al-Ali
Brown University



Susan Benesch
Harvard University



Michael Bérubé
Penn State University



Moderated by
Melanie Tanielian
University of Michigan

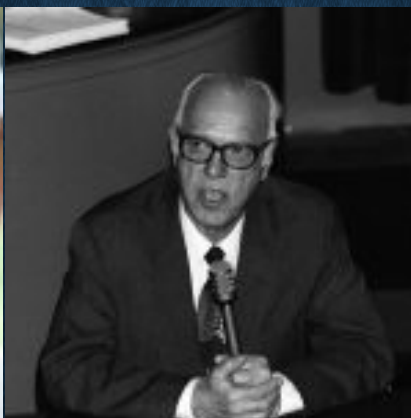


THE LECTURE

The Annual Davis, Markert, and Nickerson Academic Freedom Lecture is named for three University of Michigan faculty members – Chandler Davis, Clement Markert, and Mark Nickerson – who in 1954 were called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. All invoked constitutional rights and refused to answer questions about their political associations. The three were suspended from the University with subsequent hearings and committee actions resulting in the reinstatement of Markert, an assistant professor who eventually gained tenure, and the dismissal of Davis, an instructor, and Nickerson, a tenured associate professor.



Chandler Davis
University of
Toronto,
Professor Emeritus



Clement Markert
4/11/17-10/1/99



Mark Nickerson
10/22/16-3/12/98

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom is the liberty that faculty members must have if they are to practice their scholarly profession in accordance with the norms of that profession. Academic freedom is not a term or condition of employment; rather, it is based in the institutional structure of this and other universities and is fundamental to their common missions of promoting inquiry and advancing the sum of human knowledge and understanding. Although some aspects of academic freedom are also protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, academic freedom exists, independent of any external protection, as a basic prerequisite for universities to fulfill their mission to our society.

Academic freedom is most commonly vindicated by individual faculty members, but remains first and foremost a professional prerequisite of faculty members as a group.

*Adopted by the Senate Assembly on behalf of the
Faculty Senate, January 25, 2010*

SCHEDULE

4:00 *Introductory Remarks*

President Mark Schlissel

Colleen Conway, SACUA Chair

Chandler Davis, Honoree

4:30 *Moderator and Panelist Statements*

Professor Melanie Tanielian

Professor Nadjé Al-Ali

Professor Susan Benesch

Professor Michael Bérubé

4:50 *Moderated Discussion*

5:20 *Q&A*

6:00 *End*

BIOS



Moderator

Melanie Tanielian

Associate Professor

History Department

University of Michigan

Melanie S. Tanielian is associate professor in the History Department at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and the Director of the Center for Armenian Studies. Her monograph *The Charity of War: Famine, Humanitarian Aid and World War I in the Middle East* tells how the Ottoman home front grappled with total war and how it sought to mitigate starvation and sickness through relief activities. It examines the wartime famine's reverberations throughout the community: in Beirut's municipal institutions, in its philanthropic and religious organizations, in international agencies, and in the homes of the city's residents. Tanielian is a historian of war and society and her research and teaching interests include the social and cultural history of WWI in the Middle East, the emergence of religious philanthropic societies and their work in times of conflict, modern humanitarianism, disease, medicine, and mental health.

Professor Tanielian is currently working on a new book preliminarily titled: *Transnational Lunacy: Madness, Society, and Citizenship in a World at War, 1914-1919*, as well as is co-editing a volume titled: *Afterlives: Remnants, Ruins, and Representations of the Armenian Genocide*. Her most recent research has been supported by the American Council of Learned Society and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

BIOS



Panelist

Nadjé Al-Ali

*Robert Family Professor of International Studies,
Professor of Anthropology and Middle East Studies
Brown University*

Nadjé Al-Ali has recently left her long-term position at the Centre for Gender Studies at SOAS University of London to join Brown as the Robert Family Professor of International Studies and Professor of Anthropology and Middle East Studies. Her main research interests revolve around feminist activism and gendered mobilization, mainly with reference to Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and the Kurdish political movement.

Professor Al-Ali's publications include *What kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (2009, University of California Press, co-authored with Nicola Pratt); *Women and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives* (Zed Books, 2009, co-edited with Nicola Pratt); *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (2007, Zed Books), and *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press 2000). Her co-edited book with Deborah al-Najjar entitled *We are Iraqis: Aesthetics & Politics in a Time of War* (Syracuse University Press) won the 2014 Arab-American book prize for non-fiction.

BIOS



Panelist

Susan Benesch

*Faculty Associate,
Harvard University
Adjunct Professor,
American University
Director, Dangerous
Speech Project*

Susan Benesch founded and directs the Dangerous Speech Project, to study rhetoric that can inspire violence – and to find ways to prevent this without infringing on freedom of expression. To that end, she and her colleagues conduct research on methods to diminish harmful speech online, or the harm itself. She regularly foists related ideas on social media companies, to improve both content moderation and user behavior. Trained as a human rights lawyer at Yale, Susan is faculty associate at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society, and she teaches at American University's School of International Service.

Among Professor Benesch's recent scholarly publications are *But Facebook's Not a Country: How to Interpret Human Rights Law for Social Media Companies*, and *Proposals for Improved Regulation of Online Content*. She also writes mainstream press articles, such as this Jan 2021 oped, *The Deadly Consequences of Trump's Gradual and Insidious Rhetoric*.

BIOS



Panelist

Michael Bérubé

Edwin Erle Sparks

Professor of Literature

Pennsylvania State

University

Michael Bérubé is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Literature and past Chair of the University Faculty Senate at Pennsylvania State University, having served as Chair in 2018-19. He is the author of ten books to date, including *Public Access: Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics* (Verso, 1994); *Life As We Know It: A Father, A Family, and an Exceptional Child* (Pantheon, 1996; paper, Vintage, 1998); and *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts? Classroom Politics and "Bias" in Higher Education* (W. W. Norton, 2006). *Life as We Know It* was a New York Times Notable Book of the Year for 1996 and was chosen as one of the best books of the year (on a list of seven) by Maureen Corrigan of National Public Radio.

Professor Bérubé served three terms on the American Association of University Professors' Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure from 2009 to 2018, two terms on the AAUP National Council from 2005 to 2011, and two terms on the International Advisory Board of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes from 2011 to 2017. In 2012 he was president of the Modern Language Association. From 2010 to 2017, he served as the Director of Penn State's Institute for the Arts and Humanities.

ABSTRACTS



Nadjie Al-Ali

Complicating "academic freedom" in a global context

Professor Nadjie Al-Ali will be sharing her experiences of academic freedom in transnational context, especially in relation to her German-Iraqi background and her 25 years experience of higher education within the UK. She will make the case for a historicized, empirically grounded and nuanced discussion of academic freedom as its meaning and contestations change radically pending on time and context. She will also address the double standard apparent in some of the debates on academic freedom as well as the inherent tensions between defending freedom of speech while not giving platforms to ideas and practices that are counter to principles of equality and justice.

ABSTRACTS



Susan Benesch

Academic freedom of speech or freedom of reach?

Professor Susan Benesch will argue that on academic campuses just as elsewhere (including online) the key issue often isn't freedom of speech but freedom of reach: the opportunity to get other people to see or hear what one wants to say. Where there are conflicts, they usually pit a transmitter of ideas against a person or people who don't want to receive them. In First Amendment jurisprudence this problem is tackled by means of "time, place, and manner" restrictions, with which academia has experimented with only limited success. She'll give some examples.

In practice, informal speech norms are very powerful — arguably even more so in the United States than in other countries where the law restricts speech more than ours. Those norms operate strongly on our campuses, as Professor Benesch will illustrate. She proposes making use of this phenomenon to build informal speech norms deliberately and collaboratively, which should illuminate teaching. Academic freedom should be enjoyed by students as well as by professors, after all, and it can best be defended by both together.

ABSTRACTS



Michael Bérubé

Should academic freedom extend to the work of white supremacist professors?

The question became inescapable in 2020, but it has been lingering for at least the last five years. Academic freedom has never been well understood, and it has lately become increasingly conflated with free speech; alarmingly, this has happened together with the rise of social media, the weaponization of free speech by the radical right, and the advent of what some legal scholars are calling “First Amendment Lochnerism.” Drawing on the forthcoming book Professor Bérubé is writing with Jennifer Ruth, he will argue that the belief that white people are superior to nonwhite people has poisoned so-called “Western culture” for over five hundred years, and reached an apex in the early twentieth century, when pseudoscientific racism laid the groundwork for eugenics and genocide. This belief is now re-emerging into public life, and it has no place in any legitimate educational institution. It is past time for it to go the way of beliefs in phlogiston, the philosopher’s stone, and the efficacy of human sacrifice.