



an·ti·fa A massive Nazi rally happened in Madison Square Gardens in New York City. There were 100,000 antifascist protesters. Guess which side the police were on?

NEW YORK TIMES, 1939:
“A FORTRESS IMPREGNABLE TO ANTI-NAZIS”

In late February 1939, roughly 22,000 people gathered at New York City’s Madison Square Garden for a rally, which included a 50-member drum and bugle corps and a color guard of more than 60 flags. Six and a half months before Adolf Hitler invaded Poland, New York City’s Madison Square Garden hosted a rally to celebrate the rise of Nazism in Germany. Inside, more than 20,000 attendees raised Nazi salutes toward a 30-foot-tall portrait of George Washington flanked by swastikas. Then mayor of New York, Fiorello H. La Guardia, considered shutting it down and not allowing it to happen, but said: “Our government provides for free speech, and in this city that right will be respected. It would be a strange kind of free speech that permits free speech for those we agree with.”

“Police attacks on anti-Nazi demonstrators were expected. ‘We have enough police here to stop a revolution,’ Police Commissioner Lewis J. Valentine boasted to the press, as he surveyed his ‘blue legions from the Eighth Avenue entrance to the Garden just before the meeting began at 8 o’clock.’

The speaker was interrupted by a Jewish-American man named Isadore Greenbaum who charged the stage in protest. Police and the vigilante force quickly tackled him, and proceeded to beat him up on stage. The crowd cheered as they threw him off stage, pulling his pants down in the process. Police charged Greenbaum with disorderly conduct and gave him a \$25 fine, about \$450 in 2019 dollars.

At the time the rally took place, Hitler was completing his sixth concentration camp; and protesters—many of them Jewish Americans—called attention to the fact that what was happening in Germany could happen in the U.S. “Don’t wait for the concentration camps—Act now!”