



May 19, 2008

[This is the print preview: Back to normal view »](#)



[Greg Lukianoff](#)

[BIO](#) [Become a Fan](#) [Get Email Alerts](#) [Similar Bloggers](#)

Judging a Book By Its Cover - Literally

Posted May 2, 2008 | 03:05 PM (EST)



Read More: [Brandeis University](#), [Breaking Media News](#), [Colorado College](#), [Fire](#), [Foundation For Individual Rights In Education](#), [Free Expression](#), [Free Speech](#), [Greg Lukianoff](#), [Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis](#), [Iupui](#), [Jefferson Muzzles](#), [Keith John Sampson](#), [Muzzle Awards](#), [Notre Dame Vs. The Klan](#), [Racial Harassment](#), [Living News](#)

Show your support.
Buzz this article up.

- [SHARE](#)
- [PRINT](#)
- [COMMENTS](#)

Like this story? Get Alerts of big news events. Enter your email address

 [SIGN UP](#)

I hate the abuse of the word literally. Somehow our society has co-opted the word to mean something like "very much so" as opposed to, you know, literally. Since I'm a nerd about this stuff, it's fun for me to use the word as it's meant to be used. And today's one of those fun times, because today marks the end of a case where a student employee was punished because other employees judged a book he was reading by its cover -- literally.

Keith John Sampson is a janitor in his early fifties at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), but he also takes classes at the college. An avid reader, Sampson typically spends his breaks with his nose in a book. Last November, Sampson was reading Notre Dame vs. the Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan, a book that celebrates the defeat of the Ku Klux Klan in a 1924 street brawl with Notre Dame students.

But never mind what's actually inside the book -- it's got a picture of hooded Klansmen burning a cross on the cover! Following this nasty bit of anti-intellectual illogic, Sampson's workmates promptly freaked out. One coworker told Sampson that reading a book about the Klan was akin to ogling pornography at work. Another coworker sitting across from Sampson in the break room told him that she found the KKK offensive -- a courageous stance, indeed, which also implies she thought Sampson must have considered the Klan the bee's knees. Sampson tried to tell each what the book was actually *about*, but both refused to listen.

Two weeks later, Sampson received a letter from IUPUI's Affirmative Action Office (AAO), informing him that two employees had filed a racial harassment complaint against him and that he had been found guilty -- all because of the book. The AAO told Sampson that his big mistake was "openly reading the book related to a historically and racially abhorrent subject." Wow. Is *The Diary of Anne Frank* next?

Luckily, there's a happy ending. After five months, two letters from the ACLU of Indiana, one from FIRE, and some bad publicity

(which I hope [I helped along](#)) Keith John Sampson's record has finally been cleared of the racial harassment finding. Much to his credit, Charles Bantz, IUPUI's Chancellor, stepped up and [admitted the school's mistake](#).

Unfortunately, that makes Bantz something of a rarity among his fellow college bigwigs. Far too often, administrators dig in their heels when confronted with their abuse of student rights.

For example, [take Brandeis University](#), named a recipient of a 2008 "Muzzle Award" by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Free Expression for finding a professor guilty of "racial harassment" for explaining the pejorative meaning of the term "wetback" in class. Or Colorado College where students have been found guilty of "[violence](#)" for [publishing a parody of a feminist newsletter](#). Or how about the fact that most colleges and universities still maintain [laughably unconstitutional speech codes](#)?

So while I'm happy Sampson's case concluded well, America's colleges are still punishing people for engaging in free speech. Unfortunately, I mean that literally.

[More in Living...](#)

- [Watch: Is Rap Poetry?](#)
- [The Newest American Gladiator Is Cuban](#)
- [Turning Rage Into Reconciliation In Israel](#)
- [Welcome To The Jungle: Target Launches Sustainable,...](#)

Ads by Google

Campus

Compare online schools and degrees. Accredited universities only.

www.EducationDegreeSource.com

HotNewz for Students

The stuff you need to know in 5 minutes or less.

www.HotNewz.tv

IU Off-Campus Apartments

Beautiful, Affordable community Student friendly!

www.EPMapartments.com

Ads by Google

IU Off-Campus Apartments

Beautiful, Affordable community Student friendly!

www.EPMapartments.com

Expression College of Art

Get Info on Bachelor Degrees at the Expression College for Digital Arts

GuideToCareerEducation.com

Campus Fundraiser

We Help College Clubs Raise Money Earn 90% Profit- No Money Up Front!

www.AbcFundraising.com

Site

Web

SEARCH

[ask.com](#)

- [Copyright © 2008 HuffingtonPost.com, Inc. |](#)
- [User Agreement |](#)
- [Privacy |](#)
- [Comment Policy |](#)
- [About Us |](#)
- [Powered by Movable Type](#)