



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



By: Angela Babb, Megan Betz, Isis Smith
Indiana University Bloomington

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

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 Evropa. 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 marginalized voices of antiracists confronting and resisting white supremacy.

Our analysis draws on a range of digital media. We thematically coded using NVivo software, ranging from local to national media (Creswell 2012). We used an inductive coding style informed by grounded knowledge, as all members of our research team also had first- and second-hand knowledge of the situation based on their lived experience attending the market, participating in community actions, and discussing the situation with community members. Prominent themes we address in this poster include free speech, police and public safety, neoliberal governmentality, and regressive nostalgia for local food.

Representation / What behavior is seen as violence?

Across documents analyzed, three names were mentioned most frequently, each representing one of the main categories of actors in the conflict, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Representation of main actors in the public discourse

Person	Number of Quotes	Number of Sources
Sarah Dye (Schooner Creek Farm)	67	20
Mayor Hamilton (City of Bloomington)	32	14
Abby Ang (No Space for Hate)	28	12

In addition to giving Dye (co-owner of SCF) substantially more voice in their publications compared to Ang (co-founder of No Space for Hate), descriptions of Dye naturalize her presence in the space, drawing on an idyllic pastoral at work in the market while abstracting Dye's connections to white supremacist organizations. Terms describing Dye in contrast to those protesting her presence are seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of terms used to describe SCF and Activists

SARAH / SCHOONER CREEK FARM	ACTIVISTS / PROTESTORS
Human	Thugs
Person/People	Violent Leftists
Mother	Criminals
Daughter	Trespassers
Subject of Violence or Harassment	Vandals
Organic Farmer	Totalitarians
Proprietor	Thought Police
Identitarian	Christophobic
American citizen	Attention seekers
Owners	Oppressors

The protestors were categorically described as disruptors, using a conflation between organizations to support the notion that the protests were violent. The terms used to describe protestors and activists, in contrast to Dye, are made more troubling in light of the prominence of queer, disabled, and Black activists and activists of color; the result is a reinforcement of the market as a space of protected whiteness.

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 her access to the farmers' 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, confirming 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.



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

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

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 that the City "needs 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 no police at all." In the end, the City's conflation of police with public safety only protected white supremacists while further endangering antifascist activists. 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. Neoliberalism marks a shift from market economy to market society, whereby people are reduced to consumers and laborers (Gledhill 2007) and the State is minimized to protector of the "free market" (Harvey 2005). Neoliberal governmentality entails responsabilization of consumer-citizens to make appropriate choices (Guthman 2008), emphasizing the marketplace as the site of solutions to social problems (Alkon 2014; Peck and Tickell 2002).

Neoliberal governmentality rears its ugly head in this Bloomington conflict in two ways. First, there is the overwhelming blaming of protestors for disrupting and ruining the market space. Second, while some activists argue for boycotting the market entirely, some activists contend that only SCF and their supporters 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. The vendors define "we" as including white supremacists, contending the market has been stolen by protestors. The violent behavior attached to this regressive 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 (Marx 1969).

As Mayne argued, "In the nostalgic rhetoric of white nationalism, whiteness is the authenticity of home, indeed 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 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 "yearns to situate white supremacy as a prefigurative utopia that corrals and pacifies the agency of individuals by severely disciplining their vision of possible versions of social organization." (2018). A return to the market, then, is a return to a space of protected whiteness.

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; conflation 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 (Wu 2020, Babb & Betz 2020).

References:

(1) Alkon, A.H. 2014. Food Justice and the Challenge to Neoliberalism. *Gastronomica* 14(2): 27-40.

(2) Babb, A. & M. Betz. 2020. "COVID-19 Inspires a Cooperative CSA" *Gastronomica* blog. (August 2020)

(3) Black Lives Matter Bloomington. 2019. "Nazis at the Bloomington Farmers Market" (June 4)

(4) Black Lives Matter Bloomington. 2019. "Letter to the City Regarding the Farmers Market and Nazi Farmers of Schooner Creek Farm" (August 8)

(5) Creswell, J.W. 2012. *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

(6) Gledhill, John. 2007. "Neoliberalism." In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, edited by David Nugent and Joan Vincent, 332-48. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

(7) Guthman, Julie. 2008. "Neoliberalism and the Making of Food Politics in California." *Geoforum* 39 (3): 1171-83.

(8) Harvey, D. A brief history of neoliberalism. Oxford University Press, 2005.

(9) Hine, Ellen. 2019. "Letter alleges white supremacists sell at farmers' market." *Indiana Daily Student*, June 11, 2019. <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2019/06/letter-alleges-white-supremacists-sell-at-farmers-market>

(10) 2019. "We Want Our Market Back." *Herald Times*, July 31, 2019. https://www.hoosiertimes.com/herald_times_online/opinion/we-want-our-farmers-market-back/article_2c8cc83b-911c-5a92-963a-2d1828e25256.html

(11) Marx, Leo. 1964. *The Machine in the Garden*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(12) Mayne, Michael. 2018. "White Nationalism and the Rhetoric of 'Nostalgia' in Affect, Emotion, and Rhetorical Persuasion in Mass Communication, eds. L. Zhang and C. Clark. Routledge.

(13) Peck, Jamie, and Adam Tickell. 2002. "Neoliberalizing Space." *Antipode* 34 (3): 380-404.

(14) Twitter, Edward B. 2019. White Supremacy Is Terrorism, Not a Difference of Opinion. *The Nation*, August 19.

(15) Wu, Ellen. 2019. "Bloomington 2019: The Year of the Farmers' Market Controversy." *Limestone Post*, December 30, 2019. <https://www.limestonepostmagazine.com/bloomington-2019-year-of-farmers-market-controversy/>

(16) Wu, Ellen. 2020. "Ethos of New People's Market Focuses on Food Justice, Mutual Aid." *Limestone Post*, April 16, 2020. <https://www.limestonepostmagazine.com/peoples-market-ethos-focuses-on-food-justice-mutual-aid/>

(17) Photos by Jeremy Hogan of The Bloomingtonian: <https://bloomingtononline.com/local-news/>



BIPOC activists highlighted in Wu 2019