

Hatred on the march

Must suburban Skokie, with its large Jewish population, tolerate an anti-Jewish hate group parading in its midst? The Supreme Court in effect has said yes—though not loud and clear, but in the hoarse whisper of a 5-to-4 ruling that means several things.

First, the decision Wednesday cited the basic rights of peaceful assembly and free speech. But the First Amendment does not grant the right to incite a riot. There's no right to shout "Fire!" in a crowded theater. Thus the court majority did not see the march as a provocation in itself.

Yet many will see a provocation.

The Nazi Party knows that some 7,000 Jewish residents of Skokie suffered Nazi atrocities in Europe. Party leaders say they want to march where their concepts are most opposed. That's not a march for positive civil rights but a taunt and a publicity grab.

As one Jewish spokesman said, the march is "a deliberate and calculated affront" to Chicago's Jewish community. It is even more: It is an outrageous affront to every Chicagoan who believes in decency and human brotherhood under the fatherhood of God.

It is also a classic test of democracy. A cherished principle of free people to speak and assemble will be used—misused—by a small group to spew their hate. In the broad scheme of freedom, even Nazi distortions and Nazi lies must be allowed to be heard.

To hear something is not to endorse or accept what is heard. But to censor speech is to endorse tyranny. The free exchange of

ideas, even wrong ones, is basic in a democracy—though it must not harm others.

Thus the Supreme Court ruling is right, even as it puts strains on human emotions and civic responsibilities.

Now, Skokie and Cook County law agencies must come forth to keep the peace if the Nazi march is held. (Perhaps it won't be. Other Skokie ordinances such as insurance requirements may cool the Nazis' zeal, but that cannot be assumed.) Outsiders should stay away.

And residents with memories of Nazi cruelty deep within them should try to restrain understandable impulses to oppose the marchers. To let such evil parade alone—to deny it attention—might have been inappropriate in Berlin in the 1930s, but it is an appropriate response in a democracy in 1977. Hatred dies under its own weight.

If the Nazis march, we hope it's on July 4th. Their views will contrast clearly as ugly and pitiable against the ideals celebrated on that birthday of freedom.



Honorable people can disagree about school desegregation methods, but Chicago protesters who have marched in recent days with Nazi symbols have no honor. The twisted cross of the swastika symbolizes twisted values that Americans cannot accept.

Those who wear swastika T-shirts and carry swastika signs reveal their own ignorance. They shame themselves. They shame Chicago. They shame their country.