

Why did Charlottesville carnage happen? Because we lie to ourselves

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To my white fellow citizens:

I invite you to consider this scene from Saturday's riot in Charlottesville. [As reported by The Washington Post](#), a group of counterprotesters assembled at a rally of white supremacists in that Virginia college town and took up a chant, "No Trump! No KKK! No fascist USA!"

To which one of the white supremacists yelled back, "Too late, f-----!"

At this writing, we are still sorting out all that happened Saturday at and around the University of Virginia. First reports paint a frightening picture: Nazis, Klansmen and other benighted citizens of the extreme right — most said to be white men in their 20s and 30s — shouting the usual expressions of hate; brawls breaking out between the protesters and counterprotesters; police, according to some witnesses, standing by. Those early reports also tell us that a car was driven through a crowd of counterprotesters, with the result that over a dozen people were injured, at least one of them fatally.

While it is too soon to know much about this with certainty, this much is clear. What happened Saturday in Virginia is the bitter and inevitable fruit of our habit of intellectual dishonesty where race is concerned.

The first, such, of course, lay in writing slavery and racial inferiority into a constitution that supposedly enshrined the equality of all people before the law. From that day until this one, we have never quite weaned ourselves of lying to ourselves where race is concerned. Indeed, as the moral authority of the Civil Rights Movement recedes deeper into memory, as cable news and social media offer new platforms and broad reach to voices of acrimony and hate and as facts become "facts" become untruths become lies and too few of us seem to notice or care, the intellectual dishonesty surrounding race has become starker, more brazen and more creative than we have seen in years.

Like when people say that talking about racism is racism.

Or when they babble pious inanities like “racism goes both ways” and “all lives matter.”

Nor have news media always brought clarity. It was pundits, after all, who kept ascribing Donald Trump’s rise to “economic anxiety” even as his followers were yelling racist, homophobic and anti-Semitic slurs with unbridled glee. And leave us not forget how media have allowed the folks who brought such chaos to Charlottesville to brand themselves under a banal-sounding new euphemism — the “alt-right” — as if they were not the same bunch of mouth-breathing, lowlife racists they always were.

Where race is concerned, intellectual honesty, the willingness to see and say what is right in front of us, has long been in short supply. And too many of you — not all, no, but far too many — readily embrace these implicit lies because you fear the places to which the truth will push you. But the racial riot and terrorism that just visited Charlottesville and the emboldened brazenness of the white supremacist movement now that one of their own has taken the White House, suggest that you no longer have the luxury of avoidance, at least not if the future of this country matters to you.

I am not unmindful of the young white students who protested the hate that arrived on their campus Saturday. For that matter, I am not unmindful of the white people who marched through Charleston after the church massacre there. I remember James Zwerg, who had his face kicked in, and Viola Liuzzo and Elijah Lovejoy, who were shot to death for African-American freedom.

But I am likewise not unmindful that too many of you have watched with complicit silence and quiet terror of demographic change as voting rights were abridged, murderous policemen went free, Fox “News” turned your resentment into ratings and politicians turned your rancor into power.

The result of which erupted Saturday for all the world to see. Meaning not just the violence and not just the terrorism, but the sense of victory and vindication embodied in the smug rejoinder of a white supremacist to a group of people who had come to chant in support of something higher than bigotry and rage.

“Too late f-----!”

Maybe he’s right. Maybe it is.

That’s a decision you’ll have to make.