

History

In 1954, three University of Michigan faculty members, Chandler Davis, Clement Markert, and Mark Nickerson, were called to testify before a Congressional Committee on Un-American Activities. All invoked constitutional rights and refused to answer Committee questions about their political associations.

For these actions, the three were suspended and Professor Nickerson was denied the summer portion of his fiscal year salary. Subsequent hearings and committee actions at the University of Michigan resulted in three different outcomes. Markert was reinstated; but Nickerson, a tenured professor, and Davis were dismissed from the University.

Those events were recently revisited as a result of the centennial Celebration of the Rackham School of Graduate Studies. An historical review by Professor David Hollinger led an honors student in English in 1988, Adam Kulakow, to produce a video history of the events. Subsequently, the University of Michigan Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) endorsed a statement on October 25, 1989, requesting a significant gesture of reconciliation for the three professors.

The Senate Assembly considered the AAUP request, endorsed it in January of 1990, and presented the request to the Regents in March and April of 1990. The Senate Assembly Chair suggested that a significant gesture of reconciliation might include reinstatement for Professors Davis and Nickerson, payment of severance pay, and the establishment of an annual University Lecture on Academic and Intellectual Freedom. A parallel was drawn with the recognition by the federal government of the wrongful internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the issuing of an apology and financial compensation by the government. The Regents took no action on this request.

On November 19, 1990, the Senate Assembly established the University of Michigan Senate's Davis, Markert, Nickerson Lecture on Academic and Intellectual Freedom.

In September 1998, President Bollinger announced that the President's Office would be a co-sponsor of the lecture.