



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on September 9, 2018

## Teacher Makes Hitler Joke — School Becomes War Zone

We're not yet like Britain, where a practical joker who trained his girlfriend's dog to give the Nazi salute was [charged](#) with a "hate crime" and punished. But we're getting closer. Just ask Ben Frisch.

A teacher (formerly, anyway) at Friends Seminary, a private Quaker school in Manhattan, Frisch's 34 years at his institution came to an unplanned end some months ago. The problems began when he opened his February 14 pre-calculus class and, [writes](#) the *New York Times*,



introduced the day's lesson, involving the calculating of angles of depression and elevation. Frisch straightened out his right arm to demonstrate. He lowered it down and then raised it up. Glancing at his arm, now fully extended and pointing slightly upward, Frisch realized something: He was inadvertently pantomiming the Nazi salute. Frisch is a practicing Quaker, but his father was Jewish, and two of his great-grandmothers were killed at Auschwitz. Mortified, he searched for some way to defuse the awkwardness of the moment. And then he said it: "Heil Hitler!"

A few students gasped; others exchanged surprised looks or laughed nervously. Instantly aware that his stab at Mel Brooks-style parody hadn't landed, Frisch lowered his arm and tried to explain himself, telling his students that it used to be common to make fun of Nazis. Only recently, he said, had such jokes become taboo. He resumed the lesson, and the weird moment seemed to be over.

But instead, the Quaker institution quaked. A student mentioned the incident to a school official; one thing led to another as the news spread; and the school's principal, Bo Lauder, quickly suspended Frisch. Friends ultimately pressured the teacher to resign and sign a nondisclosure agreement, but Frisch refused, was fired, and is now suing for wrongful termination.

Since then, Friends has not been so friendly. After the school's 279 high-schoolers learned of the initial actions against Frisch, 187 students signed a petition supporting him. Principal Lauder defended his move, alluding "to 'other equally inappropriate and troubling actions' that had surfaced since the incident, without providing any details about them," writes the *Times*.

Former students are more forthcoming, only saying that Frisch is "eccentric" and "nerdy," which probably describes half of big-city mathematicians. But, unlike Lauder, the teens don't have to worry about keeping squeaky-wheel left-wing parents who pay \$45,000 yearly tuition happy (a few threatened to withdraw their children from the school). Following the money, note that Lauder has doubled tuition during his tenure and has increased the school's endowment from \$4 million to \$30 million.

Nonetheless, this incident reflects culture crash more than cash. It's not news that many people have become remarkably thin-skinned, with the sense of humor of a Nazi librarian, forcing everyone else to increasingly walk on eggshells. In 2015, Nobel Laureate scientist Tim Hunt's [career was ended](#) after he told a cute, innocent joke about women in the lab. And many comedians, such as Jerry Seinfeld, Chris Rock, and Larry the Cable Guy (the first two of whom certainly are no conservatives), now [avoid doing](#)



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[college shows](#) because humorless, politically correct students can't take a joke.

What this says about our society is not good. Some Friends parents complained that "the manner in which the school fired him [Frisch] bore little resemblance to the Quaker decision-making process," writes the *Times*. This perhaps isn't surprising: Frisch was the last Quaker at the high school. And what's reflected here is the loss of two very important virtues: charity and forgiveness.

Whether or not you like Frisch's joke isn't the point. Rather, it's that we've all at times made imprudent or insensitive statements, and, as is said regarding gifts, it's the thought that counts. When someone makes a poor joke — and especially when he's contrite — good people respond by slapping him on the back and saying, facetiously, "Very funny!" or "A good sense of humor is necessary to be well adjusted — so keep trying." Then it's over.

Yet while no one is accusing Frisch of being anti-Jewish, his scalp is still demanded. This speaks volumes about his critics. You know the stereotype of the humorless communist in a drab olive-green uniform? We're becoming that on a societal scale (with better sartorial sense). Is this what we want to move towards, being a place where people walk on eggs, perpetually poker-faced, lest smirking at the wrong thing be interpreted as career-killing approval?

Playing the safe-space game, Lauder justified Frisch's firing by saying he wants "to make all of our students feel safe." Putting aside that this sounds as possible as pleasing all the people all the time, the *Times* actually made a good point here. Today's teens "are already flooded with uncensored, unedited information, 24 hours a day: What would a safe space even look like for a 16-year-old with an iPhone?" the paper asked.

The irony is that if Frisch entered class one day in a dress claiming to be a woman, all would be expected to accommodate him — and there wouldn't be "safe spaces" for those objecting. Take issue with lewd sex education, and you get called a prude. And Lauder himself is an open homosexual. For sure, echoing what G.K. Chesterton said about Puritanism, political correctness is the pouring of "righteous indignation into the wrong things."

The safe-space movement, [claims of being "offended,"](#) and screams for "sensitivity" are merely a cover for intolerance. It's how some people slap a veneer of faux virtue on their hatred.

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