

Protest at the Pavilion
Students stand up to Richard Spencer
By Adam Austad

Rows of expressionless men garbed in thick bullet-proof vests held wooden police batons. Their faces were frozen as they lined both sides of the road leading to the MSU Pavilion for Agriculture and Livestock Education. Their composed exteriors did not wither as protesters approached them, wearing indignant expressions and spewing condemning remarks. The backdrop of the gray sky added the final touch to the dismal scene.

On March 5, 2018, hundreds arrived at Commuter Lot 89 to protest a speech given by Richard Spencer, president of white supremacist think tank National Policy Institute, who was known for provoking violent, hate-fueled protests across the country. Though Spencer was scheduled to speak at 4:30 p.m., protesters from across Michigan were there long before he arrived. Waiting for him was an ocean of bodies hoisting banners and posters, yelling, "Nazis go home!"

"I think he's a neo-Nazi, plain and simple," said Kathryn Flucht, junior in engineering at Grand Valley State University. "There's no such thing as a 'peaceful ethnic cleansing' as he suggests. He's too cowardly to come out and actually say that he hates diversity and races other than his own, and so he hides behind carefully worded speeches. He incites his followers to violence and does so in a way that manages not to implicate himself."

Flucht had a boyfriend and some friends who went to MSU. When she heard Richard Spencer was coming, she asked them to let her know about any protests that would be happening. After attending the protest, she thought MSU could have put up a much stronger fight and was disappointed in their small confrontation. However, many students did not come to protest Spencer because they felt that denying him and his followers attention was a stronger message.

"MSU is a proudly diverse community of accomplished scholars that honors free speech, while holding individuals responsible for what they say and do," said MSU Interim President John Engler in an email after spring break. "I'm especially proud of MSU students and others who shunned the racist gathering and chose to attend other events offered that day, and possibly helped end this traveling road show of hate."

As a public institution, MSU was legally required to rent space for Spencer, but the legal team negotiated a location off the main campus and during spring break to minimize danger and disruption. There were 25 arrests, but only one was an MSU student. Most notably, after the failed indoctrination attempt at MSU, Spencer said that he would be indefinitely terminating his visits to college campuses.

"Richard Spencer canceled his speaking tour on campuses because of the lack of people that came to his rally here," said Brittany Wise, an MSU senior majoring in arts and humanities. "He saw that his hate-filled belief system is not something that Spartans or others in the community

are willing to tolerate. By blocking people from getting in, we told them we didn't want their hate here. I wasn't personally involved with any of the violence, but seeing it first-hand made this issue even more real to me.”

The dismayed activists that huddled close together on that chilly Monday afternoon embodied the attitude of the “Stop Spencer at Michigan State University” Facebook page, with 970 followers, which acted as a super-conductor—electrifying the community. MSU was not the first school to stand up against hate speech, but the rally in front of the Pavilion showed that Spartans had the means and determination to act as leaders in the fight against discrimination.

WC: 546

PN: Pavilion for Agriculture and Livestock Education, Commuter Lot 89, Richard Spencer, Kathryn Flucht, Grand Valley State University, MSU Interim President John Engler, Brittany Wise

I just came here to say that I think this story is very well-organized! You touched on all the points we wanted you to and you did it in such a logical manner. Nice job!

-Emily

Good Work! It is just opinionated enough without overstepping the line I think lol.

-Logan

^Agreed. Good work on this Adam! You really captured the essence of this event.

-Syd