

A Welcoming Community's Response to Hatred

We in Gainesville find ourselves confronted with some of the same challenges and concerns that our nation has faced since its inception. A small group of people who promote a misinformed worldview centered on racism, bigotry and hatred is descending upon our welcoming community. They hope to undermine our support for diversity and inclusion by spreading their toxic message of hate.

While many of us would prefer to prevent Richard Spencer and his followers from coming to our city and university in the first place, the Supreme Court is rather clear on their right to be here on equal terms as any other group. The ACLU, American Bar Association, and other leading civil liberties and legal scholars agree. We now must decide how we respond to hatred and racism as a unified community.

False and damaging speech has been used for centuries to oppress our fellow human beings and it must be discouraged. Ibram X. Kendi, a University of Florida historian who won the 2016 National Book Award for nonfiction for his book *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* has called this unfree speech. While the courts have allowed a wide degree of latitude for even unfree speech, Kendi suggests that it should at least come with a warning label. Just as dangerous products must alert the buyer to threat of injury, so too should racist, bigoted and false speech come with a disclaimer, "Warning: what you are about to hear is false and dangerous and has resulted in pain and suffering for millions of people throughout history."

Many in Gainesville will be hosting alternative events that promote our community values of inclusiveness and diversity. These include businesses, places of learning, places of worship, organizations and gatherings of friends. We will be using this outside instigated display of hatred and bigotry to further strengthen our own connections and find new ways to express our unity and indivisibility. We encourage you to seek out these events. Please look for opportunities to participate in positive and growth-inspiring activities on the days surrounding the event.

Others of us will feel the obligation to stand firmly against this incursion in a manner fitting the long history of our right to free expression. We insist that such vile views must not go unchecked and our right to confront and refute such hateful and evil speech must be exercised. This is the right of every citizen and that right shall be protected.

In his address to the cadets of the United States Air Force Academy, Superintendent Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria now famously said in response to racist vandalism at the prep school, "The only way to defeat a horrible idea is with a good idea." We have good ideas in Gainesville and we are ready to use them to defeat racism and other horrible ideas. What Spencer and his followers most want is a spotlight. Their intent is to attract crowds to provoke a reaction that draws media attention to themselves and their racist cause. By staying away from the Phillips Center during the event, we can shun Spencer and his followers and dim their visibility.

Many outside groups will be descending upon our city, not to engage in free speech and protest, but to incite violence and seed chaos. We must not let them do so. This is our moment to rise up and show the rest of the world who we are as a community. Free speech stops when it becomes dangerous conduct. We have an obligation to protect our residents' health and safety and protect property. These outside agents will all disappear and return to their own communities, caring nothing about any after effects of

violence. The role of law enforcement is to ensure public safety and our officers will stand ready to protect Gainesville from becoming become another Charlottesville, or worse.

We have complete faith that our community is ready. We know that our city will come together in an overwhelming show of unity. We are confident that we will stand as one against hatred and offer an anti-racist alternative for the nation to follow. In order for this to happen, we must take a stand against violence and for the positive peaceful association of determined citizens. Let us show the world what we stand for, and not just what we stand against, and let us do so peacefully, affirmatively and courageously.

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