

Dear Higher Education

LETTERS FROM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOUNTAIN

When They Call Us the Enemy, We Must Respond

J. M. GALILEI

Dear Higher Education,

They have called us *the enemy*, and we must now respond accordingly. We can no longer dismiss this as mere political rhetoric. In just a month, this administration has inflicted irreparable harm on livelihoods, careers, and lives. The deliberate dismantling of USAID is already linked to the deaths of at least three children in Africa. The Pentagon is planning to remove transgender troops from the military. Chaos now engulfs grant-funded research, and the Department of Education faces threats of elimination. International students once again struggle with visa complications. Dreamers fear ICE raids on their campuses. Programs dedicated to culture, diversity, equity, and identity have been decimated or banned outright.

In Republican-led states like Texas, Georgia, and Florida, tenure protections have been weakened or restricted. The effort to intimidate and silence professors is real. It is not hypothetical, nor should it be taken lightly. The harm is already underway. In a 2021 speech, now-Vice President J.D. Vance declared, “*Professors are the enemy.*” We must take him at his word. This administration views us as adversaries and will not take kindly to us.

During the 2024 campaign, many questioned whether this administration would truly enact Project 2025. Some dismissed its proposals as unconstitutional, un-American, or simply too extreme to be realized. Yet here we are, just one month in, and Project 2025 is not only being implemented but aggressively pursued. So, let’s all WAKE UP! They have been telling us who they are, and we must believe them. They have not retracted their view that professors are the enemy.

A significant portion of the electorate voted for this administration, not in spite of these views but because of them. Many see higher education as corrupt, elitist, and inaccessible. They resent our commitment to diversity and equity. They do not believe in the idea that *a rising tide lifts all boats*. Instead, they are convinced that their own privileges (e.g., white privilege, male privilege) have been eroded and must be restored. This is retribution. Supporters of this administration want the so-called “ivory tower” to fall. They blame us for expanding access to higher learning, for speaking inconvenient truths, and for advancing the economic and social mobility of those they deem inferior.

History has shown that scholars, educators, and intellectuals who challenge authoritarianism often pay the price. They are censored, exiled, criminalized, sometimes even killed. Make no mistake, this administration is filled with authoritarian fanatics. They have marked us as enemies, and they are bringing the fight to us. Already, they are wounding our students, especially international students and students of color. They are dismantling our curricular offerings and cultural spaces. They are gutting our research infrastructure. The very foundation of our work — our triarchic mission of research, teaching, and service — is under attack.

And what’s next? Tenure. Sabbaticals. Humanities. Scientific funding. Spaces that foster belonging. Education itself. If we call on our political leaders to fight back more fiercely, then we must demand the same of our

institutional leaders. More than that, we must fight back ourselves. For our students. For the public good. For truth, no matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable. Godspeed.

*Sincerely,
J. M. Galilei*

About the author

Dr. J. M. Galilei is a professor of developmental psychology, educational psychology, and social science research, with extensive publications in these fields as a faculty member at two R1 universities. At the time of writing, Dr. Galilei has witnessed the unjust dismissal of colleagues from the U.S. Department of Education and USAID, the detention and deportation of esteemed scholars and medical professionals, and the alarming dissolution of programs, offices, and centers at academic institutions; decisions that have severed opportunities for students of all backgrounds, from the most privileged to the most marginalized.