INTRODUCTION

Our issues of hate are killing our country . . . still.

—Terri Lee Freeman

Combating hate is one of the most pressing problems we face in our democracy. Of course, as I type those words, that observation no longer appears particularly controversial; it has become almost commonplace now to assert that "America has a hate problem."[1] However, when I began the research for this book in 2014 and cited the urgent nature of this problem, I found that few people agreed with my assessment. Most people I spoke with dismissed hate as something existing on the fringes of society, as something that a small number of extremists were creating in their disturbed minds, or as something that internet trolls were trafficking in to goad a reaction out of people. Yet, even then, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) was reporting that 784 hate groups were active in the United States.[2] I would often quote that number in public presentations to shock audiences who believed that groups like the Ku Klux Klan or neo-Nazis no longer really existed, or at least not in such large numbers. In one sense their shock was understandable, because until 2014 the number of active hate groups had actually been declining.[3]

Similarly, when I began fieldwork for this project, at hate group rallies and the protests of them, I invariably found that the rallies were poorly attended; they would typically involve around ten to twenty attendees carrying an array of flags and signs with hateful messages such as "God Hates Fags" or "Diversity = White Genocide." The racist hate groups, usually wearing fascist or nationalist insignia, would wave their flags and signs from behind a line of police officers, shout some form of hate speech, and then leave the rally space, usually without

delivering any formal speeches or receiving any media attention.[4] At the time such poorly attended public events seemed to be more of a nuisance than a public spectacle worthy of concern or serious research. It was easy—then—to dismiss those 784 groups as fringe groups that did not pose a real threat to people or to our democracy.[5]

However, like any wound left untreated, hate began to fester. Each year, between 2015 and 2017, the SPLC reported that the number of active hate groups was steadily increasing; by 2018 the number jumped to 1,020, and that year's total included a 50 percent increase in white nationalist hate groups.[6] Beyond the sheer increase in hate group numbers, these figures testify that hate is not something that exists only at the fringes of our society. On the contrary, we have seen a surge in hate group organizing and not just in obscure online spaces but openly, even on college campuses.[7] In other words, "we've seen hate becoming mainstream."[8] Numerous investigative reports have even detailed the prominence of hate speech, as well as direct hate group membership, among law enforcement officers, military officers, the U.S. Border Patrol and Coast Guard, and firefighters.[9] In short, in direct contrast to the idea that hate groups and hate speech thrive only at the extremist edges, all available evidence indicates that hate is a widespread and all-pervasive problem, festering in even the most venerated corners of our society.

Not surprisingly, in addition to these increases in hate speech and hate group organizing, federal agencies have also reported increases in hate crimes and violence during this period, noting specific spikes over the course of the 2016 U.S. presidential election.[10] In fact, within one month of the election—an election punctuated by anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, nationalist, ableist, racist, and misogynist campaign rhetoric—more than one thousand bias-related incidents were reported across the United States.[11] Although connections between hate speech, like that in Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric, and physical violence are sometimes dismissed, a number of studies and reports in recent years have traced direct connections between the rise in hate crimes and Trump's hate-filled rhetoric.[12]

Moreover, although the FBI is quick to assure us that "hate itself is not a crime—and the FBI is mindful of protecting freedom of speech and other civil liberties," many high-profile hate crimes in recent years have been linked to online hate speech and its radicalizing effect on perpetrators.[13] For example, "white supremacist Wade Michael Page posted in online forums tied to hate before he went on to murder six people at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in

2012. Prosecutors said Dylann Roof 'self-radicalized' online before he murdered nine people at a black church in South Carolina in 2015. Robert Bowers, accused of murdering 11 elderly worshipers at a Pennsylvania synagogue in October [2018], had been active on Gab, a Twitter-like site used by white supremacists."[14] The relationship between hate speech and violence—which I explore from a rhetorical perspective in chapter 1—is complex. However, it is clear from these examples, and others like them, that the fight against hate-motivated violence cannot easily be separated from the struggle to combat hate speech.

Hate speech can be defined in a number of ways, but for present purposes hate speech should be understood as speech that defames, denigrates, dehumanizes, or inspires violence against particular groups of people on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, or other identity category.[15] Examples of such speech clearly abound in the host of supremacist, misogynist, racist, anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-Semitic, and Islamophobic speech that persistently permeates our online and off-line spaces. As I argue in chapter 3, however, hate speech works not just as a message but as a *tactic* that enables larger oppressive systems—including nationalism and fascism. Throughout this book I thus refrain from equating hate speech with those offensive insults that bigots spew in the presence of minoritized individuals—as, for example, when they use the N-word or intentionally misgender someone. These are, of course, important instances of hate that should be combated; however, that type of "hate speech" resides in the realm of interpersonal offensive speech. The focus of this book, instead, is on the hate speech that permeates our public, political discourse—the hate speech disseminated by power holders and organized hate groups that perpetuates violence and denies targeted people both access to the spaces of democratic deliberation and their constitutionally protected rights to life and security.

The specific, complex phenomena discussed throughout this introduction, including the increases in hate speech and hate crimes and nationalist and supremacist discourses, merit their own detailed analyses. However, they will never be shorn of their ambiguity and contingency. While I fully acknowledge that terms like *nationalism* and *hate* should not always be equated or conflated, in what follows I place them in conversation with our ongoing debates about free speech, hate speech, and democracy. By treating them as interconnected, I am able to focus on moving past the conceptual disputes that can, at times, hinder our ability to effectively deliberate about how to best combat hate.

Hate Speech, Nationalism, and the Alt-Right

Although initially dismissed in the years since I began this project, hate speech has become more widely recognized as a serious, contemporary problem. As this section details, many would now likely agree that rising occurrences of hate speech have manifested not only in increases in hate group recruitment and hate-motivated violence but also in the mainstreaming of supremacist, fascist, and nationalist rhetorics. In the United States, for example, hate speech has been central to the highly publicized rise of the "alt-right."[16] Although some have argued that the alt-right is a group engaged in "nonviolent dialogue" that simply advocates for the preservation of white identity, the alt-right has been characterized by both the Anti-Defamation League and the SPLC as a "new" form of violent white supremacy.[17] Other experts concur, treating the alt-right as an umbrella term useful for organizing a host of far-right, nationalist, white supremacist, anti-immigrant, and misogynist groups: "The alt-right is often described as a movement or an ideology. It is better understood as a political bloc that seeks to unify the activities of several different extremist movements or ideologies."[18]

Some of the extremist groups affiliated with the alt-right include the Proud Boys, neo-Confederate groups, the American Identity Movement (formerly Identity Evropa), the Nationalist Front (formerly the Aryan Nationalist Alliance, which was founded by neo-Nazis), and various Klan chapters, among others.[19] There are common threads that link these seemingly disparate groups, including opposition to Muslims or immigrants, adherence to conspiracy theories, and support for Trump. This connection to Trump, "more than anything else, was the glue that held the alt-right social network together."[20] Part of the mainstreaming effect of the alt-right and its associated hate speech is due to its explicit connection to Trump. These hate groups, especially the Proud Boys, became more publicly active and received unprecedented mainstream media coverage during and after the 2016 election cycle, culminating in the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol in January 2021 that left five people dead and embroiled Trump in a second impeachment trial.[21]

As has become clear, the nationalist and white supremacist ideologies of the alt-right have found a platform through some of the Trump administration's most notable power holders. As Rosie Gray describes it, "Leaders of an emboldened white nationalism have burst into the forefront of national politics and coalesced around a so-called alt-right subculture as they have endeavored to make their ideology part of the mainstream. Recent developments

have shed light on previously unknown connections between white-nationalist activists and the Trump administration."[22] Note, for example, that both the former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon and former deputy assistant to the president Sebastian Gorka have ties to the alt-right and white nationalists.[23] In addition to these well-known advisors, other administration officials, including a member of the State Department and a Homeland Security official, reportedly had direct connections to the alt-right's white nationalist elements.[24]

Although these advisors eventually succumbed to public pressure to leave the administration, Trump's senior advisor for policy, Stephen Miller, who has also been linked to white nationalism, remained in his position through the end of Trump's term in office.[25] Adam Serwer writes, "A cache of Miller's emails . . . draws a straight line between the Trump administration's immigration policies and previous, explicitly racist immigration laws. The emails show Miller praising racist immigration restrictions from a century ago, while bitterly lamenting the law that repealed them."[26] Unlike Bannon and Gorka, Miller remained a key figure in the administration and was a key architect of its nationalist policies. These connections to Trump provided "the [alt-right] movement with an impact and a reach well in excess of what traditional white supremacy can now accomplish, even as it empowers the implementation of nationalist political policies."[27] This is perhaps the most distressing realization about the connections between the alt-right's hate-filled nationalism and the Trump administration—the fact that not only did such connections allow for the mainstreaming of extremist ideologies but these ideologies then guided national(ist) policies.

Unfortunately, this phenomenon has not been limited to the United States. Investigative media reports, as well as academic research, clearly point to the connections among nationalism, hate speech, and violence, both in and outside of the United States.[28] In places as diverse as Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar, New Zealand, and Germany (as well as the United States), Zachary Laub has cataloged a rise in hate-motivated violence, arguing that these incidents have much in common. "A mounting number of attacks on immigrants and other minorities has raised new concerns about the connection between inflammatory speech online and violent acts, as well as the role of corporations and the State in policing speech," Laub writes. "Analysts say trends in hate crimes around the world echo changes in the political climate, and that social media can magnify discord. At their most extreme, rumors and invective disseminated online have contributed to

violence ranging from lynchings to ethnic cleansing."[29] As these cases suggest, the problem of hate is one that draws together nationalism, supremacism, and speech in a complex interrelationship—one that, I would argue, we are struggling to effectively combat.

In an open letter released in late 2019, United Nations experts called attention to the connections among hate speech, nationalist political discourse, and violence, stating that "hate speech, both online and offline, has 'exacerbated societal and racial tensions, inciting attacks with deadly consequences around the world.'"[30] Echoing this concern, António Guterres, secretary-general of the UN, stated that "hate speech may have gained a foothold, but it is now on notice. . . . In both liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes, some political leaders are bringing the hate-fueled ideas and language of these groups into the mainstream, normalizing them, coarsening the public discourse and weakening the social fabric."[31] He then announced that the UN had launched a Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, to work directly with traditional and social media platforms to prevent hate speech from escalating further. This program, as well as the work of activist groups around the world, works to pressure private tech companies to address the hate speech and hate-motivated violence that their platforms enable.

Facebook and Instagram, for example, expanded their definition of hate speech to include white nationalism, arguing that "white nationalism and separatism cannot be meaningfully separated from white supremacy and organized hate groups." Although some might argue that nationalism should not be understood as a form of white supremacy, "the idea that white supremacism is different than white nationalism or white separatism a misguided distinction without a difference."[32] Facebook and Instagram's decision, which will presumably lead to more hate speech being prohibited on their sites, has been well received by many advocacy groups as they struggle against increases in violent white supremacy.

Although the regulation of hate speech by private media companies is a step in the right direction, it is by no means the only—or at times the most effective—way to address this growing problem. As a result, rather than approaching the problem of hate through the actions of corporations or NGO's, this book details ways that we, as concerned publics, can also work to combat hate. The problem of hate speech, both online and in public spaces, is a distinctly rhetorical problem and—regardless of how we operationalize or define it—a social justice issue. It is my hope, then, that this book will both contribute to our public deliberations regarding hate in the current moment and serve as an intervention in the ongoing fight against it.

Hate Speech and the Counterspeech System

As the foregoing discussion indicates, hate speech has been normalized in our public discourse, both on- and off-line. Ideologies once considered extremist have manifested in violence, attacks on democratic institutions, and consequential policies, such as the Muslim ban and border wall in the United States or the law threatening Muslims' citizenship in India.[33] Therefore, if we can agree that hate is a problem, then what remains is an exploration of the tactics and strategies available for combating it. The original impetus for this research was my decision to embark on precisely such an exploration, specifically in public spaces of protest, where people work to combat hate when it appears in their communities. However, as I discuss in chapter 1, part of what makes these efforts so complex—and so important— is that hate speech is considered protected political speech in the United States; thus it is not combated through government regulation.

Although hate speech is regulated in many other democratic nations, in the United States, such governmental regulations of hate speech have been consistently deemed unconstitutional.[34] The most common and compelling reason given for this nonregulatory position is the belief that "hate speech regulations constitute a grave danger to first amendment liberties."[35] Some people are surprised to learn that the United States stands virtually alone in its lack of hate speech regulation, but decades of First Amendment jurisprudence have prevented the regulation of such speech in the name of protecting free speech rights. The United States' unique position on hate speech regulation has also been reinforced through centuries of liberal political philosophy on the subject of free speech and democracy, resulting in a dominant (and constraining) discourse about hate speech and how to deal with it—a dominant discourse that I call the *counterspeech system*. In chapter 1, I explore the intricacies of the counterspeech system through a critical review of discourses on free speech, hate speech, democracy, and equality as they appear in legal and philosophical circles, communication and rhetorical studies, and the popular imagination. However, for the purposes of this introduction, it is important to understand that the counterspeech system places the entirety of the burden for combating hate speech on the public—in the form of "more speech."

The idea of combating hate speech with more speech, or what is sometimes referred to as counterspeech, comes from the words of Justice Louis Brandeis in *Whitney v. California* (1927), in which he stated that, to avoid the evil effects of certain speech, "the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence."[36] Similarly, in the Supreme Court's ruling in *Snyder v.*

Phelps (2011), which protected Westboro Baptist Church's right to disseminate hate speech at funerals, Chief Justice John Roberts stated that "as a Nation we have chosen . . . to protect even hurtful speech on public issues to ensure that we do not stifle public debate."[37] Such decisions are important components of our First Amendment jurisprudence, as they work to ensure that the state does not censor the free speech needed to engage in democratic deliberation. However, the consequence of these decisions is that they prevent any state regulation of hate speech, placing all responsibility on the public to combat it.

Our counterspeech system adheres to and reinforces a vision of democracy as a series of public deliberations among equally legitimate ideas—as an arena where all speech, including hate speech, must receive equal consideration to fulfill the ends of democracy. We thus envision more speech as the presentation of reasonable, persuasive arguments against hate speech, which the public must then consider equally—alongside hate speech—to determine the winning side. In other words, the counterspeech system assumes that all speech is equally valid and beneficial to democracy, simply by virtue of being speech. Our faith in this deliberative contest leads us to believe that more speech has the ability to overcome hate speech and its insidious effects simply through its expression in the public sphere.

Within this system the state plays the role of a neutral arbiter that must disregard power contexts and maintain a neutral stance with regard to any and all speech content. Such a stance, as Justice Roberts noted, ensures that the state does not stifle public debate or controversial ideas. Although the argument that we must be careful not to regulate merely controversial speech is completely meritorious, hate speech is not simply controversial speech that transmits undesirable ideas. On the contrary, hate speech is a form of action—action against minoritized communities—and there are antidemocratic consequences that follow from allowing it to thrive in a non-regulatory system.

Some of these consequences, particularly of the *Snyder v. Phelps* decision, were predicted by First Amendment scholars in the field of communication. In his analysis of *Snyder v. Phelps*, for example, Craig Smith argued that "unless this decision is overturned, one can expect an escalation of hostile, invasive and hateful communication in our society."[38] Similarly, M. Lane Bruner and Susan Balter-Reitz predicted that the decision would provide "legal encouragement for the creation of media spectacles on the part of hate groups," like those created by Westboro Baptist Church.[39] Despite most people's (including many First Amendment scholars') continued commitment to more speech

as the only method available for combating hate speech, there is no ignoring what this commitment has made possible: the escalation of public hate speech rallies across the United States, including the alt-right's spectacular display of hate and violence in Charlottesville in 2017.[40] I argue, then, that the counterspeech system, while valuable in some ways, has worked to constrain our ability to respond to this escalation by creating and reinforcing the idea that more speech, enacted by the public, is the *only* means through which we can effectively combat hate.

Throughout this book I challenge some of the logics of the counterspeech system. In this effort I draw on the work of communication theorist Anthony Wilden.[41] Although he is perhaps known best as an early and influential translator of Jacques Lacan's works, I believe that Wilden's writings on tactics and strategy in communicative systems constitute an important resource for rhetorical scholars interested in public struggles over dominant meaning systems, as well as those interested in how various publics can be effective in social movement organizing more broadly. For Wilden all communicative systems, such as the counterspeech system, are composed of both a *strategy*, or a dominant system of meanings, and a set of *tactics* for enacting that strategy.[42] Thus communicative systems can be analyzed as semidependent hierarchies, in which a strategy has the power to both enable and constrain the tactics under its purview. Using context theory to analyze communicative systems sheds light not only on that system's inner workings but also on its limits—thereby pointing to possible avenues for disrupting or replacing it.

I utilize Wilden's context theory in three ways: (1) to explore the nuances of the counterspeech system, including the rhetorical and deliberative choices the system both enables and constrains; (2) to explore how different publics work at both tactical and strategic levels to combat hate; and (3) to theorize how we might disrupt or replace the counterspeech system with something more effective and democratic. Specifically, I argue that a *more-speech strategy* enables particular kinds of *more-speech tactics*, while also constraining our ability to use (or even perceive) alternative, perhaps more effective, tactics for combating hate. Thus, taken as a whole, the arguments forwarded here provide a foundational understanding of the counterspeech system and also work to move us past the defeatist and ultimately unproductive view that the only response to hate speech is more speech.

Following my analysis of the counterspeech system, in chapter 2 I move to an analysis of the more-speech tactics enacted by many NGOs, as well as those I have observed through my fieldwork. Then, in chapters 3 and 4, I explore what I call the combative and allied tactics I have also encountered in

the field, which have the ability to transform the counterspeech system. The conclusions in these chapters reflect the specific practices and sites of engagement that have characterized my methodological approach—an approach that combines rhetorical field methods with my experiences as a scholar-activist. I sketch these methodological practices here to situate my overall argument.

Practices and Sites of Engagement

In communication and rhetorical studies, a number of works analyze hate speech, focusing on understanding how hate speech permeates everyday discourses and contexts, the social and political functions of hate, and the rhetorical considerations inherent in debates over free speech and hate speech regulation.[43] In reviewing this literature I was surprised to find that, although there was much literature defending the validity of a more-speech approach to combating hate, there was very little research that delved into what more speech actually looks like as a mode of democratic deliberation. A few works in communication and other fields detail ways to combat hate but focus mostly on public education programs or legal regulations of hate speech.[44] Although these works provide some suggestions for how to combat hate, they do not focus on the public spaces of protest, where tensions between hate speech and more speech are most visible and material.

Therefore, my decision to enter the field to explore what more speech looks like in practice was quite deliberate. In their edited volume detailing the importance of field methods to contemporary rhetorical studies, Sara McKinnon, Robert Asen, Karma Chávez, and Robert Glenn Howard argue that making such a decision is an important first step for critics, stating that "in bridging rhetorical studies with field methods, we must first ask whether our research goals and questions necessitate a move to the field." Such methods invite "rhetoricians to attend to the way discourse moves, articulates, and shapes the material realties of people's lives in the everyday, in the public, and in their communities. It also allows scholars to attend to the often-unseen ways that individuals and groups respond, resist, and try to revise these instantiations."[45] The public spaces of the counterspeech system, I argue, are home to these "often-unseen" practices that publics use to combat hate—such practices are clearly worthy of analysis, but they have often been inaccessible outside of the field due to a lack of media and scholarly attention.

Thus, it is through field methods that "rhetorical scholars can engage otherwise inaccessible texts, like local, marginal, and/or vernacular discourses

that have not been collected and catalogued in archives and databases."[46] Rhetorical field methods provide me with the opportunity to "study public discourse that is not yet recorded, a situation in which [traditional] textual analysis is impossible."[47] Because most, if not all, of the work on hate speech and responses to it neglects the public spaces where these "deliberations" occur, I chose to engage in field methods to attend to the ways discourses about free speech and hate speech are articulated and embodied, as well as how these discourses constitute our democracy. As Michael Middleton, Samantha Senda-Cook, and Danielle Endres note, "Rhetorical field methods focus on the processual forms of rhetorical action that are accessible only through participatory methods."[48] Many participatory methods are available to rhetorical critics, including interviews, focus groups, observation, personal narrative, ethnography, autoethnography, oral history interviews, and performance, among others.[49] Of these I have most often utilized participant observation, personal narrative, and interviews, specifically unstructured field interviews that often occur organically in public spaces of protest. I would not characterize my method as ethnographic, as public spaces of protest do not lend themselves to the immersive cultural experience ethnography requires. Protests, particularly protests against hate groups, are ephemeral and thus are best approached through participant observation and field interviews. Therefore, as a rhetorical scholar utilizing field methods in counterspeech spaces, I critically observed the rhetorical elements present in that field—including interactions among various participants, police, media practitioners, and members of the general public and how those interactions worked with and in the parameters of the physical space.

The people and practices I encountered in the field clearly do rhetorical work to move social consciousness; however, they do not fit neatly into how we think about a "social movement" as a discreet category.[50] Although the publics I have worked with may temporarily share a common cause of combating a hate group, these diverse publics often frame that cause and their motivations differently, and they rarely, if ever, constitute a social movement in the sense of shared demographics, tactics, resource mobilization, rhetorical targets, or organizational structure. In fact, there are not really any social movements exclusively dedicated to combating hate. There are NGOs that work to combat hate, such as Not in Our Town or Life After Hate, but I would not characterize these as a coherent social movement.[51] The reason for this lack of a social movement against hate is due to the dominance of the counterspeech system that precludes a sustained movement in any traditional sense. What we have instead are ephemeral moments of various publics and

individuals working to combat hate in their communities when it appears. And thus in this book I focus on those moments and the rhetorical work constituted through them. Despite the uniqueness of anti-hate organizing, the research detailed in this book remains particularly useful to those interested in social movement rhetoric, particularly in terms of a practical approach to understanding protest tactics, the enabling and constraining nature of dominant strategies on social movement organizing, and the coalition building necessary for any attempts to instantiate social change.

Although I have attended a number of protests in response to hate speech, in this book I draw most extensively on seven specific field sites that serve as exemplars for understanding what more speech looks like in our contemporary moment. First, in June 2015 I participated in a Human Wall action in Charleston, South Carolina. This action was staged by local residents during memorial services for victims of the racially motivated shooting at Emanuel AME Church.[52] This action was organized in response to Westboro Baptist Church, whose members had threatened to picket the funerals of the victims. The church was founded by Fred Phelps in 1955, in Topeka, Kansas, and its membership includes mostly members of the extended Phelps family.[53] Westboro is most widely known for its anti-LGBTQIA+ hate speech, as exemplified in their various websites and through a number of social media accounts across multiple platforms. The group has been categorized by the SPLC as an anti-LGBTQIA+–based hate group, and it is also monitored by the Anti-Defamation League for its anti-Semitic speech.[54] Westboro members have been banned from entering both the United Kingdom and Canada because of their hate speech.[55]

Westboro first gained attention in the 1990s for its picketing of LGBTQIA+ individuals' funerals and later for their anti-Catholic and anti-American rhetoric.[56] Their hate-filled spectacles gained increased notoriety when they added picketing at military personnel's funerals to their repertoire.[57] According to Daniel Brouwer and Aaron Hess, "The Phelps protesters argue that the nation's deceased military personnel serve as stunning, corporeal evidence that God is punishing this nation for its tolerance of homosexuality and other vices."[58] In recent years Westboro has extended their picketing to include the memorial services of celebrities, mass-shooting victims (as with Emanuel AME), and the victims of natural disasters.[59]

In response to Westboro's threatened picketing at the memorials for the Emanuel Nine, local community members organized a Human Wall action via Facebook, planning to use their bodies to create a barrier between Westboro's hate speech and the mourners attending the memorials and funerals.

The action spanned two days of official, public memorials, including a service for all the victims, attended by the then president Barack Obama and other political figures, as well as the private funerals of two of the victims. Although we never directly confronted Westboro picketers, approximately thirty to forty people participated in the action over the course of the two days and remained along the funeral routes and outside of the church for the duration of the services. Interestingly, Westboro posted doctored photographs on their website and Twitter feeds during those two days that made it appear as if they were, in fact, picketing in Charleston. However, based on my own and other participants' constant presence in various spaces throughout the city and along funeral procession routes, the Westboro picketers were not present—or at the very least they were not making their presence known in any visible way.[60] Despite Westboro's absence, the Human Wall participants took their threats seriously and remained prepared to shield mourners should the group appear.

Although Westboro members are most infamous for their hate-filled demonstrations at funerals, they also picket at political events. In July 2016, for example, I participated in an action against Westboro at the Mazzoni Center in Philadelphia during the Democratic National Convention. The Mazzoni Center was chosen as a target by Westboro for its mission "to provide quality comprehensive health and wellness services in an LGBTQ-focused environment, while preserving the dignity and improving the quality of life of the individuals [they] serve."[61] During the convention Westboro secured a permit to demonstrate in front of the Mazzoni Center and picketed for about thirty minutes with their signature hate-filled signs and messages. They were met by hundreds of activists filling the streets and sidewalks around the center, engaging in a type of street party that included celebrations of diverse LGBTQIA+ identities and community.[62]

My fieldwork at protests of Westboro have proved invaluable for understanding the apolitical and celebratory more-speech tactics analyzed in chapter 2. However, the majority of the hate speech rallies where I have protested and conducted fieldwork were organized by racist, fascist, or white supremacist hate groups. The SPLC categorizes hate groups according to a number of designations, but those I have encountered most often fall under the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazi, White Nationalist, Racist Skinhead, Neo-Confederate, Anti-immigrant, and Anti-Muslim designations.[63] Other groups I have encountered, such as the alt-right affiliated Proud Boys, fall under the SPLC's General Hate ideology category.[64] Although some groups (or rally participants who are not directly affiliated with any group) do not always fit precisely into these

categories, all the rallies I have attended included individuals and groups who would typically be characterized as espousing hate speech.

In July 2015 I conducted fieldwork at and participated in a protest against a white supremacist rally organized by the Loyal Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi–affiliated groups at the statehouse in Columbia, South Carolina. Following the shooting at Emanuel AME Church, the South Carolina General Assembly voted to remove the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds.[65] White supremacists subsequently organized a rally there in opposition to this decision and were met by a counterrally staged by members of Black Educators for Justice.[66] The rallies were organized by what some media sources described as "dueling" hate groups—because some protesters were affiliated with the New Black Panther Party.[67] However, the majority of the two thousand protesters in attendance were not affiliated with the party but were instead composed of a diverse group of anarchist and antifascist affinity groups, Black activists from a number of antiracist groups, and unaffiliated people from the local community.

Similarly, in April 2016 I participated in a counterspeech action in Stone Mountain, Georgia, organized by the antifascist coalition All Out Atlanta and other antiracist groups.[68] White supremacist groups have a history of applying for rally permits at Stone Mountain because of its connection to both Klan and Confederate history—specifically its mountain-side carving of Confederate generals Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson that serves as the largest bas-relief in the world.[69] In 2016, as in many previous years, Klan and neo-Nazi affiliated groups were granted a permit for their rally, which they called Rock Stone Mountain. In addition to the antifascist groups that protested the rally, a number of other antiracist organizations such as the Tallahassee Students for a Democratic Society, different religious groups, the Bastards Motorcycle Club, and a Black Lives Matter contingent were in attendance.[70]

In 2017, after the violent Unite the Right rally in "defense" of a Confederate memorial in Charlottesville, hate speech rallies across the United States took on a decidedly different quality. As local and federal governments increased funding and police presence around Confederate memorials, southern towns became increasingly concerned about becoming the "next Charlottesville."[71] As I argue in chapter 3, these fears also led to an increase in militarized police forces in counterspeech spaces, which was especially obvious at a protest I attended eight months after the violence in Charlottesville. In celebration of the anniversary of Hitler's birthday, about two dozen members of the Nationalist Socialist Movement staged a rally at the Greenville Street Park in Newnan, Georgia.[72] The NSM, one of the largest and most well-known neo-Nazi hate

groups in the United States, was met in Newnan by a much larger contingent of diverse antiracist and antifascist protesters, as well as unaffiliated protesters from throughout the metro-Atlanta area. Although there was (thankfully) little to compare to Charlottesville that day, there was an especially excessive show of force by police—not, as one might expect, against the NSM but against those attempting to engage in more speech.

Despite a widespread aversion to even the possibility of "another Charlottesville," on the one-year anniversary of that Unite the Right rally, its original organizer, Jason Kessler, secured permits for Unite the Right 2 (UTR2) in Washington, D.C.[73] Although UTR2 was deemed a failure for the alt-right, the counterspeech action I participated in that day was successful in bringing together a number of diverse groups to combat hate, as discussed in chapter 4. Those counterspeech events were primarily organized by two groups, the ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) Coalition and D.C. United Against Hate.[74] These groups secured permits for four separate counterspeech spaces across the city, including the north side of Lafayette Park (where UTR2 was permitted to hold its rally), McPherson Square, Farragut Square, and Freedom Plaza. Interestingly, the counterevents and subsequent march to Lafayette Park were the most well-attended counterspeech protests I participated in over the course of this research; dozens of groups and thousands of unaffiliated community members participated in the day's events and deserve a great deal of credit for preventing the "next Charlottesville."

The final fieldwork site I draw on in my analyses occurred in November 2018 in Philadelphia, when individuals affiliated with the alt-right were granted a permit to hold a We the People rally at the Independence Visitor Center.[75] Although purporting to be a pro–law enforcement and pro-Trump event, the rally included anti-immigrant hate speech. In advance of the rally, many believed it would attract members of hate groups such as Keystone United, the Proud Boys, and the Three Percenters.[76] Though attendance at the rally was quite small, local community members again organized a protest of the rally, specifically through the PushBack Campaign, a coalition of a number of groups, including the One People's Project, antifascists, and other leftist groups.[77]

The fieldwork conducted at these seven sites serves as the primary source of the rhetoric analyzed throughout this book. However, this fieldwork does not constitute the entirety of my constructed rhetorical artifact, or "text." When "using field methods, the critic typically creates a set of diverse but complexly interrelated 'texts,'" and it is these interrelated texts that actually constitute the "field" for the rhetorical critic. "We define the *field* as the nexus where rhetoric is produced, where it is enacted, where it circulates, and

consequently, where it is audienced," McKinnon and her colleagues argue. "This definition situates people, places, events, material culture, and the digital milieu as potential fields that may be relevant to our investigations."[78] For my purposes this inclusion of where rhetoric is audienced, especially via digital milieus, has been important to the construction of my field. In addition to my observations in the physical spaces of the counterspeech system, I also include artifacts from numerous interactions on digital media platforms before, during, and after my actual time in a physical counterspeech space.

For example, I have spent a great deal of time reviewing media accounts, from both mainstream and independent media; watching videos taken by other participants at the actions I attended; and engaging in online interactions on social media with participants (usually via Twitter). When conducting fieldwork, one cannot possibly witness or record all things; therefore, supplementing my field notes with these interactions and accounts, as well as my reflections on them, has allowed for the construction of more complete artifacts than either media accounts or field observations alone could provide. Such reflective practices enabled me to check the perceptions I had in the heat of the moment at a protest and review elements of the actions that I may have missed. Debriefing with participants (whether in person or online) and reviewing media accounts (when they existed) served as important components of my methodology, enabling detailed and rich observations and more nuanced conclusions.

Finally, I have complemented the rhetorical artifacts analyzed here with media accounts of counterspeech actions that I was unable to attend. For example, in chapters 3 and 4 I draw on accounts from the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, although I was unable to attend that specific counterspeech action. Similarly, in chapter 2 my analysis of more-speech tactics is drawn from artifacts compiled from my own participation in the Human Wall action in Charleston but also includes examples from mainstream media accounts of Angel Actions across the country—as well as from promotional videos and web materials created by the publics engaging in those counterspeech spaces. As a consequence, the artifacts compiled and presented in this book were constructed from my fieldwork, various types of media, or a combination of both. As I discuss in chapter 4, there is much to be gained by seeking out diverse perspectives both in and outside of a fieldwork space.

As a final point on engagement and method, it is important to note that the rhetorical field methods I engaged have been combined with a scholar-activist approach in the field. Many of the methodological innovations in rhetoric over the past forty years, including rhetorical field methods, have

"enabled a direct critique of the power structures that shape how rhetors and their words enter the public. *Politically engaged scholarship* grew even more prominent with the critical turn in the field; interpretive methods expanded scholarly goals from description, explanation, and cultural interpretation to include critiques of power."[79] As a rhetorical critic whose education was steeped in these turns toward critical and engaged scholarship, this project reflects how I have combined rhetorical field methods with politically engaged scholarship, or what I term a scholar-activist approach.

Thus a review of how scholar activism has informed my methodology is presented here in an attempt to engage "an ethic of reflexivity [which] calls us to ask . . . What motivates me to do this research?"[80] For me not only was the move to the field about my intellectual curiosity about what more speech looks like in practice; it was also motivated by an ethical commitment to combating hate. In their work on engaged scholarship and rhetorical theory, James Hikins and Richard Cherwitz argue for the value of such a combination of reflection and action as a way for scholars to "leverage knowledge for social good."[81] My research, then, has been motivated by both my reflections as a rhetorical scholar and my actions as an activist to use the knowledge gained to work for social justice.

Although a scholar-activist approach represents a unique approach to the study of more speech, such an approach is quite in keeping with recent developments in rhetoric and communication studies. As early as 1996, Lawrence R. Frey and his colleagues argued for the importance of research that engaged with and advocated for those struggling for social justice. They contended that "such an approach is particularly valuable, for it has the potential to do good in society while expanding and transforming the theories, methods, and pedagogical practices of those who theorize, research, and teach about it."[82] More specifically, Frey and Kevin M. Carragee coined the term *communication activism scholarship* as that which is "grounded in communication scholars immersing themselves in the stream of human life, taking direct vigorous action in support of or opposition to a controversial issue for the purpose of promoting social change and justice."[83] As scholar-activist work has grown, it has been recognized for its contributions to communication and rhetorical scholarship and communities outside the academy.[84]

As a rhetorical scholar, my research has always focused on the *critique* of unjust practices and discourses, and in this project I have continued that focus by rhetorically analyzing the dominance of the counterspeech system and its ability to impede our progress in combating hate. However, "the critique of unjust practices is not sufficient in and of itself; such criticism must

be accompanied by concrete interventions on the part of communication scholars that are directed at changing unjust practices."[85] Similarly, a combination of rhetorical critique and scholar activism follows Seth Kahn and JongHwa Lee's argument that *rhetorical activism* can be "the key lens through which we understand politics, democracy and social change. . . . [And it is] time for the field to find new ways of construing relations between rhetoric and democratic practice."[86] It is my hope that the methodology detailed here, and the conclusions I draw from it, do just that—reveal new ways of discerning how we might use a diverse array of rhetorical and activist practices to better combat hate and open up possibilities for ensuring a more just democracy.

My efforts to link rhetorical field methods to activist interventions have thus been organic to the development of this project, as increases in public hate group activity and public responses to it led me to join a variety of protests at different hate speech rallies. Critique "should lead naturally to the need to intervene."[87] As a result, my immersion as a fully engaged rhetorical scholar-activist seeks to fulfill the promise of engaged scholarship by serving both as a way to produce knowledge and as a social justice intervention.

From More Speech to Allied Tactics

By drawing together theory and the practices and sites of engagement, in what follows I develop a rich account of what more speech looks like in our current moment—its outlines as well as its limits. The theoretical foundation for my arguments, as noted earlier, is presented in chapter 1, which seeks to explore the nuances of the counterspeech system in terms of Wilden's context theory. I use Wilden's discussion of strategic ignorance to suggest not only the dominance of the system but also its tendency to foster a stubborn inability to imagine alternatives to that system. Subsequently, in chapter 2, drawing on my fieldwork as well as media accounts, I survey the tactics that reflect, and are constrained by, this counterspeech system. In that chapter I develop a typology of more-speech tactics used to combat hate. These more-speech tactics fall into two broad categories: persuasive-dialogic and confrontational. These two categories are differentiated according to how they engage specific audiences, messages, and communicative punctuations of actions. Although I separate these tactics and their constitutive elements for clarity, publics often use a number of different tactics and choose different approaches based on the context within which they encounter hate speech. For example, persuasive-dialogic tactics involve interpersonal dialogue, public dialogue, and public dissemination.

Confrontational tactics make up the second category of the typology, but, in contrast to persuasive-dialogic tactics, they reject dialogue and persuasion with hate groups and instead focus on combating hate through direct action and a definitive no to hate groups in the public spaces of the counterspeech system. Depending on the context, these confrontational tactics can include apolitical, celebratory, and oppositional approaches to combating hate. After an extensive analysis of these unique more-speech tactics, I conclude chapter 2 by assessing their effectiveness and limitations.

These first two chapters provide a detailed account of what more-speech tactics look like in our contemporary moment. But, as my research has grown and evolved—and as I connected it to Wilden's insights into the struggle over dominant communicative systems—I began to recognize that combating hate requires greater attention to *strategy* and not just to tactics. I increasingly saw that, although the tactics of various publics in counterspeech spaces expressed the more-speech strategy, there were others—primarily, although not exclusively, the practices of antifascist activists—that were radically different. These tactics, which I term *combative tactics*, represent an attempt to combat hate at the level of strategy, not at the level of tactics. Thus, in chapter 3 I move to a focus on these combative tactics.

Combative tactics are deployed in the public spaces of the counterspeech system, but, unlike more-speech tactics, they are not constrained by the more-speech strategy. Because they do not operate within the logics of the more-speech strategy, they are *not* more-speech tactics. Instead, combative tactics are characterized by a commitment to community self-defense, as opposed to the state's singular commitment to the defense of hate speech as free speech. This commitment includes two interrelated approaches: deplatforming and community protection. In the public spaces of the counterspeech system, deplatforming can involve physically blocking access to a rally site or property destruction. Community protection, relatedly, involves ensuring a physical presence in or a patrolling of public spaces and, in some cases, physical violence against specifically defined "enemies." I argue that because combative tactics are not constrained by the more-speech strategy, they combat hate at the level of strategy. These tactics constitute what Wilden calls a "strategic innovation" because they challenge fascist strategy, reveal alternative ways to combat hate, and ultimately work to envelop the more-speech strategy.[88] Because the more-speech strategy often limits our ability to understand or enact alternative modes of combating hate, I argue that combative tactics—and my analysis of them—provide a unique contribution to the study of deliberations over free speech and hate speech.

This realization not only provided different insights into combative tactics but also enabled me to begin envisioning the possibility of something new: the possibility of generating *allied tactics* in the field. It is in chapter 4, then, where I move beyond the previous chapters' *critiques* of the dominant counterspeech system to detail the value of *action* inherent in a scholar-activist approach. Specifically, I detail the scholar-activist interventions I have participated in when combating hate, arguing that such interventions, when systematically cultivated and deliberately deployed, can work to transform more-speech tactics and combative tactics into allied tactics. Contributing to our understandings of the value of coalitional moments in social movement organizing, I detail how allied tactics can foster more effective organizing among those publics who are committed, not necessarily to the same tactics, but to the same goal of combating hate.

Although allied tactics are detailed in chapter 4, I conclude this introduction with a brief anecdote from my field notes at the Columbia action that captures the promise of an allied tactics approach:

> Before the white supremacist rally began, I saw a man wearing a sandwich-board sign with a red target painted on it, along with a caption that read, "unarmed black man, don't miss." I was absolutely terrified for him; he was walking around alone, and there were easily recognizable racist skinheads already walking around the grounds, not to mention heavily armed police. I couldn't bear to see him walking alone like that—a literal target—so I stood with him for a while and told him how scared I was for his safety. He put his hand on my shoulder, looked me straight in the eyes, and said with heartfelt sincerity, "I have to do what I have to do. We all have to do what we have to do."[89]

Through that brief interaction I learned a lot about what it truly means to put your body on the line for social justice and about what an *allied* approach to combating hate could really look like. Over the course of this research, I have learned a lot about hate speech and free speech, about tactics and strategies. But it was this interaction, accessible to me only through rhetorical field methods and a scholar-activist approach, that revealed the potential of allied tactics—how we can and *must* be allied in our fight against hate so *we all* can do what we have to do.