

The Charlottesville Riots – Who is to Blame?

Remus Treacy-McGee

Let's say you're walking down the street, returning from work or school, and you come face to face with a Nazi. Not some alt right conservative donned a Nazi by the internet, but an actual, self-identifying white supremacist. A Nazi. What do you do?

Unfortunately, the citizens of Charlottesville experienced this conundrum on August 12th, when a rally of white supremacists called 'Unite the Right' congregated to protest the removal of the statue of confederate icon General Robert E Lee. The argument of whether or not confederate statues should be taken down has been in the works for months – on one hand, they're historic monuments to commemorate war heroes. On the other hand, they were hard core racists and represent as such.

The protest followed marchers descending on the University of Virginia's doorstep the day before, carrying tiki torches and chanting 'Blood and Soil' and 'White Lives Matter'. The internet roared at the sight of hundreds of racists performing Nazi salutes and screaming abuse at counter protestors.

For me, the scariest thing is not the fact that these alt right/Nazis/white supremacists still exist in this day and age, or even that they had the audacity to even create a rally. No, the thing that genuinely frightens me the most is the fact that none of them wore masks. No mask, hood, disguise in sight, this group marched on the streets carrying shields and weapons and guns and spouting racist abuse, all under the assumption that they'd all have their jobs, friends and family the next day. Not a single one considered their actions may have consequences, and so were shocked when the internet doxed and harassed them online.

Once the counter protestors gathered, consisting mainly of Black Lives Matter advocates, anti-fascists and residents of Charlottesville, violence was inevitable. Whoever instigated the violence is apparently up for debate- the far-right blogger Hunter Wallace claimed the anti-fa laid in wait for the protestors and 'launched an attack' on them; another blogger of the same right-leaning nature claimed that the protestors acted first, issuing war cries and 'pushing through the anti-fa like a tyrannosaurus'.

Regardless of who started it, both sides are equally to blame for the continuation of the violence. In the end, it didn't matter who began it – it mattered who

ended it. Most reports accuse the police of doing little to nothing to break up the fighting, so is there not a measure of guilt on them too?

I think it is the police, and the anti-fa, and the white supremacists who are all to blame for the bloodshed that night. But are all of them also to blame for the tragic death of 32 year old Heather Heyer? Some may argue that James Alex Fields acted alone, that he was one loose bolt in the machine, but I believe all those who taught him the 'us versus them' mentality, who armed him, who told him he was better than the others. Even the videos surfacing online of people punching Nazis helped his people teach him that it is the alt-right versus the rest of the savage world.

People like to claim each radical is the only one, an isolated incident. Perhaps it is time we considered that there is more to it than that, and more of us to blame. Because, if nobody had instigated violence that day, most likely a young woman wouldn't have lost her life.

So remember, you're walking down the street and you come face to face with a Nazi. What do you do?