

*"White supremacy is not an abstract idea that can be peaceably debated in a bubble on campus. It is a pre-existing reality, maintained through violence every day in this country."  
-Daily Tar Heel, "Special Anti-Racist Issue,"  
August 25, 2009*



## **the divorce of thought from deed:**

a compilation of writings on social conflict, white supremacy, and the mythology of free speech at UNC

## *A Note from the Editor*

The following pieces were compiled with the hope of furthering dialogue and action around issues that pertain to free speech, anti-fascism, and the concept of “legitimacy” with regards to public discourse and community self-defense. Three of them, *Pulling the Fire Alarm in the Marketplace of Ideas, Not Free Speech but Freedom Itself*, and *A Free Speech FAQ*, were published originally in the ninth issue of Rolling Thunder magazine. The fourth piece, *War by Other Means*, was written for and distributed to students at the University of North Carolina. The cover art came from prole.info.

All of these writings were prompted in some manner by the campaign to shut down the racist Youth for Western Civilization at UNC, and the myriad ways in which liberalism, white privilege, and appeals to legitimacy defended this organization. Though it still exists on paper, UNC’s YWC chapter was ultimately destabilized and discredited anyway, despite the best efforts of campus mediators, administration, liberal student groups, and other politicians-in-waiting.

Sometimes actions must speak for themselves, and that campaign left little time for opponents of YWC to make clear their views on “free speech” and the “democratic exchange of ideas.” If the world histories of anti-racist struggle alone cannot adequately teach these lessons, perhaps this publication will help others better understand why we refused then, and will continue to refuse, to cede one inch of ground to racists and fascists in our communities.

*-one, among many, of your friendly neighborhood anarchists*

## *A Note from the Publisher*

This pamphlet was published unilaterally, in an absurdly informal fashion, by one rogue member of the North Carolina Piece Corps, due to the fact that other members are off cavorting around the globe on caribbean adventures, etc. This is how we roll, evidently. Nevertheless, if you liked it, feel free to check out our more “official” publications, such as:

*Queers Bash Back: the anarchist influence on queer youth culture*

*Politicians Love Gun Control*

*Piece Now: an anarchist introduction to firearms*

*Bash the Fash: anti-fascist recollections from the UK*

*The Stockade Stood Burning: rebellion and the convict lease in Tennessee’s coalfields, 1891-1895*



## Pulling the Fire Alarm in the Marketplace of Ideas:

Anti-Fascism and Liberal Backlash at UNC Chapel Hill

On April 14, 2009, a social conflict erupted on the University of North Carolina's campus, pitting a small fascist student group against an ad hoc coalition of students from the university and anarchists from across the state. Most of the anarchists who live around the university had been focusing on off-campus projects: prisoner support, covert service worker organizing, Really Really Free Markets, national mass mobilizations. Very little attention had been given to the university as a site of potential social conflict; instead it was viewed as a privileged and apathetic social terrain better suited for petty theft than visible anarchist activity.

The group that catalyzed this conflict, Youth for Western Civilization, was a new national organization with local chapters at a few campuses around the US. Like the national organization, the local YWC group used thinly veiled language around heritage, identity, and cultural pride in Western civilization to hide a fairly obvious white supremacist agenda—their logo was Mussolini's fasces, the original symbol of fascism. Though weak in numbers, YWC was powerful in resources: it was the brainchild of the Leadership Institute, a right-wing think tank based in Virginia with a national budget of \$12 million.

This was a comparatively small-scale conflict, but it has wide-reaching implications. It attracted national and international media attention around the issues of free speech, immigration, and anti-fascism, offering an instructive example of how anarchist ideas interact with liberal discourse about race in the supposedly "post-racial" era of the Obama presidency. It also offers lessons for anarchist students and others who find themselves reaching out to, working with, or pretending to be college students.

*"Diversity can be good in moderation—if what is being brought in is desirable. Most Americans don't mind a little ethnic food, some Asian math whizzes, or a few Mariachi dancers—as long as these trends do not overwhelm the dominant*

*culture... Even the Cuban immigrants, still preponderantly white, law-abiding, Republican-voting, affable people, are not desirable if they don't assimilate. Perhaps a few Little Havanas are manageable in a huge country, just as many Americans may see a few isolated Chinatowns as an exotic novelty. The problem is when the Little Havanas become Big Havanas and the Chinatowns become Chinacities or even Chinastates.” –Marcus Epstein, Co-Founder of Youth for Western Civilization*

## The Campaign Begins...

*“During the protest, I watched as some of my students were roughly pushed to the ground by police officers, sprayed at close range with pepper spray, and chased around with tasers. I helped some students to the bathroom on the second floor to rinse the spray from their noses, mouths, and eyes. Needless to say I was afraid for their safety and my own.” –Billie Murray, UNC Graduate Student*

Opposition to YWC at UNC began in April 2009, as students and non-students began doing research on the group and talking to friends about how to confront them. The group’s first event, a speaking engagement featuring former US Treasurer Bay Buchanan, went largely unnoticed, but conversations ensued immediately afterward about confronting their next event, at which anti-immigrant ex-congressman Tom Tancredo was to speak.

Opinions as to how to go about this were mixed. A mostly white liberal policy group called Coalition for College Access (CCA) hosted a meeting attended by anarchists, members of Students for a Democratic Society, and many others, at which it was announced that at least some of those present intended to shut down the event entirely. Initially, the liberal group talked tentatively about how their intention to compile petitions and highlight diversity could work in conjunction with this idea, though they later backed away from such plans and eventually denounced the protest altogether. CCA also failed to mention the planned disruption to the Carolina Hispanic Association (CHISPA), a non-political Latino student group. This resulted in CHISPA attending the YWC event, planning to ask hard questions during the question-and-answer period at the end of Tancredo’s speech—which never happened.

Off-campus meetings of anarchists were similarly well-attended and haphazard. Several of these occurred shortly before the event, each with a different configuration of participants. In contrast to similar meetings in the past, these were characterized by an air of confidence: the participants fully expected to succeed in shutting the event down.

Hundreds of wheatpasted posters appeared around campus the night of April 13, denouncing YWC and urging people to protest Tancredo’s speech. Most were taken down before the event began, but the publicity had an effect. That night, April 14, the small auditorium in which Tancredo was to speak was filled beyond capacity, mostly by people curious and upset about the existence of a racist group on campus. In addition to small handbills encouraging audience members to coordinate their jeering and boos (e.g., “When Tancredo says America, everyone hiss like a cat!”), multiple teams of banner holders were prepared to hold up anti-racist banners across the front of the room. Outside the event, several student groups organized a well-attended march and rally. The

Fascists are only attempting to express their views “peacefully” in order to lay the groundwork for violent activity. Because fascists require a veneer of social legitimacy to be able to carry out their program, giving them a platform to speak opens the door to their being able to do physical harm to people. Public speech promoting ideologies of hate, whether or not you consider it violent on its own, always complements and correlates with violent actions. By affiliating themselves with movements and ideologies based on oppression and genocide, fascists show their intention to carry on these legacies of violence—but only if they can develop a base of support.

*Trying to suppress their voices will backfire by generating interest in them.*

Resistance to fascism doesn’t increase interest in fascist views. If anything, liberals mobilizing to defend fascists on free speech grounds increases interest in their views by conferring legitimacy on them. This plays directly into their organizing goals, allowing them to drive a wedge between their opponents using free speech as a smokescreen. By tolerating racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, so-called free speech advocates are complicit in the acts of terror fascist organizing makes possible.

*They have rights like everybody else.*

No one has the right to threaten our community with violence. Likewise, we reject the “right” of the government and police—who have more in common with fascists than they do with us—to decide for us when fascists have crossed the line from merely expressing themselves into posing an immediate threat. We will not abdicate our freedom to judge when and how to defend ourselves.

by popular self-defense. We're told that if all ideas are debated openly, the best one will win out, but this fails to account for the reality of unequal power. Fascists can be very useful to those with power and privilege, who often supply them with copious resources; if they can secure more airtime and visibility for their ideas than we can, we would be fools to limit ourselves to that playing field. We can debate their ideas all day long, but if we don't prevent them from building the capacity to make them reality, it won't matter.

*Neo-Nazis are irrelevant; institutionalized racism poses the real threat today, not the extremists at the fringe.*

The bulk of racism takes place in subtle, everyday forms. But fascist visibility enables other right-wing groups to frame themselves as moderates, helping to legitimize the racist and xenophobic assumptions underlying their positions and the systems of power and privilege they defend. Taking a stand against fascists is an essential step toward discrediting the structures and values at the root of institutionalized racism.

Here and worldwide, fascists still terrorize and murder people because of racial, religious, and sexual difference. It's both naïve and disrespectful to their victims to gloss over the past and present realities of fascist violence. Because fascists believe in acting directly to carry out their agenda rather than limiting themselves to the apparatus of representative democracy, they can be more dangerous proportionate to their numbers than other bigots. This makes it an especially high priority to deal with them swiftly.

*Free speech means protecting everyone's right to speak, including people you don't agree with. How would you like it if you had an unpopular opinion and other people were trying to silence you?*

We oppose fascists because of what they do, not what they say. We're not opposed to free speech; we're opposed to the fact that they advance an agenda of hate and terror. We have no power to censor them; thanks to the "neutrality" of the capitalist market, they continue to publish hate literature in print and the internet. But we will not let them come into our communities to build the power they need to enact their hatred.

The government and the police have never protected everyone's free speech equally, and never will. It is in their self-interest to repress views and actions that challenge existing power inequalities. They will spend hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars on riot police, helicopters, and sharpshooters to defend a KKK rally, but if there's an anarchist rally the same police will be there to stop it, not to protect it.

Anarchists don't like being silenced by the state—but we don't want the state to define and manage our freedom, either. Unlike the ACLU, whose supposed defense of "freedom" leads them to support the KKK and others like them, we support self-defense and self-determination above all. What's the purpose of free speech, if not to foster a world free from oppression? Fascists oppose this vision; thus we oppose fascism by any means necessary.

*If fascists don't have a platform to express their views peacefully, it will drive them to increasingly violent means of expression.*



liberal group had planned a Dance Party for Diversity on another part of campus, which dissolved as curious participants left to join the protest.

As soon as the president of YWC stood up to introduce Tancredo, who had yet to enter the room, total chaos ensued. He was immediately drowned out by people calling him a racist, while others banged on chairs and held loud conversations about the racist roots of Youth for Western Civilization. Soon a large crowd could be heard outside the building, clapping and pounding on the door, giving the room a tense atmosphere. Police were trying to prevent them from entering, but as the crowd pushed into the building, people inside the room started clapping and chanting with them.

Tancredo somehow snaked his way into the classroom, amid more boos. Scuffles with police could be heard from the hallway as students tried to force their way in after him. Two people unfurled a banner in front of Tancredo as the banging and clapping outside got louder. A cop grabbed one of the banner-holders, throwing her to the ground as he pushed her out through the doors. Tancredo tried to speak, but was inaudible over the screams of students in the hallway whom the police were pepper spraying and threatening with tasers. One person ran back and forth from the hallway to the classroom, yelling that cops were tasing students to protect a white supremacist, and that a medic was needed outside to treat a woman who had been maced while trying to escape the cloud of pepper spray filling the hallway.

At this point, two women from CHISPA declared that they were daughters of immigrants and asked people to let Tancredo speak, saying they wanted to have a dialogue with him. The crowd inside, though angry and confused, quieted down temporarily. Meanwhile, the crowd outside regrouped and marched to the rear of the building. Then another pair of audience members unfurled a second banner, reading "No one is illegal," in front of Tancredo. Protesters outside started banging on the windows of the classroom, shattering a single pane of glass as screaming and booing broke out in the room once again. At this point, Tancredo's bodyguard advised him to leave, and the chief of



Chapel Hill police, who was running security for the event, told him it was over. As Tancredo fled the scene, with the gait of a terrified man pretending to be calm, thirty or more protesters chased him across the lawn. Cut off by police, they returned as other protesters, audience members, and reporters emerged from the building in a mix of victory, anger, embarrassment, and confusion. While a fire alarm sounded in the background, an impromptu rally took place with well over a hundred people dancing, holding banners, and debating.

A few of the choice quotes sent from out of town after Tancredo was shut down:

*“White supremacist formations like the Youth for Western Civilization, the student group that invited Tancredo, should be confronted and denounced at every turn, and the students at UNC who participated in these protests should be esteemed as the heroic fighters for justice that they are.”* —Hatem Abudayyeh, the executive director of the American Arab Action Network in Chicago

*“We commend all of the students who stood up to the racist politics of Tom Tancredo and sent a clear, public message that there is no space for hate on their college campus... Those opposing the protesters will surely attempt to turn this incident into a debate on free speech... They will call upon the First Amendment to make a victim out of racist Tom Tancredo who seizes every opportunity he has to demonize undocumented immigrants... Not only is Tom Tancredo’s presence at UNC alienating for a number of students, it gives his xenophobic platform legitimacy.”* —LUCHA at Columbia University

*“We are deeply concerned that the so-called rights of Mr. Tancredo to spew hate speech seem more important to the administration of UNC Chapel Hill than the rights of our community to feel safe. Apparently, the administration feels that intimidating the Latin@ community is a protected form of speech. It is also concerning that your right to speak out against Mr. Tancredo is being judged by the administration as intolerant, when it is clearly Mr. Tancredo who is guilty of intolerance.”* —Gabriela Lemus and Alikehan Salehi, Hispanic Outreach for Learning and Awareness, UNC Asheville

*“We stand in solidarity with you and completely support your protest against former congressman Tom Tancredo’s talk at your campus. Tancredo represents the most racist and reactionary anti-immigrant views. His views and talks must be challenged and exposed wherever he speaks... Your action has given us more inspiration to continue our struggles knowing that we have your support and solidarity.”* —Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Coalition (MIRAc)

*Directly confronting white supremacists has a long history in this country; from Harriet Tubman’s armed raids on Southern plantations to Louisiana’s Deacons for Defense, from Robert F. Williams’ shootouts with racists in Monroe, NC, to anti-nazi streetfighting in Toledo, OH just a few years ago, going beyond the “free exchange of ideas” to community self-defense and resistance is as American as apple pie. Drawing lessons from this historical necessity of challenging white supremacists directly, the following FAQ was written to debunk certain myths about anti-fascist organizing.*

## Free Speech FAQ: myths around fascism and free speech

*Stopping fascists from speaking makes you just as bad as them.*

You could just as easily say that not stopping fascists from speaking—giving them the opportunity to organize to impose their agenda on the rest of us—makes you as bad as them. If you care about freedom, don’t stand idly by while people mobilize to take it away.

*Shouldn’t we just ignore them? They want attention, and if we give it to them we’re letting them win.*

Actually, fascists usually don’t want to draw attention to their organizing; they do most of it in secret for fear that an outraged public will shut them down. They only organize public events to show potential recruits that they have power, and to try to legitimize their views as part of the political spectrum. By publicly opposing fascists, we make it clear to them—and more importantly, to anyone else interested in joining them—that they will not be able to consolidate power over us without a fight. Ignoring fascists only allows them to organize unhindered, and history shows that this can be very dangerous. Better we shut them down once and for all.

*The best way to defeat fascism is to let them express their views so that everyone can see how ignorant they are. We can refute them more effectively with ideas than force.*

People don’t become fascists because they find their ideas persuasive; they become fascists for the same reason others become police officers or politicians: to wield power over other people. It’s up to us to show that fascist organizing will not enable them to obtain this power, but will only result in public humiliation. That is the only way to cut off their source of potential recruits.

History has shown over and over that fascism is not defeated by ideas alone, but

or not they have the courage to act against the Administration on this issue, or will instead sit idly by while anti-immigrant ideas gain a foothold on our campus under the protection of the marketplace of ideas.

## ...The Campaign Continues

*"I want to express how disappointed I am in what happened last night when former Congressman Tom Tancredo wasn't able to speak when a protest got out of hand... Congressman Tancredo felt threatened and left without making his remarks... There's a way to protest that respects free speech and allows people with opposing views to be heard. Here that's often meant that groups protesting a speaker have displayed signs or banners, silently expressing their opinions while the speaker had his or her say. That didn't happen last night... I called Mr. Tancredo today to apologize for how he was treated. In addition, our Department of Public Safety is investigating this incident. They will pursue criminal charges if any are warranted." —Chancellor Thorp's email to all UNC students*

The events of April 14 were a national embarrassment for the university administration. Everyone from National Public Radio and CNN to several Mexican newspapers published stories on the protest. The next day, UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp sent a mass email to all students denouncing the actions and threatening to punish any individuals and groups involved. The campus newspaper, the Daily Tar Heel, refused to print a single statement supportive of the protest, instead only quoting Chancellor Thorp, the police, and right-wing bystanders, despite having had the opportunity to interview hundreds of protesters and receiving dozens of letters to the editor. Ironically, in order to support the administration's efforts to control the terms of the debate and frame the events as a violation of free speech, the DTH imposed a media blackout about YWC's connections to white power movements.

The backlash on campus was tremendous. In spite of the white supremacist background of Youth for Western Civilization, the broad participation of students as well as many off-campus locals, and dozens of solidarity statements from immigrants' rights groups across the country, countless students swallowed the line presented by the administration and the press that the protest was simply a leftist mob silencing the free speech of a respectable conservative—he was a congressman, after all. The notion of the university as a "marketplace of ideas," a sacred space in which all platforms and perspectives might compete freely and equally, and the premise that there are legitimate and illegitimate forms of protest—these became weapons with which the administration did its utmost to suppress enthusiasm for the action and silence dissent.

The Student Congress, the campus and city police departments, and the UNC administration sought to divide groups from each other and track down scapegoats. Officers made phone calls to every member of SDS and to other radical organizers on campus, trying to determine who broke the window and who organized the demonstration. Despite this, the students were hanging tough, and everyone refused to talk. However, with many students afraid of arrests, honor court proceedings, and loss of financial aid, everyone was talking a lot less to each other as well.

As radical voices fell silent on campus, few spoke out against the depiction of Tancredo and YWC as victims whose right to free speech had been trampled. Some who had participated in confronting YWC seemed thoroughly confused, uncertain or even ashamed of their own success at shutting the event down. Leaders from groups like CHISPA, the Black Student Movement, and Coalition for College Access went so far as to join hands with YWC members to sing the college anthem in a televised press confer-

ence denouncing the protest a few days later.



On the night of April 20, less than a week after the Tancredo protest, delegates from student groups that had participated in the demonstration and anarchists from on and off campus met for a facilitated discussion to air their differing perspectives and grievances. Though this was cathartic for some, little was resolved. If nothing else, the event clarified that some participants were coming from radically different political perspectives. Many of the participants lacked an analysis of the importance of fighting fascism, the ways white supremacy can wear a democratic face, or the mechanisms by which the rhetoric of free speech can be used to suppress dissent. Some did not even understand the relationship between xenophobia and white supremacy.

This conversation was further complicated by the racial dynamics of power and privilege among those who opposed Tancredo. Although people of many races and ethnicities participated in the demonstration against YWC, the people who most vocally supported the victory against Tancredo at this meeting were white. The leaders of various social groups of people of color on campus had denounced the demonstration, and members of the non-political Latino association at the meeting said they had felt silenced by those who opposed Tancredo and had been disappointed that they hadn't been able to have a dialogue with him. Members of this same group debated with a Black Student Movement member who was less critical of the disruption, arguing that the event "wasn't about race, it was about immigration." At the end of the meeting, one non-student argued that while some people might be more directly threatened by Youth for Western Civilization than others, no one group or individual owned the struggle against fascism, and that people would and should continue to confront YWC wherever they tried to organize. Others still did not seem to see YWC as a racist group, and expressed no desire to stop their organizing.

standing that we've already been given. This is what passes for "debate" in this society. It should be no surprise that its function is to keep things as they are.

What's more, what is the point of debate if there is no sanctioned action to achieve the results of that debate? If every xenophobe was suddenly convinced of the barbarity of the Border, would the wall suddenly crumble? We would still find ourselves in a place where our only choices lie between the endless deliberations of useless politicians, on the one hand, and the direct action of our own social forces, on the other.

*"War is nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means." Karl Von Clausewitz*

So this all raises the question: What happens when the debate is over? Do we act then? But what if our acting stifles further debate? Is that bad? When do we act?

The point of the "marketplace of ideas" is to ensure that the debate never ends, so that *we never act*. Debate only has meaning when we are prepared to act on our beliefs, to take risks beyond those of the classroom. This is why, despite the whining of Thorp and the Daily Tar Heel about the silencing of free speech, debate around issues of speech, immigration, and white supremacy was actually stronger after the events of past April. Debate has substance when it occurs in an honest context that reflects the daily, physical conflicts occurring inside and outside of the University. Discussion and critique must be imbued with the urgency of real life.

It would be interesting to ask what would have happened had anti-racists instead obeyed the expected rules for civil discourse. Tancredo's speech could have proceeded uninterrupted, while he insulted immigrants and Hispanic culture generally, until eventually students would have gotten their chance to ask him some "hard questions." He would have answered them politely, the students would feel a small nagging frustration, and everyone would go home peacefully to a world where immigrants are being incarcerated and deported, families separated, workers fired, and migrants killed. Surely little attention would have been paid to the event at all. NPR wouldn't have done a story about the immigration debate, Mexican journalists wouldn't have written sympathetic articles about pro-immigrant UNC students. YWC would probably have continued to grow, and had no trouble finding a new president this fall. Capitalizing on its new political legitimacy, the group might eventually have grown large enough to push policy changes at UNC, keeping undocumented students out of the classroom, making sure cops weren't accountable for any racial profiling, among other things. All the while, the vast majority of UNC students could rest assured that there was nothing important enough to get worked up about. The cowardice and apprehension of campus "activism" would have gone untested.

Thankfully, this isn't what happened. A tiny spark of excitement and tension was instead injected into campus life, along with the possibility of challenging not just a tiny racist student group but the larger framework of how we do politics. In reaction to this possibility, the administration is now actively aiding a group whose goal is the growth of a "right-wing youth movement on campus." Thorp is doing this under the rubric of the marketplace of ideas, assuring the existence of a defunct group so that he can save face and make a bizarre gesture towards a skewed version of "free speech."

Nevertheless, the unstable marketplace has been challenged, and for some, the house of cards has fallen. The administration has now shown its true colors, that it will actively aid a racist tendency if it means protecting the notion of Liberalism, thus preventing any kind of break with the current University framework. Students must decide whether



martyrs to the existence of an idea that has no visible proponents on our campus. It's one big joke: the idea that an idea's opponents are obliged to support it merely so those opponents have something with which to peacefully debate. It is nonsense that can only be explained by the weakness of the administration's position: With only one or two actual members, no public meetings, and a president that publicly criticizes his own group, YWC is in affect dead in the water. The anti-racists have basically won. So YWC becomes a corpse on life support, maintained by a concept of ideological exchange that is as meaningless as it is irrelevant to the way in which ideas actually travel in the real world.

*"Containing all affirmations and deactivating all certainties as they irresistibly come to light--such is the long labor of the Western intellect. The police and philosophy are two convergent, if formally distinct, means to this end." - The Coming Insurrection*

The reason the administration and some faculty are so desperate to assure YWC's "rightful place" is that the group's abolition would be a tremendous defeat for the Liberal conception of the University, a rupture with how and why students are taught to enter into debate. The administration understands what most students do not, that in breaking with the marketplace of ideas, anti-racists presented an active critique of the primary tenets of Liberal discourse. More and more students around the country are challenging this discourse: from occupations and tree-sitting at UC-Santa Cruz to the shutting down of a speech by once-Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge in New York, the rickety framework of Liberalism is in shambles. Students wonder, could there be another way of doing politics? In doing so, can we dispense with "politics" entirely?

Specifically, YWC opponents understand that debates around what is and is not white supremacist do not occur in a bubble, but in a society whose entire economic and political machinery was built upon and is maintained by racial hierarchies. Any debate around race takes place somewhere in that hierarchy, which is a structure that is permanently maintained by violence.

This violence isn't just rhetoric. If students were to talk to Northside neighbors about police harassment, or have some honest conversations with the day laborers Jones Ferry Rd. about the conditions that brought them to the US, this would all be readily apparent. The realities that force people to move here from the Global South, that cause people to take shitty service work jobs on campus, are all conditioned by coercion and violence. To speak of the "free and equal exchange" of perspectives about immigration in a country where migrant workers die of pesticide exposure and families face deportation, where border walls partition the once-whole territories of indigenous people and private corporations run immigrant detention centers, is laughable. A debate where one side has the power to arrest, imprison, deport, or murder the other side is no debate at all. The "marketplace of ideas" model pretends to freeze these conflicts in order to conduct debate outside of real space and time, somehow removed from a physical world where the fate of migrants is not guided by ideas per se but actually by police, judges, racist vigilantes, bankers, authorities, wealth, power, interests.

Critics of the marketplace of ideas understand that in a country where nearly every textbook, every classroom, and every TV-screened political debate affirm the basic logic of capitalism and the State, the "free and equal exchange of ideas" is a hollow gesture. Given this larger context, most dialogue around "issues" is just a superficial repetition of foregone conclusions, based on the unexamined larger frameworks for under-

As a result of these conflicts, some anarchist students involved in the first disruption dropped out of the campaign, citing concerns about relations with other student groups and the lack of support among groups of people of color, like CHISPA. This response seemed to come largely out of white guilt rather than a nuanced anti-racist analysis. It can be easy to be distracted by self-righteous liberals that oppose militant tactics when they happen to be people of color, instead of doing the work to engage with people of color who actually share your political orientation. For white people to legitimize one group as the voice of people of color was problematic, and it invisibilized the people of color who were involved in the struggle against YWC, as well as those who supported it from afar.

Despite these complications, things continued to go badly for YWC. Every night, hundreds of posters appeared wheatpasted around campus, attempting to counter the media blackout and explain anti-racists' perspectives. A week later at YWC's next speaking event, ex-congressman Virgil Goode was also disrupted, this time by a dancing drag troupe, personal body alarms, shouting and booing, and a man holding a pink "FUCK RACISM" banner screaming "I'm a Southern working man, and I STILL think you're a racist!" Fire alarms went off in the three adjacent buildings, and students poured out onto the quad to see the spectacle. Six people were arrested at this event, all charged with disorderly conduct. While the speaker was not actually shut down, the event was a heavily-policed three-ring circus, at which anti-racists made it clear that no amount of police presence or media backlash would intimidate them into passivity.

The morning after this second protest, a student named Haley Koch was arrested outside of one of her classes and charged with "disrupting the peace at an educational institution" for her involvement in the Tancredo disruption the previous week. Along with the arrests of six others the night before, Koch's arrest galvanized support from on and off campus and resulted in the formation of a protesters' defense committee.

While the six non-students arrested at the second YWC demonstration had their full names and home addresses published online in mainstream news sources the night of their arrests, right-wingers focused eerily on Haley Koch. As the only student arrestee, pictures and information about her abounded on social networking sites and elsewhere on the internet, making her a perfect target. Publicly denouncing YWC was necessary, but there are many dangers to being known as an anti-fascist, especially in the South, where white supremacists have often used vigilante violence rather than relying solely on the institutionalized violence of the police. Balancing the need for publicity against the importance of privacy can challenge even the best strategic planning.

## War on the Media, War on the Advisors

*"White supremacy is not an idea that can be peaceably debated in a bubble on campus. It is a pre-existing reality, maintained through violence every day in this country." -Daily Tar Heel "Special Anti-Racist Issue," August 25, 2009*

*"As [YWC President Nikhil Patel] points out, YWC rails against the imagined dangers of 'radical multiculturalism' and demands total assimilation of immigrant populations within their notion of what proper 'culture' is. How can one legitimately stand to try to lead an organization that states explicitly that it does*

*not believe your life experience has value, but that your experience and culture is actually a threat to their own? [YWC] is an organized, student-run hate group that peddles gentlemanly racism and white supremacy. That's not liberal bias talking, that comes from the organization's mission, the messages it extols, and the speakers it sponsors." Jamaal Green, Graduate Student, from a letter to the editor in the DTH*

It was clear that between the end of the spring semester, the threat of more arrests, and the public backlash, the strategy of publicly disrupting YWC events could not continue indefinitely. At this point the campaign took on a more closed nature, shifting to focus on the aspects of YWC that seemed most vulnerable to sabotage. Comrades with experience in the animal rights movement were instrumental in this transition, researching the organization's funding, founding members, and the faculty advisor it needed to remain a campus organization. Plans were set in motion to target the group's advisor, astronomy professor Chris Clemens, who seemed to be the weakest link politically and socially.

Around this time, DC Indymedia published news of the arrest and conviction of Marcus Epstein, who was one of Tancredo's speechwriters as well as YWC's first national vice-president and one of its founding members. In 2008, Epstein pled guilty to a hate crime in which he attacked an African-American woman in Washington, DC while screaming "nigger" in her face. The Daily Tar Heel refused to print this information, despite a constant barrage of letters to the editor. Nevertheless, this story, combined with consistent propaganda efforts and the threat of future disruptions, caused Clemens to quit his post as advisor on June 16 before any protests were directed at him. Clemens said that YWC had become "a magnet for the radical left to come shut you down." This was a major victory: according to university guidelines, if YWC couldn't find a new advisor over the summer, the group would be officially disbanded.

Emboldened by this success and desiring revenge for the media blackout, anti-racists wrapped their own front page around copies of the campus paper on the first day of fall classes. This was a two-sided "Special Anti-Racist Issue" of the DTH, with stories detailing Epstein's conviction and Clemens' resignation and editorial pieces exposing the roles of liberalism and the conception of the marketplace of ideas in legitimizing white supremacist discourse. Roughly 3000 of these were distributed, showing that anti-racists were organized and would continue their opposition to YWC.

That same day it was announced that YWC had found a new advisor: an eccentric, 76-year-old retired psychology professor named Elliot Cramer. Adding a new twist to the campaign, Cramer was a good liberal committed to the right to free speech who claimed he only supported the group because he believed it had a right to exist. In a letter to the editor announcing his decision to serve as advisor to YWC, he wrote, "Although I am not sympathetic with most of their views, I think that they, like Haley Koch, should be allowed to peacefully express them, and I have offered to be their sponsor." UNC students who were still involved with the campaign contacted Cramer to spell out YWC's connections to white supremacist activity, in hopes that he would rescind his offer. But his position remained unchanged; he described himself as an "absolutist when it comes to free speech."

Not surprisingly, Cramer's prejudice could be found just underneath his liberal façade of supporting YWC based on the principle of equal access. He told student Haley

tion emerges.

An exchange of ideas which occurs with no underlying threat that those ideas might become reality, with no possibility of action, is a *meaningless exchange*. This is why every year student groups face almost complete turnover, why service clubs are more popular than "activism," why the apolitical always seems to triumph over the potential for transforming the University into a place that could actually challenge our social conditions.

*"No critique is too radical among postmodernist thinkers, as long as it maintains a total absence of certitude. A century ago, scandal was identified with any particularly unruly and raucous negation, while today it's found in any affirmation that fails to tremble." - The Coming Insurrection*

In the past 8 or 9 months, UNC's administration, in partnership with the Daily Tar Heel and the leadership of several student groups, has gone on the offensive to promote this concept of the marketplace of ideas. In response to repeated challenges from forces, both in and outside of the University, that stand in active opposition to the ultra-right-wing Youth for Western Civilization, this coalition of mediators, moderates, and bureaucrats have taken a normally unspoken framework implied by the inertia and timidity of campus "politics" and turned it into a vocal institution in and of itself.

Soon after the wildly successful disruption of a speaking event hosted by YWC on April 14th, in which an anti-immigrant ex-congressman was forced into an undignified trot upon being chased off by anti-racists, Chancellor Thorp sent an email to all students, condemning the largely participatory action and calling for a return to civil discourse. To a certain extent, his public shaming worked: just days later, leaders of both CHISPA, a Latino student group, as well as members of the Black Student Movement and student body president Jasmin Jones gathered in a circle with several members of the white supremacist YWC to hold hands and sing the school anthem. Cameras flashed, journalists rejoiced, and everything seemed to return to normal.

On another level, however, his shaming was a failure. A second YWC event was also disrupted, as well as protested from outside. Propaganda around campus continued to go up, urging fellow students to not be fooled by YWC's attempts at political legitimacy or by calls for polite dialogue with a hate group. This work had its affect. Despite the DTH and Thorp's pleas for civility and appeals to the marketplace of ideas, YWC's advisor Chris Clemens quit his post, citing the group as too "inflammatory" and a magnet for "extreme left-wing" protests. In other words, the protests worked.

Actions have continued against YWC: on the first day of fall classes, 3,000 copies of the DTH were wrapped with a "special anti-racist edition," which detailed YWC's racist origins as well as the false opposition presented by liberal discourse around white supremacy and protest. A pamphlet exposing YWC's new advisor as a racist collaborator prompted him into overreaction, thus causing the second resignation of a faculty sponsor. In order to combat this continued campaign, Thorp gave \$3,000 out of a private fund to YWC, and personally sought three new advisors for the group, one of whom (Jon Curtis) is himself the head director of student organizations and activities. A conflict of interest, perhaps?!

Nearly every faculty member, bureaucrat, or student associated with YWC has publicly gone on record as opposing YWC's national mission statement. And yet, amazingly, these professed "liberals" are the only thing keeping the group alive, pathetic

*The following essay was written in the fall of 2009, partly in response to the administrative and liberal backlashes against the successes of YWC opponents, and partly as a broader critique of the “marketplace of ideas” concept. On a most basic level, it asserts that the equality of actors intrinsic to this concept is a myth only made possible by the illusion of the University’s separation from the rest of society. The University largely acts as a metpaphor for speech divorced from action. Over a thousand copies of this essay were distributed on UNC campus in physical and electronic form.*

## War by Other Means:

A trip through the marketplace of ideas on UNC campus

*“Today Western Imperialism is the imperialism of the relative, of the “It all depends on your point of view”; it’s the eye rolling or the wounded indignation at anyone who is stupid, primitive, or presumptuous enough to believe in something, to affirm anything at all.” - The Coming Insurrection*

In a rare moment of accidental wisdom, the U.S. Supreme Court declared in 1967, “The college classroom, with it surrounding environs, is peculiarly the marketplace of ideas.” Perhaps no better phrase can be found to characterize the social malaise, passive nihilism, and active relativism with which ideas are “debated” on campus at UNC. Here, ideas are not so much exchanged as general commodities, per se, but more specifically bought and sold like gas station candy bars, with all the import, value, and meaning those entail. “You like Baby Ruths more than Snickers? Ok, ok, that’s fine, but why get so worked up about it? It’s only a candy bar!”

Every aspect of this marketplace allusion, or should I say, illusion, is implied in the economic analogy: an isolation from the real physical world of violently conflicting social forces, a consequent lack of moral or ethical urgency, a pretense of equality in the mass media distribution of and financial investment in the ideas themselves, and an ahistorical understanding of the social position which the ideas in question have been assigned to.

Somewhere in this silly “environ,” the concept of free speech emerges, pathetically attempting to assert itself with some meaning in a world where no student really cares, and no student group is particularly willing to risk anything: to extend itself beyond the safety and comfort of the teach-in or the permitted Pit demo in order to turn their idea into a reality. And this is where the marketplace of ideas becomes just like any other marketplace: a house of cards built on faith and rhetoric, waiting to be either dismantled or transformed into its more overtly fascist counterpart as soon as a truly active opposi-

Koch that he was “not aware of a significant number of murders by white supremacists. Certainly it’s news when it happens, but the trend of such behaviors has been down for many years. I see YOU as being part of the climate of hate.” He also said, “racism doesn’t exist anymore. Racism was segregation, and that’s over!”

Meanwhile, the president of the YWC group at UNC had graduated over the summer, leaving the group with a new president, Nikhil Patel. Patel’s parents were from India, but had immigrated to the US from Zimbabwe. Patel reportedly disagreed with most of the positions advanced by YWC, but took over the group because the former president was one of his only friends. He was anxious about what his family would think of his involvement, but he, too, seemed to want to help YWC in the spirit of protecting the marketplace of ideas. “Censorship did not fly with me. I thought it would be nice to have a conservative point of view on campus just for the spirit of debate,” he said in the DTH. In a surreal turn of events, Youth for Western Civilization had become a moribund group kept alive only by liberal support.

Anti-racists quickly refocused their campaign on Cramer, printing a brochure about his support of white supremacists and planning further actions. The pamphlet, which contained the retired professor’s home address and encouraged people to contact him directly, provoked Cramer to overreact. He emailed both the media and Chancellor Thorp threatening to shoot any protesters who came to his home: “I have a Colt 45 and I know how to use it. I used to be able to hit a quarter at 50 feet 7 times out of 10.” In embarrassment, the Chancellor forced Cramer to resign on September 17. Youth for Western Civilization, which had returned after the summer with hardly any remaining members, was once again without an advisor and at risk of dissolving.

Meanwhile, days before Cramer’s forced resignation, the five of those arrested in the spring protests who pled not guilty beat their charges in court. The defendants had researched the statute and successfully argued that their behavior, though well documented by police video footage, did not actually constitute disorderly conduct. To the dismay of the assistant district attorney and the administration, a legal precedent now existed legitimizing the raucous disruption of right-wing speakers on campus.

## The Administration Takes Sides

With no faculty advisor, few actual members, and a new president who had gone on record as opposing the national organization’s mission statement, the UNC YWC chapter seemed to be on its last legs. Only one thing could save it—the direct intervention of the university administration. This came soon, first with a \$3000 gift to the organization from a private fund controlled by Chancellor Thorp himself, and then with the appointment of three new advisors who had been personally requested to take the positions in private meetings with Thorp.

The message was clear: if need be, all the financial and institutional resources of UNC would be engaged to assure that this fledgling right-wing organization survived. There were indications that this was the result of pressure from state government officials. No amount of intimidation, home demonstrations, or strategic secondary targeting could win this campaign, at least not alone. On the other hand, the group was basically dead in the water, a corpse on life support.

Insofar as it was about destabilizing YWC, the campaign had been a complete

success. Now anti-racists were no longer simply engaged in a battle with YWC, but had been forced into an all-out war with the university itself, in which they came up against one of the foundational myths of liberal democracy—the concept of the marketplace of ideas.

Despite the campaign's victories and the Chancellor's unprecedented financial support of a white supremacist group, few student groups had any interest in continuing a campaign against YWC. It seemed that the institutional apparatus of the university had successfully smothered the spark of dissent. This was apparent when YWC held its first public event of the semester in October 2009, a speaking engagement that was protested by theatrical performances but hardly disrupted at all. The event itself was a bust, with more police than audience members in attendance, but while YWC was virtually destroyed, its opponents had failed to attract new allies or heighten social conflict on campus.

A few excerpts from right-wing hate mail to student protestor Haley Koch:

*"Haley, I'm glad you got arrested you filthy kike. It's really a shame your ancestors didn't get whacked along with the other 1.2 million kikes who died under Nazi Germany. Cordially, Jim"*

*"I genuinely hope that she gets eaten by some of the Africans over there. I'm sorry folks, but that demented little lesbian is just too far gone to ever come back. On the plus side, at least she would be providing a good, solid meal to some of those noble, downtrodden Africans."*

*"With a woman like this, she really only has 1 ending. Honestly, how could a person be this deranged. She smiles now, but there is no other way for her life to go except to death from the way she lives. A WHITE woman cannot continue to surround herself with blacks and not expect the predictable to happen."*

## What Went Wrong?

This has been a battle of many surprises. What was thought to be a one-off action in mid-April dragged out into an ongoing campaign, which brought one unforeseen victory after another even as allies dropped off in distraction, disillusion, or fear of repression. Every victory anarchists hoped would encourage other groups on campus only seemed to intimidate them further. Unlike campaigns that attempt to use a pattern of strategic tactical escalation, the fight against YWC had its biggest and most participatory action in the very beginning, leaving only those less intimidated by administrative repression to continue the campaign throughout the rest of the year.

One of the most challenging aspects of this campaign was that it took place almost solely on UNC's campus. Many of the student anarchists involved, as well as most of the non-student anarchists, had already given up on campus organizing and had few

## ...So Long as You Don't Do Anything

But what if, despite the skewed playing field, someone manages to say something that threatens to destabilize the power structure? If history is any indication, it swiftly turns out that freedom of expression is not such a sacrosanct right after all. In practice, we are permitted free speech only insofar as expressing our views changes nothing. The premise that speech alone cannot be harmful implies that speech is precisely that which is ineffectual: therefore anything effectual is not included among one's rights.

During World War I, the Espionage Act criminalized any attempt to "cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, [or] refusal of duty" or to obstruct recruiting for the armed forces. President Woodrow Wilson urged the bill's passage because he believed anti-war activity could undermine the US war effort. Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman were arrested under this law for printing anarchist literature that opposed the war. Likewise, the Anarchist Exclusion Act and the subsequent Immigration Act were used to deport or deny entry to any immigrant "who disbelieves in or who is opposed to all organized government." Berkman, Goldman, and hundreds of other anarchists were deported under these acts. There are countless other examples showing that when speech can threaten the foundation of state power, even the most democratic government doesn't hesitate to suppress it.

Thus, when the state presents itself as the defender of free speech, we can be sure that this is because our rulers believe that allowing criticism will strengthen their position more than suppressing it could. Liberal philosopher and ACLU member Thomas Emerson saw that freedom of speech "can act as a kind of 'safety valve' to let off steam when people might otherwise be bent on revolution." Therein lies the true purpose of the right to free speech in the US.



In fact, in nations in which free speech is not legally protected, radicals are not always more isolated—on the contrary, the average person is sometimes more sympathetic to those in conflict with the state, as it is more difficult for the state to legitimize itself as the defender of liberty. Laws do not tie the hands of the state nearly so much as public opposition can; given the choice between legal rights and popular support, radicals are much better off with the latter.

One dictionary defines civil liberty as “the state of being subject only to laws established for the good of the community.” This sounds ideal to those who believe that laws enforced by hierarchical power can serve the “good of the community”—but who defines “the community” and what is good for it, if not those in power? In practice, the discourse of civil liberties enables the state to marginalize its foes: if there is a legitimate channel for every kind of expression, then those who refuse to play by the rules are clearly illegitimate. Thus we may read this definition the other way around: under “civil liberty,” all laws are for the good of the community, and any who challenge them must be against it.

Focusing on the right to free speech, we see only two protagonists, the individual and the state. Rather than letting ourselves be drawn into the debate about what the state should allow, anarchists should focus on a third protagonist—the general public. We win or lose our struggle on the terrain of how much sovereignty the populace at large is willing to cede to the state, how much intrusion it is willing to put up with. If we must speak of rights at all, rather than argue that we have the right to free speech let us simply assert that the state has no right to suppress us. Better yet, let’s develop another language entirely.

## Free Speech and Democracy...

The discourse of free speech in democracy presumes that no significant imbalances of power exist, and that the primary mechanism of change is rational discussion. In fact, a capitalist elite controls most resources, and power crystallizes upward along multiple axes of oppression. Against this configuration, it takes a lot more than speech alone to open the possibility of social change.

There can be no truly free speech except among equals—among parties who are not just equal before the law, but who have comparable access to resources and equal say in the world they share. Can an employee really be said to be as free to express herself as her boss, if the latter can take away her livelihood? Are two people equally free to express their views when one owns a news network and the other cannot even afford to photocopy fliers? In the US, where donations to political candidates legally constitute speech, the more money you have, the more “free speech” you can exercise. As the slogan goes, freedom isn’t free—and nowhere is that clearer than with speech.

Contrary to the propaganda of democracy, ideas alone have no intrinsic force. Our capacity to act on our beliefs, not just to express them, determines how much power we have. In this sense, the “marketplace of ideas” metaphor is strikingly apt: you need capital to participate, and the more you have, the greater your ability to enact the ideas you buy into. Just as the success of a few entrepreneurs and superstars is held up as proof that the free market rewards hard work and ingenuity, the myth of the marketplace of ideas suggests that the capitalist system persists because everyone—billionaire and bell-boy alike—agrees it is the best idea.

strong ties with other potential allies there. There was a lot of support from neighbors and church members in the mostly Black and Latino neighborhood where some anarchists live and fight against gentrification, as well as from the local community of mostly Mexican day-laborers. Although some anarchists were getting feedback and suggestions from these comrades, most of the latter did not feel that the campus was a place in which they had any agency.

In terms of on-campus politics, the effectiveness of administrative repression underscores a significant strategic mistake made by non-student anarchists. Non-student participants consistently underestimated the real or perceived threat that repressive apparatuses like Honor Court represented to many students. Perhaps because they were less vulnerable to this kind of repression, non-students didn’t adequately factor in its potential effects on the overall sustainability of the campaign. Most of these threats proved groundless, as UNC and the assistant district attorney were incapable of successfully prosecuting even disorderly conduct charges. Still, at crucial times when students needed encouragement and reassurance, such affirmation didn’t materialize.

Anarchists also should have been better prepared to counter the use of rhetoric about free speech to frame issues of legitimacy and propriety. Some now speculate that these debates could have played out differently if people had covered campus in wheatpasted posters the night of the Tancredo protest debunking the myth of free speech, analyzing the power imbalances inherent in the venues of public communication, and articulating the importance of stopping white supremacist organizing before it starts. Rather than letting the university administration and its minions consolidate their position, anarchists should have prepared to battle students’ feelings of doubt, isolation, and fear. Later, when students saw the statements of solidarity that SDS gathered, many said it helped them to feel the widespread support for their protest and the importance of the campaign against YWC; perhaps anarchists should have provided this kind of support before the initial momentum dropped.

There were competing ideological visions for what should have been prioritized in the campaign, however. Some hoped to develop good relationships with other students and build stronger campus activism; some were more interested in increasing the tension and conflict between the student body and the administration in general, seeing YWC as an arbitrary vehicle with which to do so. Many off-campus anarchists seemed primarily invested in swiftly destroying YWC so as to return to other, more long-term projects—but in retrospect it seems possible that focusing more on either of the previous two goals might have aided in that process.

After the initial action in mid-April, at least a couple of people dropped out of the campaign—some because of the threat of punishment from the university, others because of tensions with liberal and non-political groups led by people of color on campus. When some members of CHISPA described the fact that they had been unable to ask Tancredo questions as a form of being silenced, this created a complicated situation that many people did not know how to navigate: in shutting down a racist, right-wing bigot, members of a multi-racial crowd were made to feel racist.

This schism was probably avoidable, at least at first. Radicals’ plans to disrupt the event were announced in meetings beforehand, specifically to avoid such a problem; had there been better communication among student groups, CHISPA might have been able to plan for what occurred. Lack of communication with CHISPA about plans for the Tancredo protest can also be blamed on anarchists, however. Had relationships with

CHISPA's less conservative members existed before the beginning of the campaign, a more collaborative strategy might have arisen. If nothing else, anarchists might have learned ahead of time who would be worthwhile allies and who would not. Instead, despite the enthusiasm of many people of color on campus including campus workers, the head of Minority Affairs in the student government, and individual members of BSM and CHISPA, the leadership of most of these groups maintained either silence or vocal opposition to efforts to shut down YWC. This situation underscores a common challenge in such conflicts: anarchists must work out how to form working relationships with the more radical members of a hierarchical group, while bypassing the obstacles posed by that group's internal structure.

Of course, it is possible that the division that occurred was inevitable, in view of the political differences between anarchists and CHISPA leaders. This forces us to ask some hard questions of our own. Would it have made sense for anarchists to take direction from the conservative leaders of a non-political Latino student group? How would the latter have felt about the wheatpasting and pamphlets and newspaper wrap so crucial to the resignation of YWC's advisors? Would they have liked to ask every speaker brought by YWC some hard questions, even if—or precisely in order that—this prevented others from using their preferred tactics? Are we simply to ask hard questions of those who benefit from their power over us until they acquiesce?

The division between the few who dropped out of the campaign and the majority who remained involved brought up important differences in perspective about the meaning of being an ally. Is an ally a white person who takes leadership from people of color, or one who acts in concert with people of color toward a mutually beneficial end? If it means the former, which people of color should such an ally take leadership from? Should white allies take leadership from those they disagree with politically? What does it mean to prioritize perspectives that come out of different lived experiences than your own? How can we balance these concerns?

Much of the discourse around being an ally seems to presume a relationship of one-sided support, with one person or group following another's leadership. While there are certainly times where this makes sense, it is misleading to use the term ally to describe this relationship. In an alliance, the two parties support each other while maintaining their own self-determination and autonomy, and are bound together not by the relationship of leader and follower but by a shared goal. In other words, one cannot actually be the ally of a group or individual with whom one has no political affinity—and this means that one cannot be an ally to an entire demographic group, like people of color, who do not share a singular cohesive political or personal desire.

Anarchist vocabulary around leadership, solidarity, and the autonomy of interdependent social forces has proven desperately lacking in this regard. Rather than talking about leadership, anarchists should be developing the practice of organizing effectively with people who are differently impacted by the struggle. Anarchists should be learning to listen more to the voices of those who are institutionally and socially silenced, and evaluating how structural mechanisms in our organizing affect the likelihood of such people participating.

It is unfortunate that the students who were concerned about their relationships with CHISPA and other groups didn't find ways to strengthen those relationships while continuing to work to stop YWC. Perhaps they could have worked together with people from those groups to hold panels and forums about immigrants' rights and anti-

Extreme right and fascist organizations have jumped onto the free speech bandwagon as well. In the US, Anti-Racist Action and similar groups have been largely effective in disrupting their events and organizing efforts. Consequently, fascists now increasingly rely on the state to protect them, claiming that racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-gay organizing constitutes a form of legally protected speech—and within the framework of the ACLU, it does. Fascist groups that are prevented from publishing their material in most other industrialized democracies by laws restricting hate speech frequently publish it in the United States, where no such laws exist, and distribute it worldwide from here. So in practice, state protection of the right to free expression aids fascist organizing.

If defending free speech has come to mean sponsoring wealthy right-wing politicians and enabling fascist recruiting, perhaps it is time for anarchists to reassess this principle.

## The Rhetoric of Free Expression

There appears to be a broad consensus in the US political spectrum in favor of the right to free speech. While opponents may quibble over the limits, such as what constitutes obscenity, pundits from left to right agree that free speech is essential to American democracy.

Appeals to this tradition of unrestricted expression confer legitimacy on groups with views outside the mainstream, and both fascists and radicals capitalize on this. Lawyers often defend anarchist activity by referencing the First Amendment's provision preventing legislation restricting the press or peaceable assembly. We can find allies who will support us in free speech cases who would never support us out of a shared vision of taking direct action to create a world free of hierarchy. The rhetoric of free speech and First Amendment rights give us a common language with which to broaden our range of support and make our resistance more comprehensible to potential allies, with whom we may build deeper connections over time.

But at what cost? This discourse of rights seems to imply that the state is necessary to protect us against itself, as if it is a sort of Jekyll and Hyde split personality that simultaneously attacks us with laws and police and prosecutors while defending us with laws and attorneys and judges. If we accept this metaphor, it should not be surprising to find that the more we attempt to strengthen the arm that defends us, the stronger the arm that attacks us will become.

Once freedom is defined as an assortment of rights granted by the state, it is easy to lose sight of the actual freedom those rights are meant to protect and focus instead on the rights themselves—implicitly accepting the legitimacy of the state. Thus, when we build visibility and support by using the rhetoric of rights, we may undercut the possibility of struggle against the state itself. We also open the door for the state to impose others' "rights" upon us.

## The Civil Liberties Defense

In the US, many take it for granted that it is easier for the state to silence and isolate radicals in countries in which free speech is not legally protected. If this is true, who wouldn't want to strengthen legal protections on free speech?

# Not Just Free Speech, but Freedom Itself:

## A Critique of Civil Liberties

*“Despite the radical roots of organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union that advocate for state protection of free expression, this form of civil liberties empties the defense of free speech of any radical content, implying that only the state can properly guarantee our ability to express ourselves freely and thus reinforcing the power of the state above the right to free speech itself.”*

Across the years, anarchists have defended freedom of speech. This is important in principle: in an anarchist vision of society, neither the state or any other entity should be able to determine what we can and cannot say. It’s also important in practice: as a revolutionary minority frequently targeted for repression, we’ve consistently had our speeches, newspapers, websites, and marches attacked.

Free speech fights have figured in anarchist campaigns for a long time. The Industrial Workers of the World fought restrictions on pro-union soapboxing by flooding jails until cities were forced to change their ordinances. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman passionately defended free speech in the US during World War I and in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution. During the Makhnovist resistance in the Ukraine and the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia, anarchist forces distinguished themselves from authoritarians both left and right by refusing to restrict the press. More recently the SHAC 7 case, in which animal rights activists were defined as terrorists simply for running a website advocating direct action, showed that speech can still bring us into conflict with the state.

But anti-authoritarians aren’t the only ones who have taken up the banner of free speech. More recently, the right wing in the US has begun to argue that the failure to give conservative views an equal footing with liberal views constitutes a suppression of their free speech. By accusing “liberal” universities and media of suppressing conservative views—a laughable assertion, given the massive structures of power and funding advancing these—they use First Amendment discourse to promote reactionary agendas. Supposedly progressive campuses reveal their true colors as they mobilize institutional power to defend right-wing territory in the marketplace of ideas, going so far as to censor and intimidate opposition.

fascism, or featuring radical people of color debunking myths about free speech. Perhaps students could have arranged opportunities for non-student anarchists to socialize with some of the more radical members of CHISPA. It was sad that some people simply opted out of the campaign; let’s delve into these complicated issues, rather than just back away from them when they get difficult.

In the struggle against YWC, it initially seemed that other groups shared the goal of shutting it down. When it became apparent that this was not the case, that many other groups and individuals on campus believed in YWC’s right to exist and wanted to have dialogue with them, the political terrain shifted. It is possible to blame this on anti-racists’ failure to argue their case that YWC was, in fact, a racist organization. It is also possible that the predominantly liberal discourse on campus was simply incapable of recognizing an established, well-funded, politically legitimate group as white supremacist, given the connotations of covert violence and nighttime terror that this phrase still evokes in the South. It is certain that anti-racists initially underestimated the political legitimacy YWC was able to muster, a mistake that cost the campaign dearly.

## Evaluating Success

There were multiple overlapping goals within this campaign, influenced both by the divergent ideological perspectives of the participants and the different relationships those people had to campus life and student organizations. Evaluations of the campaign’s success vary according to which of these goals one prioritizes.

If the goal was defeating YWC locally by discrediting them, disrupting their events, and destabilizing their infrastructure, the struggle was at least partially successful. While their local chapter is still holding events, they are widely discredited and have almost no membership. After losing their first president to graduation and having two advisors forced to resign, their second president drastically distanced himself from the national organization, publicly criticizing the national organization’s objectives. He himself was forced to resign a couple months later under pressure from the Leadership Institute, which appointed a more appropriate—politically conservative and white—president in early December 2009. When she graduates in spring 2010, it seems possible that the group will simply dissolve.

The struggle against YWC at UNC also disrupted their organizing on a national level. After the publicity from the first demonstration, Providence College refused to permit Tancredo to come speak; YWC has also been banned from becoming a student group at some universities. The national YWC leadership, as well as the right-wing think tank that gave birth to the group, have come under increased scrutiny as a result of this campaign. Their efforts to mainstream more explicitly racist anti-immigrant rhetoric have been hindered by the YWC fiasco. However, as of now YWC groups are still organizing on several college campuses.

If the goal was to strengthen activist networks on campus and foment antagonism towards Chancellor Thorp and his administration, the campaign can only be judged a failure. While it brought together anarchists who had not previously worked together, strengthening some working relationships, campus activism has gone into noticeable decline—and not because it has given way to a more subversive form. It is not clear if this is due to burnout resulting from the fight against YWC or something else entirely. Perhaps

this decline has more to do with Obama's presidency, and the tremendous support he received on campus, than anything else.

In spite of anarchist interventions, it seems that UNC is no more ripe for rebellion now than it was before this struggle. While anarchists have learned from some of their mistakes, it remains to be seen whether the high turnover rate in campus activism inhibits the collective memory necessary for such learning, or if the majority of the student body see the presence of groups like YWC as a problem at all.

This last problem highlights another question: are UNC students any more likely now to see racism? At minimum, a struggle against a politically legitimized purveyor of white supremacist ideas ought to foster a more systemic analysis of racism—as opposed to one centered around personal prejudice, equal opportunity, and so on. Unfortunately, rather than explore the means by which white supremacist ideas are legitimized, the misconception that today racism is limited to that which is outside “legitimate politics,” or the inherently white supremacist implications of opposing immigrants and immigration, most students seemed to disengage entirely—denying the existence of racism in the age of Obama.

Some of this must be attributed to the unwillingness of students to accept the responsibility of confronting racism and privilege at a university founded alongside the institutions of Southern white supremacy. But anti-racists involved in the campaign also made choices that deprioritized spreading this kind of analysis in favor of the more quantitative and immediate goal of shutting down YWC. While propaganda efforts such as the posters and the newspaper wrap highlighted a systemic understanding of racism that went beyond the group being targeted, most tactical decisions were more single-minded. The conflict eventually became a private war between anarchists and YWC, while much of the student body grew deaf to the accusations being thrown back and forth about racism and free speech. Perhaps this is a pitfall of applying SHAC-style tactics in a different arena: while the tactics themselves can be effective, animal rights campaigns often deprioritize building popular support, promoting horizontal structures, or generalizing revolt—which may be essential in other contexts. The small home demonstrations, harassment of advisors or researchers, and small-scale private sabotage common in the animal rights and animal liberation movements can hardly be expected to foster a large-scale political shift on campus.

All the same, there are indications that at least some people were moved by anti-racists' efforts. After the beginning of the fall semester, the DTH was finally forced to begin printing letters to the editor supportive of the campaign. One such letter, written by a groundskeeper in response to a pro-YWC editorial scolding the protesters arrested the previous spring, concluded that,

“[The DTH] has become a rightist mouthpiece for the select few middle-class bluebloods that clearly populate its staff. We claim a due and just victory in spite of your threats. And, by the way, the ‘Special Anti-Racist Issue’ I read at the outset of this semester remains (and I suspect will remain) the best piece of journalism I pull out of a campus newspaper box this academic year.”

Without more relationships on campus, it is difficult to know how many other people may have subtly shifted their attitudes around race, immigration, and direct action.

The failure of anarchists to spread rebellion and long-term opposition to YWC beyond their own preexisting networks is a consequence of choosing to deprioritize on-campus organizing. Though anarchists were able to put their diverse array of skills and enthusiasms to good use, and managed to see an unpopular campaign through to arguable success, they failed to generalize whatever internal conflict and antagonism already permeated campus. Whether this means anarchists should have better estimated their own capacity ahead of time and acted accordingly, or did the best they could with a bad situation, is hard to tell—but it provides lessons for those eager to provoke classroom rebellion worldwide.