



Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on November 21, 2017

On the Left: Tolerable Intolerance?

Continuing in the tradition of George Orwell's War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, and Ignorance is Strength slogans of seemingly contradictory character in his book *1984*, the ironically named Freedom of Expression Policy at Middle Georgia State University, covering each of its five campuses, declares that "the University has designated 'Free Expression Areas' on each campus, and these areas are the only areas that may be used for expression."



On the university's main campus in Macon, for instance, free expressive activity is limited to one section of grass "between the Education Building and the Library."

In her recent column, "Are universities abdicating their responsibility to educate students for fear of offending them?" Samantha Harris at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education points to two recent censorship cases in which college theater departments "cancelled productions after students objected to the content of the plays."

In October, reports Harris, "the theater department at Brandeis University had canceled a planned fall production of a play based on the comedy of Lenny Bruce by acclaimed playwright and Brandeis alum Michael Weller.

The play, which centers around the efforts of a fictional Brandeis student to perform a Lenny-Bruce-inspired comedy routine on a modern-day campus, was meant to be a provocative exploration of how Bruce's works might be received on campus today."

One of the Brandeis students leading the opposition to the play explained his position, a superb example of the current state of political correctness and the evolution of a newfangled tolerable intolerance among those on the left. "The issue we all have with it is that playwright Weller is an older, straight gendered, able-bodied white man. It isn't his place to be stirring the pot," said Andrew Childs, class of 2018 and an Undergraduate Department Representative for the Theater Arts Department and a member of the season's "play selection committee."

As the controversy currently stands, the play is postponed, rather than cancelled.

Being myself a member of the tribe described by student Childs as older, straight, able-bodied, white and male, I am in his bigoted opinion to be automatically in the wrong and forbidden from stirring the pot.

Nevertheless, I'll discard the muzzle and ask two questions.

Given his efforts to quash the work of playwright Wells because of his age and birth characteristics — straight, white, male and old — is Childs saying that societal microphones, stages and presses should be reserved for those who are young females of color, non-straight and differently abled?

And second, did Childs learn in his history courses that the propaganda ministries in the Third Reich prevented performances of symphonies by Jewish composers, banned the works of authors, filmmakers



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and playwrights based on prejudices regarding group identity, and dispatched storm troopers to halt stage performances and silence comedians?

Similarly, the theater department at Knox College in Illinois cancelled a production of Bertolt Brecht's "The Good Person of Szechwan," reports Harris, after students objected that "white students would be cast in roles that might otherwise have been played by students of color."

Said the editorial board of *The Knox Student*, "The theatre department is a very white department — like many departments at Knox — and it needs to acknowledge that they are coming from a place of privilege and prejudice."

Being white, in short, is synonymous with being guilty. That's not racism?

Ralph R. Reiland is Associate Professor of Economics Emeritus at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh.



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