SYRACUSE, NY -- Over the course of Syracuse's history the streets have been no stranger to protests.

"It really has a history of political radicalism and public protest. It started out in the 1800s," said Robert Searing, curator of history at Onondaga Historical Association.

And that holds true today.

"The language is the same, the tactics are somewhat the same but we had an incredible flip in the moral perspective of what's being said, but that concept of freedom of speech is still very central," added Searing.
Back in 1861, it was the lead up to the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln was recently elected president and the presence of an anti-slavery society was gaining speed. A famous Syracuse minister, Samuel May, was asked by public officials to postpone gatherings to protect citizen's safety.

"He ultimately goes ahead with it in the name of free speech, he and his organizers are met at the haul, which is right at Hanover Square on East Genesee Street, by essentially what May calls a riot and they shut down the gathering," explained Searing.

Just this week, Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner cited public safety concern as the reason to deny the permit for the 'America First Rally,' in support of President Trump's national security policies.

In the 1960s, more protests broke out by the civil rights group, Congress of Racial Equality, or C.O.R.E.

One in particular was over the construction of the Interstate-81 viaduct through Syracuse. It destroyed a predominantly African American neighborhood and displaced many from their homes.

"You can see sort of these construction cranes are wrecking houses, they are knocking houses down, so you have the protesters laying down," said Searing as he pointed to pictures from back in the 1960s.

In today's I-81 debate, opposition has yet to reach that level of intensity.

As the nation reacts to Charlottesville and other demonstrations, Syracuse already has rich history of civil rights actions in our past.
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