

## Academic Freedom: The Student Version

by

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may bring a more youthful approach to university affairs, a new willingness to experiment and take chances. On the negative side, student activists' naive

by its imaginative treatment in fiction. Undergraduate life was a

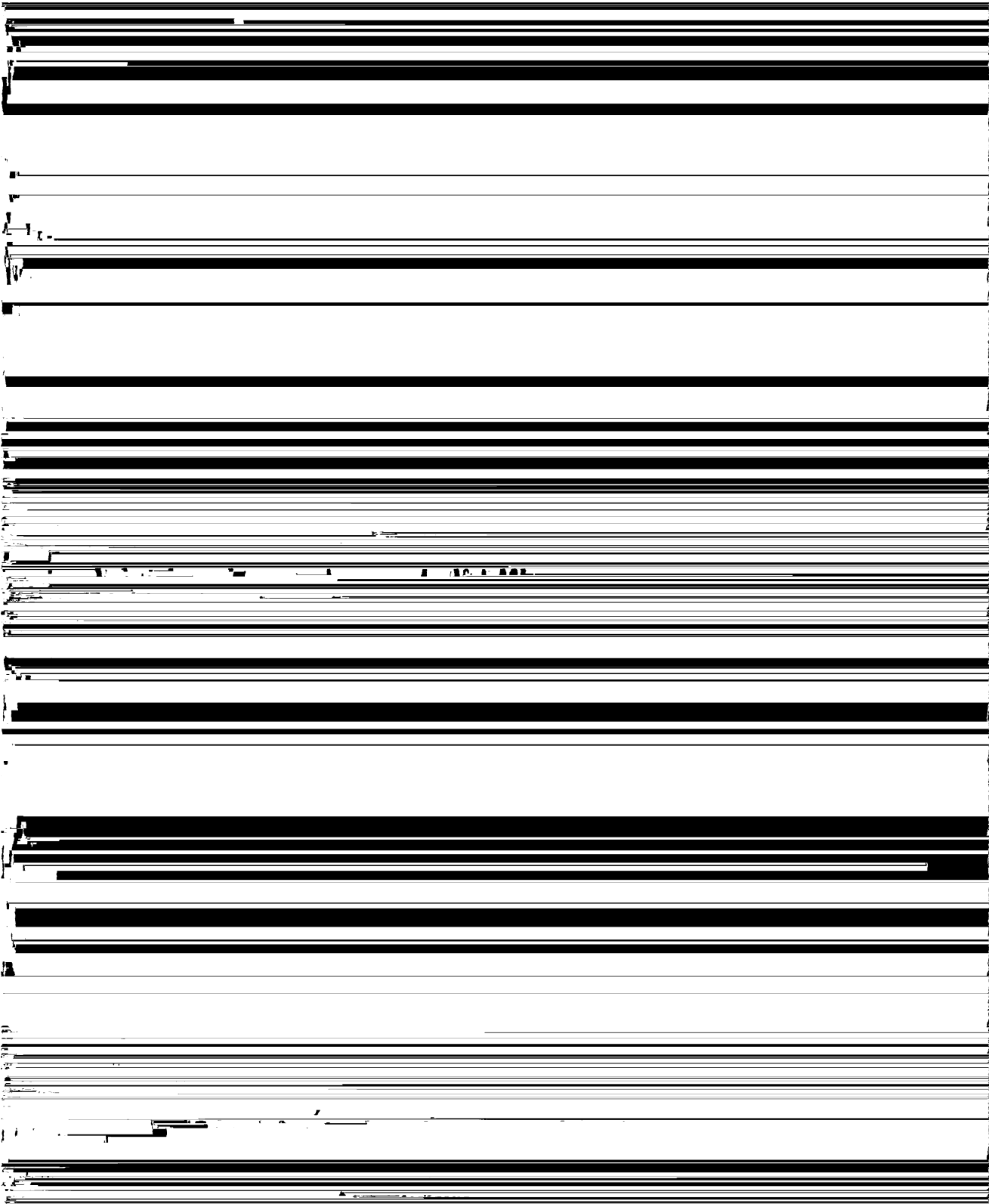
of paradise. Recent fiction, however, — in such a book as Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* — warned that the academic Eden was swarming with serpents: and we can expect a whole suc-

cession of sombre novels about the conflict on the campus. Now the North American student has joined the European as a political figure

committed students on any campus — and by committed I mean those who have political and social convictions and are prepared to act upon them — has always been small. But they are more visible to-day

and compared to their predecessors — say the student radicals of the thirties, — they are much more concerned about the university itself. Even among the small group of the committed there are divisions

temperamentally resist action that may lead to violence and those who embrace such action as a means of bringing the issues to a climax

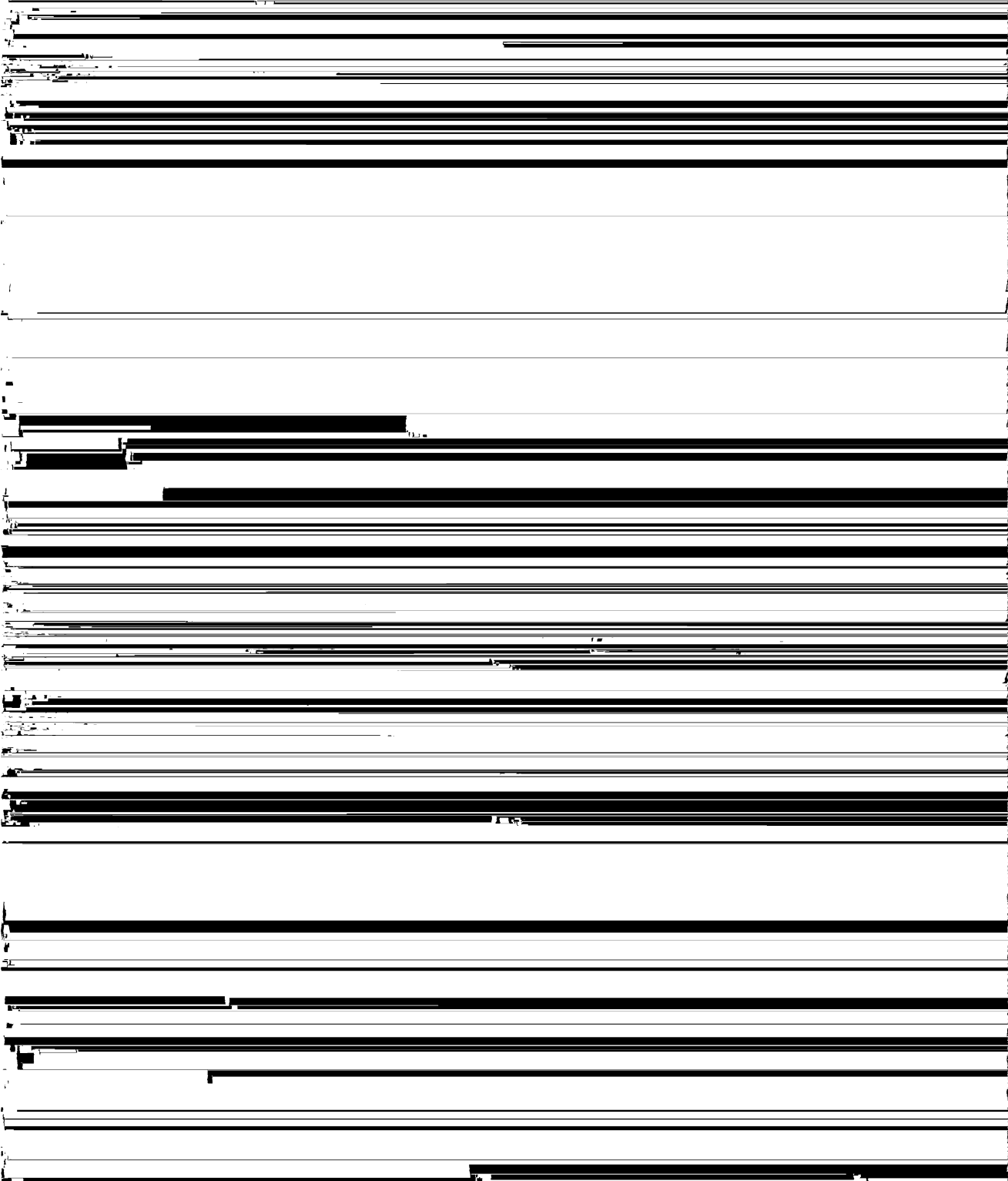


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doctrine of freedom developed a much more substantial basis. The

professor was the man who knew; to inhibit him was, therefore, to

as a citizen and as a student. All this is defensive. But the committed student seeks to give a more positive content to freedom. Freedom is the right and the power to make the decisions that shape one's environ-



California was similar to that of, say Queen's or Dalhousie, and that the economic position of middle-class students in Canada could be equated with that of the depressed American negro. The second contrast, which well may become a conflict, is in the attitude to the relationship of staff and student. The traditional concept is staff centred. It is concerned about the defence of the staff against outside interference, and this interference is most serious when it is a question of staff appointments. These must be in the hands of the staff itself; a teacher must be chosen and promoted by his peers. Now the committed student is saying that this may lead to professional tyranny, with the student as the principal victim. The remedy is to give the student a major voice in appointments and promotion. But this is a radical change.





plauded the agile young men on the field and the subtle maidens on

formalized antics of the young. On the campus even vandalism could take on a cheerful romantic quality. But at the heart of the university age took over. The graduate system of preparation for teaching guaranteed that the scholar would finally arrive on the campus with a

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so desperately to lead open, honest lives and have institutions in society which would make such lives possible. (63-70)

The cult of youth, as these quotations indicate, finds a sympathetic response among those in their 40s and 50s. It may be that they have a guilty conscience as a result of growing up in the post-war years of

affluence, when ideals withered in the atmosphere of cold war. Certainly committed youth may find strong allies among members of the teaching staff who are not all under the statutory 30. Discussions in Faculty meetings these days divide on lines determined by one's sym-

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anti-intellectualism. Committed youth is so concerned with his vision of a Utopian society — an amalgam of Paul Goodman, the Oxford group, and a caucus of his favourite political party — that he is suspicious of a disinterested analysis of things of the mind. He is



the insistence upon seeing freedom as significant to the individual

only in terms of his personal decisions; the emphasis upon freedom as a moral as well as an intellectual value. But in its willingness to use coercive action in place of reasoned discussion it undermines the