



## CAN Statement on Free Speech on College Campuses

The Campus Antifascist Network (CAN) was formed last year to oppose fascism and address the spike in recruitment activity and violent intimidation from fascist groups on college campuses across the United States. Since November, 2016, more than 200 episodes of white supremacist, Nazi and neo-Nazi activity have occurred on U.S. college campuses.

As has been widely observed, a falsely absolute notion of “free speech” has so far provided the protective sanctuary for much of the new fascist mobilization to grow and fester. Last April in Berkeley, for example, Nazi and neo-Nazi members of groups like Identity Europa---a white supremacist organization---attacked activists at a “Free Speech” rally. Pro-fascist Richard Spencer has repeatedly sued universities that have tried to block him from speaking at their campuses by invoking his right to “free speech.”

The Campus Antifascist Network understands freedom of speech as an important tool for political dissent, and one that should be protected when used without the threat of producing serious physical or mental harm to others.

Fascism, however, is not merely a speech-act or set of ideas: it is a social program aimed toward undermining democracy, murdering its opponents, and establishing a racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-semitic, transphobic, ableist and nationalist authoritarian state. As such, CAN argues that Fascism should \*not\* be protected as free speech because speech in support of such a social program is always an expression of violence. In Charlottesville last August, we saw a precise corollary of fascist speech and action: the night after Richard Spencer led white neo-Nazis in a torch-lit march across the University of Virginia campus chanting racist slogans like “Jews will not replace us,” and “Blood and Soil,” Heather Heyer was murdered when a young neo-Nazi plowed his car into her. Fascist speech always precedes, and predicts, the violence endemic to its social program.

Indeed, Fascist speech on college campuses undermines free speech more than it advances it. By violently disrupting the conditions for all to speak freely, especially for those individuals and groups who are already marginalized, fascist speech attempts to hide its program by deploying “free speech” in order to destroy the free speech of others. Milo Yiannapolous, for example, displays the telephone number for ICE in his speeches and encourages people to identify undocumented students so that they may be arrested or deported. He publically ridicules transgender people, encouraging their social ostracization. Speaking engagements by Milo and other prominent speakers of the so-called "alt-right" seek to eliminate campus communities' ability to ensure the conditions where all can speak freely, as well as the very lives and livelihoods of people who reject or are targeted by fascist thought and ideas.

CAN thus opposes providing platforms for fascist speakers on college campuses. We oppose our communities being used as opportunities for fascists to pursue campaigns of terror and silencing dissent. As institutions of higher education, our communities develop cultures of rigorous inquiry

and democratic inclusion, so in principle there should be no requirement to welcome those who would use this openness as a platform for their violent exclusions. Our position is supported by legal precedent. As legal scholar [Dan Siegel has noted](#), the Supreme Court ruled in 1969 that "there is no free speech right to advocate violence when there is a likelihood that violence will actually occur.... [it] confirmed that while 'mere advocacy' cannot be forbidden, 'incitement to imminent lawless action' is not protected (Brandenburg v. Ohio)."

There is already abundant and direct evidence that Fascists attempt to use "Free Speech" not to converse and debate, but to harass, intimidate, provoke, and recruit people to their reactionary social program. [In a piece that appeared in \*The Nation\*](#), for example, we explained how campus administrators are not letting in "new ideas," but rather opening their doors to fascist agitators who intend to harm their opponents through doxing, intimidation, online harassment and stalking. CAN seeks to safeguard and guarantee the rights of antifascist student protesters whose online accounts are hacked, or who are recorded in class or at campus protests only to find such videos highly edited and posted online by alt.right groups like Turning Point USA with the purpose of stoking anger, harassment, and violent threats. Fascist "free speech" advocates are trying to shout down those with the courage to protest their social program of violence. The hollowness of fascists' reliance on "free speech" is apparent in their attempts to silence dissent and prevent CAN and those of similar good will from protecting our communities against their attacks.

Arthur Rosenberg, in 1934, noted that the key element in the rise of fascism in Germany was not mass support, but acceptance of fascist ideology in mainstream society. Today's adherents of the same murderous, genocidal ideologies that sent the world into war are trying to force their way into our media and educational institutions, and broaden the 'Overton Window' of acceptable political discourse to include violent racism and ethnic cleansing - and yet appear at the same time as the legitimate heirs to a democratic society. Only the best students of Joseph Goebbels would be trying to convince society that they are more acceptable than their victims. It is our intent to not let them succeed.

We encourage students and faculty everywhere to join us in our fight. Contact us at [cannetwork.fighttheh8@gmail.com](mailto:cannetwork.fighttheh8@gmail.com). Also see CAN resources at our website <http://campusantifascistnetwork.com>