



**Remarks by Barry Strauss  
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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY:

I would like to thank The Bradley Foundation for the signal honor it has granted me by making me one of the recipients of the 2025 Bradley Prize. I accept, with gratitude and humility. Permit me to say a few words about the subject I know best, higher education, a matter of importance for us all. As Plato said, to have a just society you need to educate people correctly. And in America, higher education aims to educate the best and the brightest.

Our universities are a national treasure. They are a driving force in scientific progress, including such developments as advances in medical imaging and the roots of the Internet. They have fostered profound works of humanistic scholarship in fields such as classics, history and philosophy; they have been the seedbed of deeply analytical research in the social sciences. Our universities attract students from around the world, with over a million international students now attending annually.

American universities are a national treasure, but it is a tarnished treasure. The story is well known, in no small part thanks to the work of my fellow Bradley Prize winners this year and in previous years. Globalism has replaced nationalism. Careerism has replaced liberal education. Progressivism has entrenched itself, leaving centrists quiet and conservatives an endangered species. Campus activists have called for the eradication of western civilization, the very civilization that made their universities possible, the main guarantor of the free exchange of ideas.

We need great research universities. But we also need universities that guarantee free speech and vigorous intellectual debate. Our job as scholars is to expand the boundaries of knowledge. Our job as educators is to teach students to think for themselves. Having to work in a monoculture is prejudicial to the mission.

The ideal of a university should be liberal education. It is called “liberal” because it liberates students from their cherished but unexamined opinions and turns them toward truth. It prepares them to be free men and women. It is liberal education itself that is at risk from the trends of recent decades.

But this is an old, well-known story. Let’s turn to the good news, because encouraging things are happening across the country. Efforts are underway to restore our universities to their ideals. These are very old but very good notions, embodied in such mottos as Yale’s LUX ET VERITAS, “light and truth”; Cornell’s “I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study”; or Stanford’s “The wind of freedom blows.”

Because we are Americans, these efforts are taking place not by means of central directives but through the initiative of individuals, working together and forming new institutions, and with the help of a few generous foundations like Bradley.

I have the good fortune to have spent most of my career at Cornell, a great institution and my alma mater. There, almost twenty years ago, I co-founded the Program in Freedom and Free Societies. The program’s core mission is to enhance the understanding and appreciation for constitutional liberty, by stimulating inquiry into the nature and meaning of freedom.

I now have the good fortune to be a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford. Hoover is an exciting place for a historian. With the Hoover History Lab, the Hoover Applied History Working Group, and the Hoover Working Group on the Role of History in Contemporary Conflict, there is constant intellectual ferment and the free exchange of ideas, vigorously and openly debated. Hoover Fellows also play an active role in Stanford’s Civic Initiative, whose [goal](#) is to further Stanford’s mission of preparing students for “virtuous and effective citizenship.”

But to quote Churchill, “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” Churchill was referring to the Second World War, but we are not fighting a war. To quote another great statesman, “We are not enemies, but friends.” All of us who love the university, as I do, must work together on a reset.

I believe that we are entering an era of national renewal. As a historian, I study the question of how societies renew themselves. The answer is a combination of flexibility and a focus on a nation’s founding principles. I will quote one of my favorite maxims, a line from Tommasi di Lampedusa’s classic novel, *Il Gattopardo* or *The Leopard*. In response to a revolution sweeping

Sicily in the mid-nineteenth century, the young scion of an aristocratic family explains to his old-fashioned uncle, “Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga com’è, bisogna che tutto cambi.” That is, “If we want things to stay the same, everything has to change.” Cynical it may be, but it is nonetheless wise.

Our universities were right to open their doors to new people and new subjects of study. Racial, ethnic, and gender diversity is both just and necessary. They have gone about implementing it the wrong way, of course, through DEI, because they forgot the core American principles of freedom and equal treatment before the law. But they will get it right.

History offers examples of successful societal renewal, sometimes under extreme circumstances. Ancient Athens, for instance, was the world’s first great democracy, but it faltered and lost the Peloponnesian War, with devastating effects on life, liberty, and national self-confidence. An oligarchic elite, always hostile to Athens’ experiment in rule by the common man, launched a coup d’état and replaced democracy with oligarchy. They talked idealism and then bared their fangs. They executed their opponents and confiscated their wealth. Then the democrats fought back with an army made up of ordinary people. They waged war and won. Both sides agreed to an amnesty, the first in recorded history. In the following years, the city revised its constitution to strengthen the rule of law. It became more orderly but not one whit less democratic.

Athens healed its wounds by drawing on its heritage of citizenship and public-spiritedness. It proved to be resilient. So did another city worthy of our attention, Jerusalem. It’s the subject of my new book, *Jews vs. Rome*. After launching not one but three massive revolts against their overlord, the Roman Empire, the Jewish people lost their Temple, their national capital, the better part of their homeland – and, in cases, lost their lives. Nevertheless, the Jews, like the Athenians, proved resilient. They drew on their heritage, centered on a holy book, the Torah, and on the men who interpreted it, the rabbis. The rabbis rallied the people and began instituting rituals to replace the lost Temple. Meanwhile, other Jews also adored the Torah, but they believed that their mission now was to preach to the nations. They took their inspiration from Jesus Christ, whom they hailed as messiah and whose gospel they preached. For both Jews and Christians, the fire of resistance became the flame of resilience.

Our society too will prove resilient if it returns to its roots in the western tradition and the history of the American republic, starting with its founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. We need to acknowledge flaws, of course, but more important, we need to teach our students the character of greatness. We can hardly do better than Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln did not go to college. He didn't go to high school. Lincoln had less than a year of formal schooling altogether, which he pursued in drips and drabs. He was mainly self-educated, including in the law. Yet Lincoln was arguably America's greatest president. He owed his success to his natural intelligence, to the culture of the society in which he lived, and above all, I think, to his character. And he owed it to his education. It was a self-education, but it was an education in greatness, focusing on the Bible, Shakespeare, and the documents of the American founding.

Lincoln's education was simple, but it was patriotic, fundamental, and ambitious. It supported him as he faced his country's greatest crisis and taught him to channel his character into unforgettable words.

I have a challenge for American higher education. My fellow professors, remember that Lincoln - one of America's greatest citizens - owes us nothing. Let that be a reason for humility. Let it be a reminder that fancy seminars and boutique courses and enrichment programs are worth little unless they can shape men and women who can aim as high as Lincoln. I challenge our universities to return to a curriculum that educates for greatness. For citizenship. For freedom. And for America.