

Excerpt from *The Official Anti-Milo Toolkit*

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ABSTRACT The organizers of the Anti-Milo Toolkit aimed to contribute to a broader counter-movement that would make it easier for university campuses to challenge and de-platform white supremacist and fascist speakers sheltered under the auspices of “free speech.” This toolkit gathers info-tracts, syllabi, flyer templates, and other activist materials collected and widely distributed across campuses in preparation to protest Breitbart journalist Milo Yiannopoulos’s 2016 “Dangerous Faggot Tour.” Yiannopoulos was slated to speak at thirteen college campuses in support of an alt-right platform founded upon the weaponization of “free speech,” xenophobia, and transphobia. In addition to providing materials for protest, the authors of the “Anti-Milo Toolkit” take critical aim at appropriation of liberal-academic vocabularies by right-wing groups and Yiannopoulos’s history of outing trans and undocumented students at his events, and call for widespread action against the spread of violent rhetoric targeting marginalized communities in order to maintain the university as a space of sanctuary. Because of its accessibility via digital channels and its wide range of short and readable pieces written in a variety of styles, and because of the collective’s wide network of organizing connections, the kit circulated very broadly.

KEYWORDS free speech, Milo Yiannopoulos, transphobia, xenophobia

Milo Yiannopoulos is a Breitbart journalist and member of the so-called alt-right,¹ a loosely affiliated group mobilized largely through internet platforms with far-right ideologies tied to white nationalism, Islamophobia, anti-feminism, homophobia, transphobia, and anti-Semitism.

The name of his speaking tour—“The Dangerous Faggot Tour”—which traveled through thirteen US college campuses over the course of three months, brands itself on much of the same sensationalism that fueled the rise of Donald Trump: inflammatory rhetoric couched in aggressive racism, xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, and Islamophobia.

Yiannopoulos repeatedly used his identities—as a white, foreign-born, gay man—to evade accountability for his violent rhetoric. And yet, he has leveraged the recent gains around transgender rights in the United States to argue that such gains are a “distraction” from the rights of white gay men.²

He has also called for the incitement of physical violence against transgender women,³ has named Black Lives Matter, a group that calls attention to the disproportionate number of Black Americans killed by law enforcement, a “terrorist organization,” and has called feminism a “cancer” that must be obliterated.

As he has traveled through a number of university campuses these past months, the level of violence at his events has been escalating.

In December of 2016, Milo outed a transgender woman who was a student at the University of Wisconsin and who had been active in the push for gender-neutral bathrooms on campus.⁴ He projected her face and name onto a screen in front of hundreds of people, livestreamed the projection to his internet audience, and belittled and mocked her gender identity. This resulted in a deluge of hate mail and her inability to return to campus.

In mid-January of 2017, Milo’s talk was shut down by activists at the University of California, Davis, but not before large groups of neo-Nazis and white supremacists from around the state of California gathered to network with one another at the event, creating a potentially violent and extremely unsafe situation for the queer, gender-nonconforming, and transgender students in the crowd. Directly following the shutdown of this event, student activists at the University of California, Davis, began receiving rape and death threats.⁵

In late January of 2017, an anti-racist organizer protesting Milo’s talk at the University of Washington was shot by a white supremacist and left in critical condition.⁶ Though his actions were completely unprovoked, the shooter was released by police custody on grounds of “self-defense.”

In November of 2016, we began a multi-directional email campaign to contact faculty and administration at the University of California, Berkeley, about the potential for real physical harm that Milo’s presence on campus would pose to the student body, particularly its most marginalized members—disabled, transgender, students of color, Muslim and undocumented students.⁷

In January of 2017, after a successful email campaign, over one hundred University of California, Berkeley, faculty signed a letter to the administration calling for the cancellation of Yiannopoulos’s event, citing the illegality of harassment based on gender identity (Title IX) which Yiannopoulos’s rhetoric has repeatedly violated.⁸ The administration refused to cancel the event, citing that the right to free speech overrode discrimination and harassment.

Yiannopoulos’s claim for free speech rights—a claim ratified by the Berkeley administration—is a ruse, a way to confuse liberal commentators, and ultimately,



FIGURE 1. The contributors of the Anti-Milo Toolkit used artist Annette Lemieux's striking 1995 image to call protestors to organize against Milo Yiannopoulos's transphobic and fascist campus tour. The original image titled "Left, Right, Left, Right" consists of thirty photolithographs—three copies each of ten images—which Lemieux sourced from journalistic documents dating from the 1930s to the 1970s. The end product includes layers of photographs depicting a raised fist, belonging to various famous political and cultural figures, including Martin Luther King Jr., Richard Nixon, Jane Fonda, and Miss America, while many others are anonymous, including a preacher, a sailor, and community members. These compiled images held up on protest signs signify a demonstration and serve as a perfect gesture that connects the history and legacy of protest with the urgency of the present.

let's not mince words, a cover for spreading genocidal politics. This was made clear when, the day after their event at Davis was canceled, Milo's supporters restaged the notorious pepper spray incident of 2011. In reenacting state violence against student protesters, Yiannopoulos and his supporters make very clear how much they value students' freedom of speech and bodily integrity (and remind us of how patchily such values have been upheld by the same campus administrators who now preach the doctrine of free speech *über alles*).

Despite such displays of violence, Milo apparently continues to fool some Free Speech Movement alumnis,⁹ who have come to treat freedom of speech as a religious imperative. In their recent editorial, such alums have nothing to say about Milo's racist abuse of Leslie Jones,¹⁰ or his grotesque harassment of a transgender student at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, suggesting that the editorialists have no way to critically parse protected speech from harassment. Their edi-

torial clearly illustrates how free speech, if pursued at the expense of a broader project for social emancipation, simply ratifies and sanctifies existing hierarchies and mechanisms of power, which condition what is able to be said and done by whom and where.

The demand for free speech only helps build democratic possibilities insofar as it is articulated within the framework of a broader push for social equality and emancipation (as, for example, in the Industrial Workers of the World early-twentieth century campaigns for the right to give speeches in public, or in the Free Speech Movement itself, which gained traction *only* through its association with the civil rights movement).

Countering Milo and the alt-right requires an ability to critically assess the ways in which the vocabulary of liberal-academic discourse is currently being co-opted by extreme right-wing groups in order to legitimate and further a platform of genocide and terror against historically marginalized groups. Rather than cling to liberal ideologies that fail to place the rhetoric of rights within historically specific frameworks, we must take a strong stance against the legitimization and normalization of harassment, hate speech, and physical violence—a trend that is already well under way in the current Trump administration.

We must hold the university accountable to its pledge to remain a sanctuary for communities that have been historically under assault by those in power. We can continue this work by not allowing space for the spread of violence.

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Notes

1. *Wikipedia*, “Alt-Right.”
2. Yiannopoulos, “I Am So Done.”
3. Yiannopoulos, “I Am So Done.”
4. Landsbaum, “Alt-Right Troll.”
5. Buchanan, “Man behind the Curtain.”
6. *Democracy Now!*, “Seattle.”
7. “Keep Milo Out—UC Berkeley.”
8. University of California, Berkeley, Faculty, “Open Letters.”
9. Cohen, “Free Speech Movement Veterans.”
10. Isaac, “Twitter Bars Milo Yiannopoulos.”

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