

Who Was Really at Fault in Charlottesville?

by Conrad Black



Almost everything about the Charlottesville riot was disgraceful except the conduct of the president. The move to take down the statue of General Robert E. Lee was nonsense. Lee has few rivals as the greatest general in American history (Grant, Sherman, MacArthur, and Eisenhower perhaps). He opposed the secession of Virginia from the Union but, as was common in the South then (and has not entirely died out in any region of the United States today), believed he owed his first loyalty to his state over the United States. He was less dedicated to the virtues of slavery than was Charlottesville's most famous son, Thomas Jefferson, founder of the University, neighbor at Monticello, and, of course, author of the self-evident truth "that all men are created equal."

This terrible incident started as a reasonable civic

demonstration by Southern traditionalists who were not hostile to African-Americans but object to the shamed renunciation of a great American heroic and folkloric figure from "Gone With the Wind," to The Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," to "The Dukes of Hazzard." Robert E. Lee was not a precursor of Bull Connor, Strom Thurmond, James Earl Ray, or the unreformed George C. Wallace.

These original local groups did not wish or seek the attention of the Ku Klux Klan, or the American Nazis or the violent hooligans who appeared in strength flaunting vivid racist symbolism, who were the most remarkable feature in Saturday's tragic events. As the day approached, it became clear that the other side of the issue, whose core was reasonable townspeople who put the ultimate fact that the Civil War was fought to suppress an insurrection and to promote at least the gradual elimination of slavery above the gallantry of the Confederate Army, was being reinforced by more militant leftist organizations. Antifa, which purports to find fascists at every position of authority in the United States, Black Lives Matter (whose name suggests that any sane person had ever said otherwise), and other far-left groups with a propensity to violence, made no secret that they too would be there.

As the day unfolded, it was clear that orders had been given to the local police to *ensure* that a serious fracas occurred. The police did nothing to disperse the armed groups on each side, on several occasions herded them toward each other to encourage combat, and then withdrew at times to facilitate the violence. It must be assumed that orders for an insufficient law enforcement and ineffectual rules of engagement emanated ultimately from the governor of Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, the *ne plus ultra* of Clintonian zeal and cynicism, and former Democratic Party chairman.

The debacle ensued; the peaceful majorities on both sides were shouldered aside by the violent thugs on the extremes, with the Klansmen and neo-nazis being more vocal and recognizable

by their signs and costumes. Since one of their number appears to have been responsible for the (mercifully) sole fatality, the white supremacists and neo-nazis seem to have been the more violent group. But the entire incident had almost nothing to do with the issue of what should happen to Charlottesville's statue of General Lee, (who would have been as disgusted as we are by the extremists of both sides).

President Trump's comments on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday were accurate and appropriate, and as usual the national media either eagerly grasped the flame-thrower handed them by the professed Nazi demonstrators and accused the president of mollycoddling David Duke and the Klan ([who were very aggrieved](#) by Trump's chastisement of them on Saturday), or they were gulled by the anti-Trump spin of the media and Virginia officials into condemning the president for ambivalence between Klansmen and Nazis on one side, and decent advocates of racial equality on the other, as if any such clear confrontation of wrong with right had occurred.

Virginia's U.S. senators, Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, are as rabidly partisan as McAuliffe, and the Virginia authorities, local, state, and national, have a hand in this outrage. Kaine thinks Jared Kushner might be guilty of treason and Warner thinks Trump really might have organized the golden shower of urinating prostitutes in Moscow.

The facts of Charlottesville should be ascertained by impartial investigation, prosecution, and exposure, and Attorney General Jeff Sessions has promised they will be.

This incident is of a piece with the mindless violence at Berkeley and other university campuses. The nihilists and anarchists of both sides want bloody conflict and vandalism, and most of the Democrats and the anti-Trump Republicans and the national media are trying to pin the phenomenon on Trump. This became clear as the weekend unfolded, explaining Trump's calibrated escalation of anti-racist comments.

We have come full circle. In the absence of any positive argument to vote Democratic last year, the Clinton campaign accused Trump of misogyny and racism. That failed and evaporated and was replaced in post-electoral denial by the Russian collusion nonsense. With the end of visible White House disorganization following staff changes, and after a cameo appearance of Trump the alleged Korea-warmonger last week, we are back to Trump the friend of the Klan, [Obama's infamous campaign charge](#).

Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts this week [claimed the leadership](#) of the Democrats; they are close to becoming a far-Left party, in likely fulfilment of the Obama plan, which had to be partly concealed to ensure Obama's reelection. Donald Trump is a policy moderate, but an activist enemy of gridlock.

The campaign of defamation against Trump will fail, and if the Democrats and pseudo-Republicans don't get to higher ground soon, Trump will pull together the responsible Right and most of the center and wax the Warren Democrats by a margin that will make the Nixon and Reagan reelections look like photo-finishes.

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