

‘Deplorable Prof’ Michael Rectenwald Speaks Out Against NYU Milo Ban, Suggests De Blasio Collusion

by Michael Rectenwald



I first discovered Milo Yiannopolous when I was still a leftist. Unlike many of my friends on the left, who dismissed him as an “a**hole,” or a “jerk,” I found him to be smart, funny and often insightful. I thought he made some great points as he poked fun at the identity politics of the left, which was [one of my bugbears](#) as well.

When Milo was no-platformed by my university in the fall of

2016, I thought that the rationale for the decision was specious. The gist of the ban was that the talk would take place in a location “proximate to the Islamic Center, the LGBTQ Student Center and the Center for Multicultural Education and Programs.” That is, some students might walk past the hall and inadvertently hear something from the speech that might trigger them. This would be a risk, despite the fact that the talk would take place behind closed doors.

It was the university’s no-platforming of Milo, its introduction the same fall semester of a bias reporting hotline, as well as the talk of safe spaces and trigger warnings, that convinced me that social justice ideology had come home to roost at NYU and was becoming official policy. Soon after, I created the notorious [@AntiPCNYUProf](#) Twitter handle. The rest is history.

I first got to know Milo through his book, *Dangerous*, in which he mentioned me in an appendix, as the “Deplorable” NYU Professor. Later, he interviewed me for his podcast. We began exchanging emails and then texts when I started thinking about having him visit my class.

When I was in Florida at summer’s end, I tried to meet Milo in Doral, but was not able to make the scheduling work out. In the fall, I began to talk with Milo about having him speak in my class, in part because I had a strong sense that he would have important things to say about cultural exchange and the leftist ideas of “cultural appropriation,” “cultural imperialism,” and identity politics. My class addressed such questions in a segment of my course on “global culture.” It seemed to me that combined bans on “cultural appropriation” and “cultural imperialism,” if possible, would amount to cultural isolation, and a ghettoization of both “dominant and “subordinate” cultures. I asked Milo to address these and other issues, including identity and identity politics, in the context of Halloween, which I thought provided a fun and fitting backdrop for bringing the issues into focus.

I vetted Milo's talk and I had asked him to lose a few jokes that I thought were unnecessarily generalizing or which otherwise I thought might be mistaken for recommendations rather than humor. I can testify that the final version included little for which he has been condemned in the past (although surely some offense could be taken by leftists—offense-taking is a leftist trademark). The opening salvo of the final version is probably the most scandalizing of all, including as it does a slur but also a promise to argue why Halloween should be rescued from the censorious left:

"Hello everyone, and welcome to HALLOQUEEN II: REVENGE OF THE F*G," it read. "Last year I gave a talk on October 31 at Cal State Fullerton and I believe I'm right in saying that's the last talk I gave on an American college campus. I am so spooky and so terrifying to your professors that we now have to sneak me in under cover of darkness—in the back of a van. But I'm here! And I'm going to tell you why Halloween is awesome, and why you should save it from the scolds and nannies who are coming to take it away, telling you your costumes are 'problematic,' 'racist,' and, if they swallowed a dictionary or have attended a gender studies class, 'toxic expressions of cishet white patriarchal oppression.'"

Before the quills of leftists become fully erect, I should say that a gay man calling himself a "f*g" is a re-appropriation not unlike others used by subordinate groups. So, Milo should not be impugned, unless fault is also found when blacks use the "n" word. And I agree with the claim that Halloween (and our rights for that matter) should be rescued from the censorious left. As I wrote over two years ago, the costume surveillance by the social justice left has become the scariest aspect of Halloween.

Milo's paper includes a brief account of the various cultural threads that were woven together to produce contemporary Halloween, "including Guy Fawkes Day, when effigies of the gun powder plotter were roasted over bonfires and adolescents ran

amok; the tradition of the Lords of Misrule, when the social order was turned on its head as commoners presided over towns and parishes, often ordering their subjects to drink to intoxication; and the eve of All Saints Day, when all manner of spirits were loosed on the world and the devil became a common character and disguise.”

But Milo also takes characteristic shots at the left’s fixation on social identity and identity politics. Leftists, he suggests, are in costume all year round and mistake their true selves for the costumes themselves. Their costumes include tattoos, piercings, blue hair, and other markers of tribalism. As such, they “flatten [identity] to simplistic costumes that deny our humanity and our individual richness and complexity.” Such markers are more important to them than “integrity, aspiration, discipline, nobility, chivalry, and all those other internal moral and intellectual aspirations,” he argues.

This belief about the primacy of social identity and its external signs, Milo claims, partly explains why leftists are so outraged by the appropriation of cultural artifacts – on Halloween and otherwise:

The idea of “cultural appropriation” rests on a misunderstanding that external signs of culture, costumes, represent more than they do. The Left believes that how you wear your hair matters and that it can be “stolen” because they see their bodies and their clothes and their hairstyles as a package of consumer choices. It’s what they assemble to tell the world who they are, rather than an essential part of their being. Their self-presentation is based on a need for the world to know which tribe they belong to, and that supersedes any respect they have for the beauty and integrity of their bodies. No wonder they get mad about cultural appropriation.

Ultimately, Milo points to the importance of an alternative to

the leftist conception of the self as reducible to social identity markers. He argues that the interiority and singularity of the individual supersedes and succeeds social identity.

Some may be surprised to learn that Milo is a Christian and a Catholic and that the values he espouses involve the transcendence of social identity and the world itself. For Milo, the ultimate “costume” is the one that Christ wore when he became man, in order to surrender himself for our sins:

Catholics, of course, would say that the most mind-blowing costume of all is God taking on human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Human beings made in the image and likeness of God. We mirror God, and are meant to reflect him—but we distort this image when we sin.

It may be argued that Milo’s irreverence for the ways of the contemporary world are in the service of Christianity but also of the Church as the bulwark of the western cultural heritage.

In fact, Milo’s heresy is that as a militant Christian believer, he transgresses the dominant religious orthodoxy, the social justice creed. As I argue in [*Springtime for Snowflakes: “Social Justice and Its Postmodern Parentage*](#), social justice is a religious creed and its believers are the equivalent of religious zealots. It is a religion because it is based on belief and ritual. I would add here that it’s a bad religion, precisely for the reasons that Milo intended to treat in his talk.

While we both “identify as” cultural libertarians, I do not endorse the sum total of Milo’s views, nor do I defend his every utterance. I know that his humor often scandalizes and shocks. He has made some statements that I would never make and that I disclaim, without denouncing. In bringing any speaker, whether to the classroom or to a speaker’s forum, a host is not responsible for the sum total of the speaker’s

actions or remarks, if in fact they can ever be known. Yet while in the U.S. everyone deserves a right to speak, within constitutional limits, not everyone deserves a platform. I believe that Milo, a *New York Times* best-selling author, does. He does not deserve to be no-platformed based on false allegations.

Some of the charges levied against Milo Yiannopolous are ludicrous. The worst is that he is a “leader of the alt-right.” This slur represents a [libel](#). Milo was a *Breitbart* reporter covering the alt-right and has since been maliciously labeled as one of them, despite their disdain for him, and vice versa. The claim that he endorsed [pedophilia](#) is beneath contempt. Clearly Milo was coping with his own abuse by a pedophile in his teens, which he has discussed at length in a chapter of his new book, *Diabolical*, which I have read. The claim that he endorsed the bombing of leading Democrats would represent a double standard, as I’ve lost count of the number of prominent “resistance” fighters on TV and social media who’ve called for Trump’s assassination. But Milo was not seriously saying that he wished the bombs had gone off. He was joking after the fact that the “bombs” couldn’t have gone off, since they were, for all practical purposes, fake.

As for me, some have called me “racist” (among other choice epithets) – for my stance against the social justice left and especially for attempting to bring Milo to campus. But “racist” is to the contemporary U.S. what “enemy of the people” was to the Soviet Union. Social justice ideology is the religion of the state and “racism” is the chief heresy. It is likewise the main moniker of denunciation, although very few if any uses of the term have anything to do with actual racism. The same may be said for “sexist,” “fascist,” “alt-right,” or any number of smears meant to invalidate a speaker in advance.

As for NYU’s compliance with Mayor de Blasio’s request that Milo’s talk be “postponed,” I think that the mayor provided

NYU President Andrew Hamilton with a perfect alibi. NYU was in the tough position, caught between the Scylla of violating academic freedom and the Charybdis of allowing a speaker in a classroom whom they deemed to be a menace. The mayor stepped in and saved them from appearing to violate my academic freedom and that of my students, while effectively cancelling the talk. The question is whether in doing so [de Blasio violated First Amendment rights](#).

Clearly, I do not agree with the university's and some city council persons' assessment of Milo's rhetoric as a "hate-filled." And anyone who watches the [alternate talk](#) that he delivered yesterday can hardly come away with that impression. Milo is a cultural warrior and a fierce critic of those who adhere to cultural and political values that he sees as pernicious or ridiculous. And I don't think his views are anathema to the values of the university – unless, that is, the university openly avows "social justice" as its official creed.

Also published at [Springtime for Snowflakes](#). He tweets @anticpcnyuprof