

Feelings and Thoughts on Charlottesville

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Like everyone—in the world, really—I was riveted by the events in Charlottesville, Virginia in mid-August of 2017. White racial activists had gathered in that city to protest the planned removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee and to hold a “United the Right” rally. What came up for me:

My first reaction was elation and gratitude with reference to the statue protest. How about this! White people—organized, and doing it publicly—standing up for their heritage and race, standing up for people like me, standing up for me. When has this ever happened before? Nothing comes to mind, and I’ve been around forever — I’m bearing in on eighty. Thank you.

And they were doing it with such remarkable dedication and courage. Richard Spencer and the other leaders had to know the physical peril they were putting themselves in; much less assaulted, they could have been shot. The participants in this endeavor had to know they’d be trashed, not applauded, for doing what they believed in their hearts, and very arguably, was the right thing to do, and that it could even cost them their jobs, their livelihoods. I was involved in anti-Vietnam War protests and, yes, black civil rights activities in the sixties and had nothing at all to lose doing it. In fact, it was a good way to improve my social standing, including with women; it picked up my love life.

The Charlottesville protest had special personal meaning to me. While I grew up in the North, the Griffins are from Georgia and my grandfather fought for the South in the Civil War. That’s right, my grandfather—not my great-great-great grandfather—was an adult in 1860. I know enough about my grandfather to be assured that his participation in that war was not in the defense of slavery and oppression. And I know enough about history to affirm that the same can be said about General Robert E. Lee. From the images on television over the weekend, what a

magnificent statue of Lee it is, and sadly, I didn't even know it existed, or that it was going to be removed. Such an injustice and calculated assault on my race and my ancestors, and the protestors brought that to my and others' attention.

These upbeat feelings, which persist, have gotten mixed up with some sobering thoughts, however.

With its stridency and far right symbolism and predilection toward violence, even if it is in self-defense, the Charlottesville protest was problematic as a media event, and that's how most people experienced it, as a show, in the same category as "Game of Thrones." Just as were George Lincoln Rockwell-led protests in the 1950s and '60s (I wrote a [book](#) that included a chapter about him), it was a perfect set-up for whites' adversaries to haul out the tried-and-true smear labels—white supremacist, racist, Nazi—and to dismiss the whole of the white racial movement as beyond the pale and a menace.

The alt-right thrust, this mind-set and presentation, doesn't play well with the great majority of people, including women, college students, and professionals (where were they in Charlottesville?). Successful movements—I'm thinking of the black civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, feminist, and gay rights movements—included radical elements, and indeed they contributed to the cause. They appealed strongly to some people, they inspired many others, and they served an educational function. (Prompted by Charlottesville, I checked out [AltRight.com](#) and learned something.) But, the point, these successful movements weren't only radical, and fundamentally they weren't perceived by the mass public as radical or extreme, as far left or far right, or as comprised of a limited demographic (e.g., edgy young men). Rather, these movements had the blessings of our media and academic elites, and they were viewed as centrist, core-American, everybody-included, and that accorded them legitimacy and wide appeal. The fact of the matter is that no sensible person with status in the world and a reputation to protect and children's college tuition to pay either now or up the line is

going to run the risk of showing his or her face at a “Unite the Right” rally.

I’m left with the conclusion that white activism needs to become more pluralistic, call it that. Currently, there’s a rich variety of white analysis and advocacy. The talk is really good (although it could be argued that basically we talk primarily to each other). But we need more, and different kinds of, white activists, people out there actually doing it, forming organizations, becoming active politically, whatever it is. We need more white protectors—the only people actually protecting that statue of Robert E. Lee were alt-right types, and good for them.

My take on it is that alt-right people ought to keep doing what they believe in doing, full speed ahead. And that other racially conscious and committed white people—representing a wide range of ideological and political persuasions (the cause of whites isn’t just a rightist thing) and all personal styles, each in his or her unique, individual way—get active too. And that they be savvy in how they go about doing it: both figuratively and literally, getting active on the side of whites can be like sticking one’s head out of a foxhole.

And yes, I’m speaking particularly to young people. These days, I’m barely able to tap out these few words before I take yet another nap. Someday this will be you, so if you are going to do something—big or small, it all adds up—decide what it is and move on it while you still can.