



Atlanta Antifascists

Richard Spencer Gets a Not-so-Warm Welcome at Auburn University, Alabama, April 18, 2017

Introduction

On Tuesday, April 18, white nationalist leader Richard Spencer (of the National Policy Institute and [Altright](#)) gave a speech at Auburn University in Alabama, which is less than two hours away from Atlanta. Anti-racists mobilized against this event and, shortly after the end of Richard Spencer's talk, students angrily escorted Spencer's white power followers off campus and chased some of them through the streets of Auburn.

In the run-up to the Tuesday event, Spencer's forces blatantly organized for violence on campus, using scarcely veiled language of assembling "safety" squads, and urging racists and far-Right anti-communists to travel from far and wide to invade the campus. On the actual day, the far-Right ended up having a hard time, with their attempts at aggression met with compelling responses from students and other anti-racists. While white nationalists predictably declared a victory, this verdict was informed by delusional claims about the day. For example, racist claimed that their members were not really chased off campus so much as followed, and that their forces "drastically outnumbered" anti-racists. Such messaging from white nationalists, combined their focus on waging war on anti-fascists in the aftermath of Tuesday, suggests that they are in fact unhappy about how the day went.



Spencer's Visit Approaches

Richard Spencer used a Youtube video to announce that he would be speaking at Auburn just under a week before he was scheduled to appear on campus. Before Spencer's announcement, [an Alt-Right "White Student Union" for Auburn had launched a website and begun circulating antisemitic flyers on campus](#), attempting to cultivate a climate of intimidation on campus. Anti-racists including our organization began circulating news of Spencer's visit to Auburn soon following his announcement – since events at Auburn were part of regional coordination by Alt-Right white nationalists, we believed that anti-racists should likewise treat this event as a regional concern since a victory at Auburn would affect all of us as people living in the South. While the state-friendly anti-extremists of the Southern Poverty Law Center urged students to avoid and not confront the racist mobilization, several Auburn students shared our view that fascist organizing prospers when left unopposed. A [Twitter account](#) was established by Auburn students opposed to racist organizing, and a call for loud, vocal opposition to Spencer's visit was released. Atlanta Antifascists solicited endorsements from other anti-racist and leftist organizations for the call to action. At this point, the situation began shifting rapidly.

The first change came on Friday when Auburn University canceled Spencer's booking, citing concerns over student safety. While we were happy that white power organizing had hit a roadblock, it was also clear that actions of the sort taken by the

University, could just as easily be used against leftists and anti-racists in the future. For this reason, appeals to cops, courts, or other authorities have never been at the center of our work as anti-racists.

Richard Spencer issued a furious response to the University, claiming that Auburn would “rue the day” they made this decision, and stating that he would fly in key white nationalists for the Auburn event as well as organize squads equipped with “safety gear.” (Shortly before Spencer announced his Auburn visit, he had discussed the formation of a “white bloc” to take on anti-racist opponents.)

Denied a room on campus, Spencer stated that he would hold a rally of some sort anyway, the constant subtext of his statements being that organizing far-Right forces to go after enemies on campus would be a fine alternative to a speaking engagement. Amongst those Spencer flew in for his event was [Mike Peinovich AKA “Mike Enoch,”](#) operator of TheRightStuff website as well as “The Daily Shoah” podcast. In the days to come, other far-Right formations mobilized to descend on Auburn: Identity Evropa, [Brad Griffin’s “Alt-South” network,](#) [Anti-Communist Action,](#) the Traditionalist Worker Party, and the [League of the South \(who took on a security role.\)](#)

The other major escalation took place on the other side of the country, where on Saturday the 15th far-Right forces (including open white supremacists) clashed with anti-fascist protesters in Berkeley, California. This event, portrayed by the far-Right as a victory, emboldened more far-Right and white nationalist forces (including some of the groups listed earlier) to pledge to be at Auburn with the hope of routing their enemies in a brawl. Just as in Berkeley where organized far-Right forces used “free speech” as a pretext to organize violence and attempt to control territory, in the days as Spencer’s Auburn visit drew near, his coalition was increasingly brazen about wanting to control the turf with violence.

(A war of posters and counter-flyers also broke out on campus, with [anti-racist flyers against Spencer’s visit](#) being countered with [fake “Antifa” flyers](#) as well as White Student Union materials portraying militant anti-racists as troublemakers willing to attack random bystanders.)

While Spencer's forces organized for a physical fight, Richard Spencer also pushed through legal channels for his event to go ahead. On Tuesday afternoon, mere hours before the event began, Spencer announced that he had obtained a court order compelling Auburn University to allow his speaking event to proceed as initially scheduled. Spencer's case had been argued by Atlanta white nationalist attorney [Sam Dickson](#) – a fixture on the racist scene nationally – on behalf of Cameron Padgett, a student who had made the booking for Spencer's visit using a Georgia State University (Atlanta) email address.



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Letter of Agreement

Customer	Reservation: 33198
Cameron Padgett Misc. Events	Event Name: Alternative Right Status: Tentative Phone: 912-856-2371 Email Address: cpadgett4@student.gsu.edu Event Type: speaker Event Coordinator: Debbie Hood
Bookings / Details	Quantity Price Amount
Tuesday, April 18, 2017	
6:30 PM - 9:00 PM Alternative Right (Tentative) Foy Auditorium theater style for 200	
Room Charge:	1 \$700.00 \$700.00
	Subtotal \$700.00
	Grand Total \$700.00

Foy Hall booking, exhibit in Sam Dickson's lawsuit

Tuesday Afternoon and Evening

The court order changed the scene. Had Spencer held an outdoor rally in defiance of his cancelled booking, our expectation was that this mobilization would be combined with bands of white power/"Alt-Right" militants ready to street fight and to target those they saw as enemies (for example, people of color, Jewish students, or leftists.) Alabama "Alt-South" organizer Brad Griffin later wrote that Spencer's court victory was in some sense also disappointing for him, because with the changed situation "I wouldn't get a chance to fight and win a bit of glory for myself [...] in [...] an epic throw down." Griffin's claim clarifies what the far-Right forces mobilizing for Spencer had in mind shortly before the court made its ruling. With

the court ruling, however, they'd have to queue to go inside a room, being scanned with a metal-detecting wand beforehand.

Students came out in large numbers in response to Spencer's speaking event, with some protesting outside, some attending Spencer's talk to press him, some by contrast taking a "no platform" approach, and others merely checking out the scene. Into this situation, leftists and anti-racists from several parts of the South also arrived. The fascists who from mid-afternoon onward were spotted in bands around campus, took position at the venue for Spencer's speech, separated from protesters by police and barriers.

It was a solid week of organizing by anti-racists — students of various political persuasions as well as "outsiders" to Auburn like our organization — which enabled a powerful response to Spencer's assembled forces. From our perspective, some things went far better than others. At Auburn, the black bloc — a tactic originating from radical Left and anarchist movements in Europe during the second half of the 20th Century — was generally a shit-show, although the fact that networks activated and anti-fascists traveled to attend was itself a positive. Auburn Police were extremely aggressive in targeting anti-racists who were wearing masks or bandanas (to guard against later harassment by the far-Right.) By contrast, white supremacists obscuring their faces were occasionally told to remove masks but overall, were not aggressively targeted. It is to be expected that the police, whose unions overwhelmingly endorsed Donald Trump's right-wing populist presidential campaign and who generally protect a racist status quo, will typically side with organized racists over anti-racists.

Anti-racists — from Auburn and from elsewhere — maintained a lively presence outside Foy Hall during the time people entered for Spencer's speech, as well as during the event itself. This anti-racist presence played some role in stopping people from drifting away before Spencer's speech was over and racists filed out. Chants of "Fuck Richard Spencer!" were popular. However, there was also friction between some anti-racists who had travelled to Auburn, and other parts of the student body. For example, some "outsiders" were at first annoyed by Auburn pride chants, since they seemed to be an attempt to replace more pointed chants against the white supremacists gathering on campus. In retrospect, the situation was

complicated than we initially understood; the Auburn spirit chants may have also communicated collective confidence in the face of adversary: “We’re proud to be Auburn, we’re going to stick together and see each other through this situation.”

The only arrests of the day occurred while Spencer’s speech was happening. Ryan Matthew King — who has subsequently been identified as a Montgomery, Alabama tattoo artist and “compatriot” of the racist/secessionist League of the South — was stationed outside and tried to attack an anti-racist in the crowd. King’s assault did not go as planned, with [King promptly landing on the ground after misdelivering a blow](#), and receiving a stern physical rebuke from the crowd. King and two anti-racists were arrested as the police rushed in.



League of the South “compatriot” Ryan Matthew King at Auburn University before starting fight

Tension grew in the crowd as it got later and darker outside, with the tide of opinion moving even further against Richard Spencer after he made the mistake of attacking college football and Black athletes. As white nationalists filed out, they received an angry escort from campus by the assembled crowd. Matthew Heimbach’s troopers of the Traditionalist Worker Party and other white supremacists attempted a poorly-conceived charge on students and other protesters, but soon realized their mistake.

Some of the departing white nationalists were chased by students and protesters. A few racists ended up worse for wear.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Spencer's event at Auburn showed that wherever ideological racists try to organize on campus, they should expect determined opposition, even at campuses such as Auburn with a reputation as conservative. The events at Auburn demonstrate how closely Far-Right organizing for violence accompanies the "free speech" activity of white power leaders like Spencer. On the 18th, white power activists were restrained in their violence compared to what they had threatened in days beforehand. Combined students and Southern anti-racists gave every racist-instigated act of violence an unmistakable response. Further, despite some concerns from Auburn students about militant anti-racists arriving on campus from elsewhere, Auburn students themselves chased and confronted "Alt-Right" racists at the end of the evening.

Since white nationalists can be slow learners, we expect that the "White Student Union" at Auburn may drag on for some time. For information on opposition to this White Student Union and other racist activity in and around Auburn, check out twitter.com/no_nazi_auburn

Photo galleries of Alt-Right, racist and far-Right activists at Auburn University on April 18 are available [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

antifa atl / April 25, 2017 / Alabama, Alt-Right, Alt-South, Altright, Anti-Communist Action, Auburn "White Student Union", Auburn AL, Auburn University, Berkeley CA, Cameron Padgett, Identity Evropa, League of the South, Mike Enoch, Mike Peinovich, National Policy Institute, Ryan Matthew King, Sam Dickson, TheRightStuff, Traditionalist Worker Party

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