

Counterprotesters overwhelm free speech rally in Boston

The people who attended a rally at the Boston Common did not bear Nazi symbols or racist slogans. But the tens of thousands of counterprotesters saw their intention as defending hate speech.

by [Henry Gass](#) and [Story Hinckley](#)

This article appears in the [September 13, 2017](#) issue.

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) A free speech rally in Boston organized by groups with right-wing ties on August 19 brought out tens of thousands of counterprotesters week after demonstrations in Charlottesville, in which three people died.

The counterprotesters' aim was to assert their own values and to shout down what many view as hate speech rooted in white supremacy.

[Boston saw the largest crowd among rallies and protests nationally, some taking a right-wing position while others aimed to "Eclipse Hate," as a Portland, Oregon, demonstration was called.]

The Boston counterprotesters marched peacefully along a two-mile route to the rally on Boston Common, many of them protesting publicly for the first time. After the rally organizer arrived with the permit, the free speech protesters were patted down by Boston police officers before passing into a fenced-off area

Those who attended the rally at the Boston Common bandstand did not bear Nazi symbols, racist slogans, or signs. One wore a "Don't Tread on Me" hat.

Matt, a mechanic from Hull, Massachusetts, wore a "Proud Boys" T-shirt—a reference to a far-right Western chauvinist group. He said he came to support the free speech protesters, but isn't being allowed inside the fenced area.

“Anyone that is different from them will be considered a Nazi,” he says, pointing to the dozens of black-bandanna-clad anti-fascist, or Antifa, activists members walking through the park. “I am not a Nazi. I respect people who respect me, of all races.”

A tall white man in his early twenties, who asked to only be identified by his first initial, A., said came to support free speech, not hate speech.

“We’re not seeing each other as people,” says A., who before he went inside the fenced area identified himself as a Libertarian. “It doesn’t matter if you’re with Antifa or if you consider yourself a white nationalist.”

Among the counterprotesters was a young woman named Amelia, who was wearing a yellow felt Star of David on her dress. She said she has joined a half-dozen rallies since Trump became president. On August 19, for the first time she wore a bracelet with her allergies and emergency contact information written on it.

“It’s always going to be difficult when there are people out clearly with two sides,” she says.

The man next to her, also wearing a felt Star of David and a bracelet, added, “There’s an aspect of fear to it that’s more present after what happened in Charlottesville.”

Matthew Martin, a young African American man wearing a black T-shirt, said he wasn’t opposing free speech.

“Why can’t ISIS and al-Qaeda have nonviolent representatives march? Because it’s incitement,” he said. “The Klan is a terrorist organization . . . so if ISIS can’t march, the Klan shouldn’t be able to march.”

A version of this article, which was edited on August 25, appears in the September 13 print edition under the title “Counterprotesters greet ‘free speech rally.’”