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

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In May 2019, Unicorn Riot revealed that Schooner Creek Farm (SCF) – a vendor at the city-hosted Bloomington Community Farmers’ Market - was actively recruiting for the white supremacist hate group Identity Europa. As the season progressed, activists organized research campaigns, petitions, and weekly protests demanding SCF be removed from the market. The City of Bloomington (City), however, insisted the First Amendment protected the vendors from ejection. Tensions rose as white supremacists attended market to show solidarity, protests escalated, and a vocal segment of the community asked for the market to return to normal. After closures for public safety, the City reopened the market with barricades and increased policing, and more activists were arrested. We unpack the discourse dominating media coverage and seek to uplift the experience attending the market, participating in community actions, and discussing the relationship with community members. Prominent themes we address in this poster include free speech, police and public safety, neoliberal governmental, and regressive nostalgia for local food.

### First Amendment / Who is permitted the freedom of speech?

The most common discursive theme in this con/flict 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 her 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)

After a summer of arresting protestors for carrying signs or singing too loudly in the market space, the Farmers’ Market Advisory Board codified this discrimination, creating a policy banning all signage at the market, confining that, while the right to protest and disrupt a marketplace is not always protected free speech, Dye’s right to participate in the market is.

### 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.” SCF posted on social media, “So grateful for the police presence which helped contribute to the positive atmosphere.”

Members of the Purple Shirt Brigade before and during arrests for singing too loudly in the market space.

Meanwhile, activists explained how the presence of police - another white supremacist institution - further compromised their safety. Black Lives Matter Bloomington urged the City, “We need to recognize that ‘more police’ do not make black and brown people ‘more safe’.” In a later publication, the organization reiterated, “for those communities directly threatened by the City’s white supremacist vendors, more police and surveillance can be more dangerous to our lives and well-being than a provocation at all!” In the end, the City’s confinement of police with public safety only protected white supremacists while further endangering antifascist activists.

### Neoliberal governmentality / What is an acceptable way to confront white supremacy?

Also working to protect white supremacy in this public market space is neoliberal governmentality. Neoliberal governmentality entails responsibility of consumer-citizens to make appropriate choices. This is exemplified in the marketplace as the site of solutions to social problems. Non-space makes choices to confront white supremacy more difficult. Neoliberal governmentality rears its ugly head in this Bloomington conflict in two ways. First, there is the overwhelming blaming of protestors for disrupting and running the market space. Second, while some activists argue for boycotting the market entirely, some activists argued that only SCF and white supremacist vendors should be boycotted. These arguments reduce activists to consumer-citizens who must use their purchasing power to affect change. Further, this second argument works to divide activists while the white supremacists are united in their blaming and shaming of activists for disrupting commerce.

### Nostalgia and Local Food

The nostalgic culture riddled in this conflict reveals the exclusive rhetoric of the City and SCF sympathizers. Ten sources use nostalgic rhetoric to lament the loss of the market, highlighting the colorblind whiteness in the public market space.

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 blinders and don’t pay attention to the pathetic attention seekers [protestors]. Have a coffee, a little nosh. Buy a week’s worth of veg... Go home haters. (Protestors}. We want our farmers market back.” (Herald Times 2019b)

This is an example of nostalgia for the market, disregarding the larger issue of racism that is present. Mayne (2018) defines “whiteness” as including white supremacists, and contends that the market has been boycotted by police. However, the violence of this nostalgia was further demonstrated by this comment: “The violent behavior attached to this regressive nostalgia creates barriers for those attempting to access food, especially those 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 viewpoint toward 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 uncritical 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 sanctify white supremacy as a prefigurative utopia that coalesces and pacifies the agency of individuals by severely disciplining their vision of possible versions of social organization.” (2018).

### Conclusions

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 governmentality, 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 (Vu 2020, Babb & Betz 2020).