

Denouncing the evil lie of white supremacy

The right-wing extremists aren't counting on support from most white people. Just silence.

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Faith leaders' action in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 12, 2017. Steven Martin/National Council of Churches.

The neo-Nazis and white supremacists who gathered in Charlottesville—and who plan to gather again in other places in coming months—did not hold their rally to persuade people of the rightness of their cause. They gathered to intimidate and to terrify. One of them used a car as a deadly weapon against counterdemonstrators. The entire rally was an act of terrorism—intended to demonstrate power, stimulate fear, and provoke Americans' deepest anxieties.

The extremist right-wing groups are not counting on majority support, but they are counting on majority silence. They do not expect media adulation, but they are eager for media attention. And they are emboldened by the president. For all these reasons, it is crucial for Americans—especially white Americans—to find every way

they can too loudly and clearly condemn white supremacy for what it is: an evil lie and a dangerous cancer in a nation that seeks to provide dignity and justice for all.

White supremacy must not only be denounced; it must also be renounced through concrete acts. This can take various forms—beginning with putting one's moral convictions and one's body on the line the way that clergy and other leaders did in Charlottesville, opposing the hate groups with their public presence. The president and his administration can take the concrete step of funding—rather than eliminating—programs that counter white extremist groups. State and municipal leaders can take the concrete step of removing monuments in public spaces that celebrate the Confederacy, explaining to their constituents why this action helps move the nation toward a better future for all Americans.

Renouncing white supremacy also involves the difficult work of acknowledging all the ways it continues to shape American life, whether in policing, economic and educational opportunity, immigration, or foreign policy. White supremacy is at work whenever there's an assumption that white people's peace, security, and thriving are somehow superior to or more important than other people's.

White people of conscience may like to think of themselves as categorically different from the white supremacists who marched in Charlottesville. But they should recognize that the extremists imagine themselves to be acting on behalf of all white people. That logic must be rejected completely and exchanged for a vision of a racially inclusive future.

Speaking last year, activist and author Adrienne Maree Brown said that racist realities in America “are not getting worse. They are getting uncovered. We must hold each other tight and continue to pull back the veil.”

In Charlottesville, the veil was pulled back further on the twisted logic, inherent violence, and historical resonance of white supremacy. Those who see it are called to act nonviolently but decisively to oppose it.

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