

2007

Deterring Protesters

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Repository Citation

Zick, Timothy, "Deterring Protesters" (2007). *Popular Media*. 210.
https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/popular_media/210

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Posted By [Timothy Zick](#) On September 5, 2007 @ 11:50 am In [Uncategorized](#) | [3 Comments](#)

Many have complained that President Bush shields himself from opposing viewpoints and that the Administration, in a more general sense, does not tolerate dissent. Thus far, much of the evidence supporting this claim has either been anecdotal or, some might argue, the product of partisan griping.

A Texas couple recently settled (for \$80,000) a lawsuit against the Bush Administration over being tossed from a Fourth of July speech by President Bush. The plaintiffs were ejected for wearing "anti-Bush" t-shirts. As a result of the lawsuit, some evidence came to light that demonstrates the Administration's aversion to dissent is a matter of official policy. The Office of Presidential

Advance produced a "[Presidential Advance Manual](#)"^[1] (dated October, 2002) that instructs presidential advance staffers in the art of "deterring potential protesters" from attending President Bush's public appearances. Pre-event measures to "minimize demonstrators" include limiting attendance to those with tickets and screening attendees for hidden protest signs (no "homemade" signs are allowed). If, despite these measures, protesters attend an event the manual instructs staff to ask local police "to designate a protest area where demonstrators can be placed, preferably not in the view of the event site or motorcade route." If for some reason that is not a workable solution to the problem of potential protesters, the manual suggests the strategic use of "rally squads" to shout them down. Ultimately, if all else fails, the manual instructs that protesters should be thrown out of the event (although staffers are instructed not to fall into the "trap" of physical confrontation, which "most often" is desired by protesters).

Presidential appearances obviously raise substantial safety concerns. There is even, at least on *private* property, an argument in favor of allowing a campaign or administration to exclude protesters and dissenters (although this obviously distorts the marketplace of ideas and inhibits self-government). The Presidential Advance Manual does not generally address safety concerns. Nor does it distinguish between events on private and public properties. The White House has refused so far to discuss the manual – on the ground that it is at issue in two other lawsuits filed by similarly displaced protesters. The document speaks for itself. It is, simply put, a playbook for deterring public protest.



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[1] Presidential Advance Manual:

http://www.aclu.org/pdfs/freespeech/presidential_advance_manual.pdf

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