

# The Battle for Sidewalk Neutrality

The public spaces in Garberville have become a battleground, and every year at about this time the war really heats up. However, the last two Friday evenings in a row I attended peaceful protest demonstrations at the corner of Redwood Drive and Church Street in Garberville.

These were well organized and disciplined actions, and the protesters' right to use the sidewalk was reaffirmed by law enforcement, and challenged by none. Protesters occupied that stretch of sidewalk from about 6 to 9 p.m. both nights. Will this become a regular thing, like Paul Encimer's Friday afternoon Peace Protests under the clock, or will the situation improve, making further protest unnecessary?

It's funny how people seem to understand that when you stand on the corner with a political sign in your hand, you are exercising your First Amendment right to free speech, but if you stand there with a sign that says "Hungry" or "Anything Helps" you are considered a nuisance. We should be thankful that we don't have street preachers here in Garberville. That's another fully protected First Amendment activity. Think about that the next time you see a kid with a guitar and an open case, because he has every right to be there, and things could be worse.

And that's exactly what these protest demonstrations were all about — the right to use the public sidewalk. Okra Dingle, a spokesperson for the protesters put it this way: "We want to change the tone of civility on our sidewalks." Apparently, the previous weekend people were sprayed with a water hose, chased and pushed into the street by an irate building owner just for playing music in front of his downtown storefront, after business hours. This according to several of the protesters who witnessed the event, one of whom gave a detailed account to a Sheriff's Deputy, for the purpose of filing charges.

I think they proved, pretty conclusively, that if you show up in numbers, act with discipline, and have someone with a video camera recording everything, you can exercise your right to free speech in Garberville and change the tone of civility. At least they were able to do so on two consecutive Friday evenings in August.

Personally, I'd rather listen to someone play the guitar, or steel drum, or fiddle, than hear protesters chant slogans. I'd rather look over a collection of handmade jewelry or albums or cookies than read one more protest sign, and I'd rather give someone five dollars so they can get something to eat than get any more junk email from non-profit organizations begging for my money. People have the right to use the public commons, and they have the right to engage you. There are worse things in life.

I realize that a lot of you feel that anyone who engages you is "violating your space," but space is a place we share. It's kind of like social media, but it's more immediate, and you can't "block" people. As people spend more time in "virtual" environments, the demands of the real world seem onerous, but engaging with people in your own town, on the sidewalk, is a good way to stay in practice.

Let me try to put it in terms you might understand.

***'The sidewalk is not tailored to your search history or media bias, nor does it monitor your behavior or collect personal information about you. The sidewalk does not require a high-speed connection or impose data limits.'***

Whether you are shopping, searching for information, or looking for someone, the sidewalk remains a critical, irreplaceable tool, both for business and the public sector, precisely because of its inherent neutrality and open access to everyone. That's why it's so important to protect the sidewalk and to respect everyone's right to use it.

There's practically no public WiFi anywhere in Southern Humboldt, but we all use the sidewalk. We really shouldn't be surprised to see lots of people talking, making connections, looking for connections, sharing stories, music, art, goods and services on the sidewalks of Garberville. It's the only social network a lot of people have, and it's the only truly neutral network in Humboldt County, but only if we can respect people's right to use it.

Protecting sidewalk neutrality in Southern Humboldt demands that we respect everyone's First Amendment right to free speech, whether they preach the gospel, play the guitar or beg for spare change. It might make you uncomfortable, if you're unfamiliar with the interface, but the Garberville sidewalk remains the most active and essential social network in Southern Humboldt. Let's keep it open to everyone.

-John Hardin [lygsbtd.wordpress.com](http://lygsbtd.wordpress.com)

## 'Hot Summer' Continues from page 1

In mid-September however Jim Morrison got away with singing the lyric "higher" in "Light My Fire" on Ed Sullivan against explicit instructions. The next day however CBS banned a daytime soap that dealt with interracial relationships.

The numbers have shifted to the left – 40,000 in Boston facing down a handful of white supremacist types. The Bay Area the same. But the media has taken its clue from the President and is more concerned about the self-defensive violence of anti-fascists not the murderous rage of the altright against blacks, Jews, Mexicans, women, and even whites who don't dig "White Supremacy."

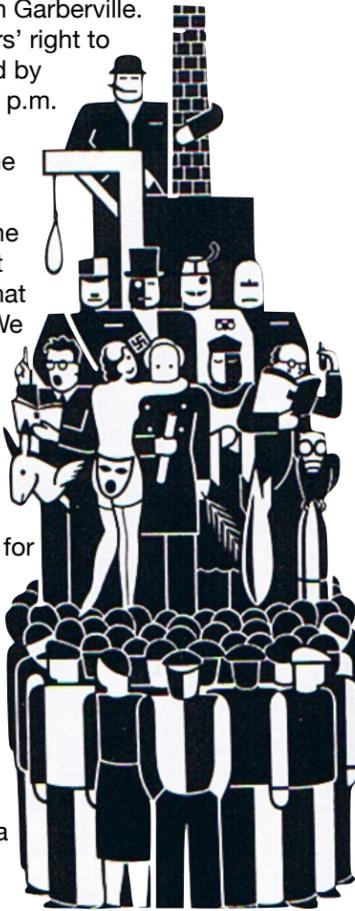
(What will happen when the altright finally gets it that Trump is under "house arrest" by the Military-Industrial Complex? Probably lead to a few assassinations by disappointed white supremacists – the deplorables scapegoating the disposables. Any such violence will be downplayed and forgotten by the media as quickly as possible. The media wants to draw no lessons from deaths like that of Heather Heyer.)

Racism is not so obvious here in the Deep North. The open war is against poor people and street people. After all, Eureka's NAACP cosponsored its Martin Luther King with the often lethal Eureka Police Department. Is it that the suffering of poor whites doesn't count, just like the supremacists claim, or is there just relief that someone else beside black people are being scapegoated by the EPD?

The competing Summer of Hate finds our NoHum and SoHum gentrifiers still trying to make *unfair housing* work its miracle against those – mostly whites - who it deems too poor. "Homeless" stands in for the N word here in the Deep North. Keeping people without housing is still the strategy. (Elsewhere you can read the adventures of Josh Sweet, hosing down the streets of those he deems undesirable. Shades of Patsy Thoreson and Pat O'Brien who carried out the class war on a more intimate scale.)

September will tell the tale. Garberville's ruling gentry would like to repeat last year, close down the Town Square and cleanse the camps along the Forest Freeway and the River. The police try to help by suppressing complaints, but so far their hands are tied by the intrusion of legal principles into their happy Vigilante-Cop relationship. Murderous rages are still in evidence among the haters and as only one side has the guns the outcome can't be happy. Hopefully the Trimmigrants may serve to dilute the hate, but a large section of this coalition led by rich weed growers paradoxically links to old settler forces motivated by hatred of the **Cannabiz**. These old settler forces link up more logically with Town Gentry in rejecting the very poor people that the tourist industry needs for cheap, unhoused labor. These are the locals who subsist on low wages, exiles from the benefits of the **Cannabiz** payscale.

The CounterCulture has not yet shown any indication that there is a political will left for anything except fruitless voting in a fixed system. Yet, if time travel took any hippy from the sixties and dropped them, pack, dog and all into today's mean streets and tried to do any *Truckin'*, (!!!) facing a water hosing might be the least of their worries. As Phil Ochs pointed out then, it doesn't seem to be really "interesting anybody beyond a small circle of friends." - Paul Encimer





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-MLK

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