

NEW YORK POST

MY 'RACIAL HARASSMENT' NIGHTMARE

By KEITH JOHN SAMPSON

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May 9, 2008 -- IN November, I was found guilty of "racial harassment" for reading a public-library book on a university campus.

The book was Todd Tucker's "Notre Dame vs. the Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan" I was reading it on break from my campus job as a janitor. The same book is in the university library.

Tucker recounts events of 1924, when the loathsome Klan was a dominant force in Indiana - until it went to South Bend to taunt the Irish Catholic students at the University of Notre Dame.

When the KKK tried to rally, the students confronted them. They stole Klan robes and destroyed their crosses, driving the KKK out of town in a downpour.

I read the historic encounter and imagined myself with these brave Irish Catholics, as they street-fought the Klan. (I'm part-Irish, and was raised Catholic.)

But that didn't stop the Affirmative Action Office of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis from branding me as a detestable Klansman.

They didn't want to hear the truth. The office ruled that my "repeatedly reading the book . . . constitutes racial harassment in that you demonstrated disdain and insensitivity to your co-workers."

A friend reacted to the finding with, "That's impossible!" He's right. You can't commit racial harassment by reading an *anti-Klan* history.

For months, I felt isolated and dejected. Yet I knew that most of the faculty, staff and students at Indiana University were good people. The campus is a growing, thriving part of Indy, where people of all colors and religions come to study.

But the \$106,000-a-year affirmative-action officer who declared me guilty of "racial harassment" never spoke to me or examined the book. My own union - the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees - sent an obtuse shop steward to stifle my freedom to read. He told me, "You could be fired," that reading the book was "like bringing pornography to work."

Shame on the affirmative-action people and my union for displaying their ignorance and incompetence. Their pusillanimous actions, in trying to ban

Tucker's anti-Klan history book, played into the hands of the hateful KKK.

After months of stonewalling, the university withdrew the charge, thanks to pressure from the press, the American Civil Liberties Union and a group called the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE.

Let me be clear: I don't view this episode as a black-against-white or conservative-vs.-liberal issue. It's a basic civil-liberties issue.

Martin Luther King Jr. wanted a world where people "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." The affirmative-action people at Indiana University never saw past the color of

my white skin. (Ironically, I detest the Klan and I have dated a woman of color.)

Abolitionist Charles Sumner said, "Prejudice is the child of ignorance. It is sure to prevail where people do not know each other." The people at the Affirmative Action Office were so myopically intent on finding a Klansman, they failed to see a natural ally standing before them.

The unchecked power of such campus bureaucrats needs to be restrained. And if a union like AFSCME won't protect its workers' constitutional rights, it should go out of business.

If they can stop me from reading one book, then they can stop any American from reading any book.

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[Home](#)

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