

Why the Wind of Freedom Blows

Larry Diamond

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Thank you Provost Etchemendy, for your very generous introduction. And thank you for the extraordinary service you have given to Stanford as Provost. Many in the audience may not realize that you have surpassed Frederick Terman as the longest-serving Provost in the history of Stanford. But I think everyone knows and appreciates the extraordinary leadership team that you and President John Hennessy have been during these past twelve years of transformative growth in the University's work of teaching, research, and community engagement. During my three decades as a social scientist, I have come to believe that leadership is the most important and the most frequently neglected variable in explaining the success of institutions, movements, or countries. In my briefer time as a director of two university centers, I have also come to appreciate some of the sacrifices that scholars must make when they turn to University

administration. We, the Stanford community, owe a very considerable debt of gratitude to you and President Hennessy for your contributions during these last twelve years.

Now let me turn to a different example of leadership in a very different era.

Nearly five hundred years ago, the modern struggle for freedom was launched when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg. Luther was disputing the sale of indulgences, which enabled Catholics to be absolved of their sins through purchase rather than through confession and penance. This was not some arcane religious dispute about faith and forgiveness. Although he intended them as a scholarly rather than political protest, Luther's theses posed a broad challenge to systemic corruption, injustice, and abuse of power, which emanated down from the papacy and riddled the clerical ranks.

In the language of our current moment, Luther's critique went "viral" as a result of a relatively new technology of

information and communication—the printing press. Back then, news of his theses took a couple of weeks to sweep through Germany, and a couple of months through Europe, rather than the couple of hours or days it might take over the Internet today. But soon, communities were seized with controversy over the issues he had raised.

The catalytic effect was profound and enduring, giving rise to new Protestant churches that would eventually claim the faith of more than half a billion adherents. But the impact of the Protestant Reformation was much more diffuse, spawning explosive growth in literacy and the birth of the mass media. The revolt within the Church also sparked a broader confrontation with unaccountable authority. And it became as well a struggle *for* academic freedom and the rights of the individual.

Of course, authoritarian structures do not gently give way to principled protest. Luther was framed as a heretic and an enemy of the Church. In January 1521 he was excommunicated, and three months later he was summoned to a hearing at the Diet of

Worms. There, he refused demands that he recant his stand. In the Edict of Worms, Emperor Charles V forbade anyone to “dare, either by words or deeds, to receive, defend, or favor that said Martin Luther,” and called for his arrest. Luther fled and went into internal exile.

One of the individuals who rallied to Luther’s cause was a young German humanist named Ulrich von Hutten. The 33-year-old Hutten published three essays, the *Invectives*, in which he challenged Luther’s critics and his own with a Latin phrase, meaning: “Don’t you see that the wind of freedom blows?” In his inaugural address as Stanford’s ninth President, Gerhard Casper, who has done much to stir our appreciation of Hutten, expounded:

For Hutten, what was the freedom whose wind was blowing? Clearly, freedom from as yet unreformed Church orthodoxy, freedom from the Inquisition, freedom from Rome’s worldly aspects. But freedom was also intellectual freedom, the freedom to engage in fearless inquiry and the

freedom to speak your mind robustly without inhibition.

A scholar and a poet, Hutten was a restless and passionate soul who feared no man and railed against pompous authority. In the same invective where he declared "the wind of freedom blows," he warned the established authorities: "Know there are many Luthers, many Huttens here. Should either of us be destroyed, still greater is the danger that awaits you; for then, with those battling for freedom, the avengers of innocence will make common cause."

In an essay after he left office, Stanford's founding President, David Starr Jordan, explained why he chose "The wind of freedom blows" as the motto for Stanford University. Jordan praised Hutten as a bold opponent of oppression and a "martyr to democracy." And he shared these other memorable words of Hutten's:

With open mind I've dared it
And cherished no regret

And tho' I may not conquer

The truth is with me yet.

Hutten died a penniless refugee on an island in the lake of Zurich at age 35. However, as President Jordan wrote,

He had "dared it" and the force he had defied crushed him in return. The issue was the growth of man, the recognition of personal individuality, the essence of modern democracy.

In his moving short essay about Hutten in the May 1918 *Stanford Illustrated Review*, Jordan made a prophetic prediction: "It is still true that 'the wind of freedom is blowing,' and in due time it will sweep over the whole earth."

When Jordan wrote those words in the midst of World War I, there were less than two-dozen democracies in the world, and in most of those, women still could not vote. Democratic rights were gaining momentum, but they were still confined to a small slice of humanity, in the West. Most of the world was under colonial

domination, and the few democracies that existed in Latin America were largely elite affairs. In the United States, African Americans would not fully gain the right to vote for another 47 years.

During the half-century after President Jordan offered his hopeful prediction, the global struggle for freedom waxed and waned in the face of tumultuous events—the great depression, the Russian and Chinese revolutions, a second world war, a wave of independence movements and wars of national liberation, decolonization, military coups, the Cold War, the Vietnam War.

When I was an undergraduate here at Stanford, I was heavily involved in the peaceful and moderate wing of the antiwar movement. I wrote for the *Daily*, protested at rallies, and was elected to the ASSU council of presidents. I was one of those who believed—and still deeply believe—that politics is a crucial arena for bringing about political and social change, and I took off a quarter to help manage a local congressional campaign.

But that was a time when our country was even more severely polarized politically. The Vietnam War and then the Watergate scandal shattered public confidence in government. When I graduated at the end of 1973, dictatorship—not democracy—seemed to be the global wave of the future. Barely a quarter of the world’s independent states were democracies, and few of these lay outside the West. East Asia was booming under authoritarian developmental states like those in Korea and Taiwan. Observers were hailing the “miracle” of development under the modernizing generals in Brazil. For the indefinite future, communism seemed entrenched in the Soviet Union—and, after Soviet troops crushed the Prague Spring in 1968—in Central and Eastern Europe too. The United States government had just conspired in a bloody military coup to overthrow the elected government in Chile. Virtually all of Africa was under military, Marxist, or personal dictatorship.

Reflecting a widely shared skepticism, the great Yale political scientist, Robert Dahl, deemed it unlikely that there would be “any

dramatic change in the number of [democracies in the world] within a generation or two.”

Yet a strange thing happened around the mid-1970s. People did not get the message that democracy was passé. A wide range of Ulrich von Huttens started popping up. In fact, they had always been there, but they began mobilizing more effectively, and in more favorable circumstances.

In April of 1974, the Portuguese military overthrew a right-wing dictatorship that had stood for nearly half a century. For eighteen months, different political parties and ideologies, some extreme and antidemocratic, contended for dominance. Ultimately, moderates of the left and right, led in part by Socialist Party president Mario Soares, prevailed at the polls, turning Portugal firmly toward democracy. Democratic transitions began soon after and proceeded rapidly in Spain and Greece.

Inspired by these changes, and aided by the new human rights policy of President Jimmy Carter, democrats in Latin America began to turn back the oppression of military rule. Led

by the stalwart liberal politician, Raúl Alfonsín, democratic forces won a decisive victory in Argentina's 1983 elections. Prospects for human rights and the rule of law revived throughout the region. By the time Chile's dictator Augusto Pinochet lost a 1988 plebiscite for another eight years in power, and then democratic parties won the presidency the following year, most of Latin America had completed a remarkable decade of democratization.

In 1986, the wind of freedom began to blow through Asia, when Philippine parties, encouraged by Catholic Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, united behind Cory Aquino in a presidential snap election called by President Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos stole the election, but a disciplined opposition was able to document the fraud. It then mobilized more than a million people to pour into Manila's highway intersection at EDSA to back a military rebellion in support of the democrats. Marcos sent his tanks and troops to suppress the uprising. But nuns holding rosaries knelt in front of the tanks, people in the scores of thousands linked arms in their path, and the dictator's troops were blocked.

The miracle at EDSA was the first of many times that “people power”—the non-violent, carefully strategized mobilization of hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens—faced down repression and brought democratic change. The next year, South Korean civil society, led by students and organized labor, once again rose up to demand and achieve democracy. They had already paid a heavy price during the Kwangju uprising in May of 1980. The most prominent long-time leader of Korea’s democracy movement, Kim Dae-jung, was twice almost put to death by the military.

The 1980s were the crucible of dramatic gains in freedom that the world still largely enjoys. Building on the brave resistance of dissidents throughout Eastern Europe, an electrician at Poland’s Gdansk shipyards, Lech Walesa, led workers to rise up for their rights in what became the Communist bloc’s first independent trade union—Solidarity. That mass resistance helped to unravel the myth of communist regime legitimacy and stability. So did the extraordinary courage of dissidents like Andrei

Sakharov in the Soviet Union, a nuclear physicist who became a passionate advocate of human rights, his wife, the implacable activist Yelena Bonner, and Vaclav Havel, the Czech playwright who, like Walesa, would assume the presidency when his country became a democracy.

For supporting the Prague resistance in 1968, Havel was prevented from traveling outside the country, and his plays were banned from being performed. Short of money, he had to take a job in a brewery. Repeatedly, he was persecuted, harassed, arrested and imprisoned. None of this deterred him. In 1977, he helped organize and write Charter 77, which called upon the Czech government to honor the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accord. It tells you something about Havel that this was partly prompted by the arrest of the psychedelic Czech rock band, People of the Plastic Universe.

It was not just the perestroika reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev or the bankruptcy of the communist model that helped to bring about the triumph of freedom over communism. It was the

courageous and creative work, at great risk and sacrifice, of countless individuals like Havel, Walesa, Bonner and Sakharov who fought for freedom.

Havel was one of the greatest democrats of our time, because he took to politics reluctantly, saw acutely the irony and absurdity in it, and distrusted all holders of power, including himself. He understood that two of the most important traits in a democratic leader are modesty and self-restraint. In this, he was like two of history's other great founding presidents, George Washington and Nelson Mandela, who left power voluntarily when most of their country wanted them to stay.

Nothing so powerfully symbolized the failure of the communist system as the Berlin Wall. Gorbachev did not respond when, in June 1987, President Ronald Reagan appealed to him at the Brandenburg gate to "tear down this wall." But when Hungary effectively opened its border with Austria two years later, 13,000 East Germans fled to freedom within a matter of weeks. There followed mass demonstrations in East Germany and a rapid

collapse of communist authority. Democratic change then spread like wildfire throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

The fall of the wall had an immediate and profound influence in Africa, which was finally able to develop politically on its own terms, rather than as a Cold War battlefield. In February 1990, a civil society coalition forced out the long-serving Marxist autocrat in Benin, and the apartheid regime in South Africa released Nelson Mandela from 29 years of imprisonment. These two events ignited a “second liberation” in Africa that swept away most of the continent’s military and one-party regimes. In South Africa, a complex series of negotiations and compromises skillfully navigated around the dangers of ethnic and right-wing violence, culminating in the massive victory of Mandela’s African National Congress in the country’s first multiracial elections.

By the time South Africa completed its democratic transition in 1994 the world was transformed. Democracy had staked a significant foothold in every region of the world except the Middle East, and it had become the dominant form of government in all

of Europe and in Latin America. As you can see from the top line in the graph on the screen, the percentage of democracies in the world had grown from barely a quarter to nearly 60 percent of all the independent states. Liberal democracy, which affords its citizens greater freedom and rule of law, remains less prevalent in the world, but it has also grown, as we see in the bottom of the two trend lines. Despite some erosion in both levels of democracy—a matter that should concern us all—nearly two in every five states today can reasonably be called liberal democracies.

Yet, the wind of freedom has not blown steadily through these four decades. Many societies have seen their hopes for democracy dashed. Few have suffered so severely as Burma.

Vaclav Havel stood in active solidarity with movements for freedom around the world. And he felt a particularly deep kinship with leaders, like Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi, who embraced Gandhian principles of non-violent civil resistance in the struggle for freedom. In 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi returned to her native

Burma after a long period of exile abroad, just as the military strongman, General Ne Win, was stepping down from a quarter-century of rule. Soon after she arrived, in a speech to half a million people in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, she called for Burma to become a democracy. She founded the National League for Democracy and began to campaign for a transition, but then she was placed under house arrest.

Briefly in 1990, there was an opening to general elections, but when Suu Kyi's party won the vast majority of seats, the military nullified the results and launched a brutal crackdown that is only now easing. For most of the last two decades, until last year, Aung San Suu Kyi was confined to house arrest. She always had the chance to leave Burma, but she knew the military would not let her return. So she chose to stay with her people, to suffer with them but also give them hope. She stayed in Burma even when her beloved husband was dying of cancer in England. Think about that when you ponder the sacrifices people make for freedom.

In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Vaclav Havel was widely expected to win the prize that year, but he nominated Suu Kyi instead. With Eastern Europe's freedom achieved, he felt it was more important for the world to recognize Burma's struggle—and the heroic leadership of the diminutive activist whom the military dismissed as “that woman.” That woman's steadfastness has paid off. Now Burma's military seems to recognize the dead end of stagnation to which dictatorship has brought their country. In by-elections two months ago, Suu Kyi's party swept the open seats and she was elected to Parliament.

Around the time Burma's democratic hopes were raised and dashed, students in China, inspired by the democratic changes in the world and the political reforms of Gorbachev, mobilized for a freer society. The brutal military crackdown in Tiananmen Square 23 years ago this month quashed but did not bury Chinese aspirations for freedom. Over the last three decades, China's communist rulers have delivered astonishing rates of economic

growth, lifting more people out of extreme poverty more rapidly than ever before in human history. But increasingly, this rapid development has come with deep contradictions—massive corruption and inequality, environmental destruction, and exploitation of the weak by the powerful—that the regime seems incapable of addressing. Although many of them have been arrested, tortured, fired, and forced into exile, China's intellectuals, artists, lawyers, and civil society leaders are now pressing for individual rights, the rule of law, democracy, and respect for the cultural integrity of oppressed peoples like the minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang.

China's regime continues to repress courageous activists like Liu Xiaobo, winner of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize, now in prison, and Chen Guangcheng, the blind "barefoot lawyer" who exposed forced abortions and other human rights abuses, and who recently came to the United States after his dramatic escape from house imprisonment. But the movement for freedom is growing in China, and in coming decade it will bring dramatic change.

We can take considerable pride in much of what the United States has done in the last three decades to support democratic movements around the world. But the gale force wind of freedom has been a breathtakingly global phenomenon, and among its most remarkable features have been the bonds of solidarity forged among democrats across vastly different cultures. Civic and student groups that pushed post-communist regimes toward democracy are now working closely with their peers in the Middle East. Former Peruvian president Alejandro Toledo, who braved over a hundred death threats to confront Alberto Fujimori's despotism in Peru and steer that country back to democracy, has just been to Libya at the invitation of democratic forces there. These days, the vast majority of international election observers, even those recruited by American NGOs, come from other emerging democracies.

So why does the wind of freedom blow so relentlessly across the continents and centuries? First, freedom and democracy are

universal values. As the Indian Nobel-prize economist, Amartya Sen, argues, the mark of a universal value is not that it has the consent of everyone but that “people everywhere may have reason to see it as valuable.” Moreover, Sen insists, we can find constituent elements of these values in most of the world’s great cultural and religious traditions, and these elements enable innovative thinkers, religious authorities, and political leaders to frame demands for freedom in authentic indigenous terms. The result has been not one but many theological and cultural reformations, including one that is beginning to work its way through the Muslim world.

A growing profusion of public opinion data gives stunning support to the claim that democracy has become a universal value. In survey after survey, in Latin America, postcommunist Europe, East and South Asia, even the poorest states of Africa, and now the Arab world, popular majorities support democracy as the best form of government. People around the world want the right to choose and replace their leaders, and today democracy is

the only form of government with broad international legitimacy.

This brings us to the second reason why the wind of freedom blows. In most parts of the world, authoritarian rule has discredited itself by its widespread corruption and abuse of power. To be sure, corruption, cronyism, and a weak rule of law are problems that plague many democracies. But have corrective mechanisms that autocracies lack. And even when democracies disappoint in their economic outputs, people value them as a form of government. By contrast, few people in the world any longer celebrate the intrinsic virtues of dictatorship. Thus, when dictators cannot deliver decent governance and a better life, people seek an alternative system. And in this shrinking world, oppressed peoples increasingly know that democracy is the essential antidote to injustice.

Yet, autocrats do not find permanent salvation in success, either. Ultimately, they are damned if they do deliver development and damned if they don't. For if—as in Spain, Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, and Chile—they generate economic

development, then they bring about the social conditions for their own demise: high levels of education and literacy, a substantial middle class, and social and economic integration with the world's democracies.

Extensive survey research over two generations shows that economic development brings about a transformation in values. As Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel document, modernization produces a fundamental shift from "survival values" emphasizing physical security and material comfort to "self-expression values" privileging "human autonomy and choice." They conclude: "socioeconomic development tends to propel societies in a common direction"—toward tolerance of others, suspicion of authority, and valuing of freedom—"regardless of their cultural heritage."

Finally, people push for freedom because there is an innate human need and desire to be treated with respect and dignity, or in the Arabic, *karama*. As much as anything, it was humiliation that drove the Tunisian fruit vendor Mohammed Bouazizi to set

himself on fire eighteen months ago to this day—an act that set the Arab world on fire, igniting mass protests that have so far toppled four Arab dictators. People around the world want to be recognized as having equal worth and basic rights. In a world of broad access to FM radios, satellite television, and mobile phones, even the poor come to know that only a free society can secure those rights.

I have tried to resist the temptation to turn this into another commencement address, but let me close with what I think this means for you, the Class of 2012.

As President Hennesy will no doubt remind you tomorrow, with freedom—and a Stanford degree—come not only rights and privileges but also responsibilities.

There is no higher civic responsibility than to succeeding generations, and there is no more urgent imperative now than to address the gathering crisis of climate change. You see what is happening: our ice caps are melting, our forests are burning,

extreme weather is becoming common, and our oceans are becoming more acidic. Just one week ago, 22 distinguished scientists warned in the journal *Nature* that the combination of population growth, widespread destruction of natural ecosystems, and climate change may be driving our fragile planet toward an irreversible change in the biosphere—a catastrophic tipping point—unless dramatic policy action is taken. "It really will be a new world, biologically, at that point," warns Anthony Barnosky, the lead author of the paper. "The data suggests that there will be a reduction in biodiversity and severe impacts on much of what we depend on to sustain our quality of life, including, for example, fisheries, agriculture, forest products and clean water. This could happen within just a few generations." The world's poorest and weakest populations are particularly at risk; environmental crisis on this scale would bring widespread drought, famine, violent conflict, and massive refugee flows.

Meeting this nexus of environmental threats, and thus bringing our energy use back into more sustainable balance with

nature, will be THE overriding public policy challenge confronting your generation. How quickly and creatively you meet it will affect more than the fate of our democracy and our freedom. It will affect the quality and ultimately the sustainability of human civilization itself.

In tackling this challenge and others, I hope you will be energetically engaged as citizens, and that you will not cease preparing yourselves to be better and more effective citizens. As you have heard many times, Stanford was founded with the explicit hope and expectation that your time here would render you “of greater service to the public.” That is why we have a Haas Center for Public Service. During your time at Stanford, most of you have been involved in some form of public service, and at least a third of you in Haas Center programs. Do not let your commitment to service wane, and never doubt that *you can* make a difference.

Be true to your principles, as Ulrich von Hutten was, even when it was dangerous. And just as Hutten took on daring tasks,

I hope you do so as well. Like public service, daring is embedded in the genetic code of Stanford. Back in 1996, Gerhard Casper reminded us of an article in the 1899 New York Town Topics that ridiculed Leland and Jane Stanford's founding gift: "It is difficult to conceive a more foolish misuse of splendid opportunity than to dump twenty or thirty millions of dollars in a third rate Western 'university.'"

Class of 2012, thank you for the high honor of your invitation to give this speech. Most of all, thank you for being a great class of students, worthy of the Stanfords' vision and inheritors of Hutten's passion. It has been a privilege to teach you and work with you. I know that you will use your rare gifts to fan the winds of freedom, to deepen and reform our democracy, and to make the world a better and more livable place.