

Understanding the Charlottesville Chaos

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***Jason Kessler** organized the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, yesterday to gather those who oppose the city’s decision to remove the statue of Confederate leader **Robert E. Lee** from Emancipation Park. Thousands marched on the University of Virginia campus late Friday night wielding torches and chanting things like “Jews will not replace us.”*

Things took a turn on Saturday, when [counter protesters showed up to demonstrate against](#) the white nationalists filling Charlottesville’s streets. Here’s all that went down during the “Unite the Right” rally and what comes next:

Who was there

- Kessler, a freelance journalist who has written for various conservative-leaning websites and [president](#) of a conservative political advocacy group, organized the whole thing.
- Former KKK Leader and Trump supporter **David Duke** was there. He called the rally “a turning point” and said that white nationalists will “fulfill” Trump’s agenda.
- **Richard Spencer**, one of the most prominent white supremacists and president of the National Policy Institute, a white nationalist think tank. [He was arrested after acting unlawfully](#) with local police.
- Anti-fascist and Black Lives Matter activists among other anti-fascist and anti-racist groups held counter protests during the rally.

What it was like on the ground

Hawes Spencer, a friend of Axios’ **Mike Allen**, covered Friday night’s protest for the N.Y. Times and Richmond public radio station WCVE. [Mike asked him what it was like:](#)

- **“The entirety of Downtown Charlottesville** looked like a war zone. Protesters maced each other, threw water bottles and urine balloons — some of which hit reporters — and generally beat the crap out of each other with flagpoles.”
- **“With many armed militia present**, we thought bullets might be a problem. But as it turned out, it was **just like European terrorism: a car aimed at pedestrians.**
- **“Some of the photographers** were braver than I and just dove right in to the middle of these constant melees. A month ago, my two oldest teens showed up for the KKK rally out of curiosity. Thankfully, they took a hike up a mountain today!”

When things turned violent



James Alex Fields Jr., the driver that killed a woman in Charlottesville protest (Source: [Everipedia](#))

- As Hawes Spencer described above, protesters and counter-protesters fought throughout the day.
- Virginia **Gov. Terry McAuliffe** [declared a state of emergency](#) after these violent clashes continued, allowing local officials to call in additional resources to regain control of the situation.
- A 20-year-old man intentionally drove his car, estimated at 40 m.p.h., directly through a crowd of counter-protesters. He killed a 32-year-old woman and injured at least 19 others. [Watch the video of the incident here](#). He has since been charged with second-degree murder.

Bipartisan reactions

- **FLOTUS Melania Trump:** "Our country encourages freedom of speech, but let's communicate w/o hate in our hearts. No good comes from violence. #Charlottesville"
- **President Trump tweeted:** "We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for. There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Lets come together as one!" He added: "Am in Bedminster for meetings & press conference on V.A. & all that we have done, and are doing, to make it better-but Charlottesville sad!"
- **House Speaker Paul Ryan:** "The views fueling the spectacle in Charlottesville are repugnant. Let it only serve to unite Americans against this kind of vile bigotry."
- **VP Mike Pence:** "I stand with @POTUS against hate & violence. U.S is greatest when we join together & oppose those seeking to divide us. #Charlottesville"
- **Colorado Sen. Cory Gardner:** "Mr. President - we must call evil by its name. These were white supremacists and this was domestic terrorism."
- **Hillary Clinton:** "The incitement of hatred that got us here is as real and condemnable as the white supremacists in our streets. ... Now is the time for leaders to be strong in their words & deliberate in their actions."
- **Sen. Orrin Hatch:** "We should call evil by its name. My brother didn't give his life fighting Hitler for Nazi ideas to go unchallenged here at home. -OGH"
- **Ivanka Trump:** "There should be no place in society for racism, white supremacy and neo-nazis."
- **Sen. John McCain:** "White supremacists and neo-Nazis are, by definition, opposed to American patriotism and the ideals that define us as a people and make our nation special. As we mourn the tragedy that has occurred in Charlottesville, American patriots of all colors and creeds must come together to defy those who raise the flag of hatred and bigotry."
- **Sen. Mitch McConnell:** "The hate and bigotry witnessed in #Charlottesville does not reflect American values. I wholeheartedly oppose their actions."
- **Barack Obama, quoting Nelson Mandela:** "No one is born hating another

person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion. ... People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love. ... For love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

- **Sen. Nancy Pelosi:** “Our nation is defined by the march of progress. Our strength lies in our diversity. We must reject hate.”
- **Joe Biden:** “No. Not in America. We must be stronger, more determined and more united than ever. Racism and hate have no place here.”

Breaking down [Trump’s “on many sides” response](#)

- Speaking from Bedminster, NJ, Trump said: “We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides. *On many sides.*”
- **Why it matters:** By addressing the “many sides” of this protest (which was organized by white nationalists upset with the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue), Trump failed to distinguish between those demonstrating in support of white supremacy and those who showed up in opposition to it.
- **Former KKK leader and Trump supporter [David Duke said the protest was “a turning point”](#)** and that white supremacists will “fulfill the promises of Donald Trump.” Denouncing white supremacy in his remarks, or simply not blaming “all sides,” would have allowed him to address this issue and set the record straight.
- **When asked by various reporters what Trump meant** by on many sides, the White House responded: “The president was condemning hatred, bigotry and violence from all sources and all sides. There was violence between protesters and counter protesters.”
- **Be smart, courtesy of Mike Allen:** Being a leader is taking your people where they don’t want to go, or don’t *know* they want to go. Being president is about rising to the occasion, not shrinking to your base. Large swaths of Trump’s *base* don’t think like this. The vast majority of conservative Americans aren’t racists. Trump does them a disservice by creating that impression, and by coddling or fearing the few who resist loving one another.

What’s next

- The [Department of Justice announced it’s opening a civil rights investigation](#) against the man who drove his car through the crowd.
- Richard Spencer suggests things won’t slow down. “You think we’re going to back down to this kind of behavior to you and your little provincial town?” he asked during a video [posted](#) online. “No, we are going to make Charlottesville the center of the universe.”
- Many will continue to look to Trump to toughen his language against white nationalists and supremacists, particularly after events like this.

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