Free Speech and Public Safety for Whom? Protecting/Protesting White Supremacy at a City Farmers’ Market

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First Amendment / Who is permitted the freedom of speech?

The most common discursive theme in this conflict is the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Yet while the preservation of free speech is mentioned in 45 sources, it is rarely associated with protestors. Discussion of free speech is dominated by an assurance that Dye has a constitutionally protected right to free speech, and that this equally guarantees access to the farmer’s market.

According to the City’s farmers’ market coordinator, “The City is constitutionally prohibited from discriminating against someone because of their belief system, no matter how abhorrent those views may be. The City may only intercede if an individual’s actions violate the safety and human rights of others” (Indiana Daily Student, 11 June 2019)

While SCF/Dye’s white supremacy remains “alleged” in 31 sources, legal claims to free speech are granted without such caveat. This “speaks to a nationwide problem local governments and law enforcement have with confronting white supremacy directly, as they do so readily with other issues they identify as threats. Instead, they claim impunity, citing a misguided belief that the First Amendment ties their hands, until the situation escalates to a crisis point” (Twitter, 2019).

Protestors peacefully holding signs and black bloc demonstrations were ejected from the public market space.

Police and Public Safety / Who is permitted the experience of safety and security in public spaces?

The City added barricades, more police, and snipers on top of the parking garage across the street, all under the guise of promoting public safety. The Bloomington Mayor declared, “Our police are part of us. Community policing is the essence of what we do… We welcome people getting to know our police as much as possible. “

In a letter to the local newspaper, a collective of vendors supporting SCF say, “If you haven’t been to the market before, please go when it returns in two weeks. Wear virtual blindness and don’t pay attention readily with other issues they identify as threats. Instead, they claim impunity, citing a misguided belief that the First Amendment ties their hands, until the situation escalates to a crisis point” (Twitter, 2019).

This is an example of nostalgia for the market, discouraging the larger issue of racism that is present within the community, including white supremacists, containing the market has been boycotted by protestors. The violent behavior attached to this repressive nostalgia creates barriers for those attempting to access food, especially attendees who do not fit the white heterosexual profile celebrated by the American Identity Movement (Max 1969).

As Mayne argued, “In the nostalgic rhetoric of white nationalism, whiteness is the authenticity of home, instead of restoration. Affective content of these elements manifests itself in the terror of whiteness eclipsed, mourning the loss of home, and its return. “(2018)

While the market is attempting to hold a nostalgic view towards local food culture, it has a tighter grasp on the views presented by white nationalist vendors. Mayne noted, and the above quotation demonstrates, that “nostalgia’s uniquely unreciprocated narrative triggers a passive emotional investment that encourages individuals to understand a fantastic past as an ideal future”, however, the public is failing to see how this past was enabled by and is continually entwined with white nationalism, which “seems to stifle white supremacy as a prefigurative utopia that corrals and pacifies the agency of activists while the white supremacists are united in their blaming and shaming of activists for disrupting commerce.

Conclusion

When a farmers’ market vendor was identified as a white supremacist hate group recruiter in Bloomington, Indiana, USA, several factors served to protect their occupation of the public market space and eject the antifascist protestors; namely, discriminatory representations of community actors; inequitable application of the First Amendment; confinement of police with public safety; neoliberal governance; and a regressive nostalgia for local food. Altogether, these factors maintained a City-run farmers’ market as a space of protected whiteness.

Still, activists are creating safe spaces for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ members of the Bloomington community to buy, sell and access local food (Wu 2020, Babb & Betz 2020).