



The School for Ethics and Global Leadership

Speechwriting

ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

This is a hypothetical exercise meant to explore the boundaries of free speech in a multicultural world. In this case study you'll encounter some real people and real events, but the speech assignments are wholly fictional and constructed solely for purposes of this project.

BACKGROUND

On January 7, 2015, extremists claiming to follow Islam attacked the headquarters in Paris of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 13 staff members and terrorizing the French capital. As motivation for the attacks, the terrorists cited the magazine's satirical depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, considered blasphemous to many Muslims. (The magazine had long printed harshly satirical material not only about Muslims, but also about the Pope, Christians, Jews, politicians, and others in power.) The *Charlie Hebdo* attack was followed the next day by a terrorist attack on a Jewish grocery store in Paris that killed four, a month later by twin terrorist attacks at a synagogue and a café in Copenhagen, Denmark that killed two and wounded at least five.

After the Paris incidents, more than a million people gathered in the streets of Paris to condemn the attacks and defend *Charlie Hebdo's* right to publish satire under the tenets of free speech. World leaders attended the march in Paris to express solidarity with the French and stand up for democratic freedoms. "Je Suis Charlie" became an international rallying cry for defenders of free speech, including movie stars, politicians, writers, and artists.

In some quarters of the immigrant community, however, there was a more mixed response. While in no way condoning violent extremism, some Muslims expressed anger over the ongoing depictions of Muhammad in *Charlie Hebdo* and other publications, which they considered hurtful and offensive. They also cited the harsh social and economic conditions for many immigrants in France, where foreigners had long felt marginalized and alienated in French society. For example, France recently made it illegal for Muslim girls and women to cover themselves in French schools and universities. Indeed, the Paris terrorists had all been disaffected young men (and one woman) who became attracted to violent extremism, supposedly in the name of Islam.

One of the loudest voices lashing out against French authority up until then had been a controversial French comedian, Dieudonné M'Bala. A staunch anti-Zionist who opposes homosexuality, Dieudonné was born in France to a Cameroonian father and French mother and over the years had developed a large following in the immigrant community and beyond. Soon after the *Hebdo* attacks, he was arrested for allegedly expressing his sympathy on Facebook for one of the Paris terrorists. Although he removed the offensive statement from his Facebook page after his arrest, and said publicly that he condemned the attacks, he remained a target of French officials, who had already arrested him several times in the past. After *Hebdo*, he was banned from performing his skits in some cities in France because officials viewed his message as overtly anti-Semitic, and was only allowed to resume when he removed some of the most controversial material from his performances. (Public expressions of anti-Semitism are against the law in France.)

Dieudonné's humor involves crude jokes about gas chambers and other references to the Holocaust, as well as jokes about homosexuality and political leaders. He has also popularized a salute called the "quenelles," which many interpret as an upside down version of the Nazi extended arm salute. (A "quenelle" is a regional dish in France akin to a meatball; it also has other lewd connotations.)

Dieudonné's supporters have taken to doing the "quenelle" in front of Jewish establishments and in Jewish neighborhoods, but claim the gesture is not anti-Jewish but anti-establishment. Dieudonné also has invited his followers to send photos to his website of different people around the world doing the "quenelle" and he sells t-shirts and other paraphernalia depicting the salute.

For supporters of Dieudonné, there was great hypocrisy in the French government's overwhelming support of *Charlie Hebdo's* satire and right to publish depictions of Muhammad while at the same time banning or arresting Dieudonné for his controversial statements and views. However, those supporting the ban on Dieudonné argue that he is singling out a group in hateful ways, whereas *Charlie Hebdo* is an "equal opportunity offender" that takes satirical aim at many different groups and leaders.

CASE STUDY: FREE SPEECH OR HATE?

Michelson State University (MSU), a large, prestigious public university in the United States, is engulfed in controversy following the student association's invitation to French comedian, Dieudonné, to perform on campus. MSU prides itself on its diversity – it boasts Jewish, Muslim and Christian student groups, an LGBT alliance, foreign students from dozens of countries, hundreds of first-generation Americans, multiple independent student publications, and political organizations covering the spectrum from Young Republicans to Young Communists. On a campus this diverse – racially, culturally, religiously and ideologically – respect for others features prominently in the university's code of conduct, which all students sign upon enrolling.

Controversial speakers, including Benjamin Netanyahu, Malcolm X, Andrew Dice Clay, and Ann Coulter have appeared at events on campus in the past. In fact, the Administration has never before barred a speaker invited by the student association. Seldom has the diverse campus community found itself as divided as it now is over the possible appearance of Dieudonné.

In light of the many cultural sensitivities on campus, and the violent global context in which the Dieudonné visit would be taking place, the President of the university wants to cancel the event. She believes that Dieudonné is not merely comedic or satirical, but hateful, and thus has no right to perform under tenets of free speech. The President is supported by several groups, including the local university chapters of Hillel, GLSBT, ROTC, and others.

The student association, meanwhile, has not backed off its invitation, saying that Dieudonné is an influential voice in popular culture around the world and deserves to be heard. Further, the association believes that universities, which are supposed to enshrine and model democratic values, should not censor speakers, even those who are controversial. Among the groups supporting the student association is the local chapter of the ACLU and Students for a Free Palestine.

SPEECH ASSIGNMENT #1 | Write a three-minute statement that the President of the university will deliver to the news media on the steps of the Administration building. She will announce in the statement that she is canceling the event, saying it is inappropriate for a public institution (and tax dollars) to support an activity or performer who engages in hate speech.

SPEECH ASSIGNMENT #2 | Write a three-minute speech that the president of the student association will deliver on the steps of the student center at a rally in support of Dieudonné coming to campus and in defense of free speech. The speech will in part respond to the cancelation of Dieudonné's performance. The rally will be covered live by local television, CNN, MSNBC, and other news organizations, as well as bloggers.