

Letter to Financial Times, January 17, 2014

## Agitation has nothing to do with speech

Sir, Christopher Caldwell views the French effort to constrain Dieudonné M'bala M'bala's exercise of "free speech" through a myopic American lens ("[France blurs the line between comedy and crime](#)," Comment, January 11). France, like the UK, has laws against inciting racial hatred. Wisely, it regards the suppression of such "speech" as an ethical matter as well as one of public order.

"Speech" in the form of agitation in which Dieudonné seems to engage appears to fall under this rubric, as it could easily elide into the commission of anti-Semitic acts by his audience. The French would never have allowed Nazis to stage a march through Skokie, Illinois, a largely Jewish Chicago suburb, for example, on the same grounds.

Such agitation has nothing to do with speech *per se* and everything to do with the intimidation and oppression of minorities, the protection of whom is a good republican principle whether derived from historic custom or the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.