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No, Trump Did Not Call Neo-Nazis and White Supremacists 'Very Fine People'

However, the accuracy of what Trump did claim – that there were "very fine people on both sides" of the 2017 Unite the Right debacle – is in question.

By **Taija PerryCook**

Updated June 21, 2024

Published June 20, 2024



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Claim:

On Aug. 15, 2017, then-President Donald Trump called neo-Nazis and white supremacists who attended the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, "very fine people."

Rating:



False

False

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Context

In a news conference after the rally protesting the planned removal of a Confederate statue, Trump did say there were "very fine people on both sides," referring to the protesters and the counterprotesters. He said in the same statement he wasn't talking about neo-Nazis and white nationalists, who he said should be "condemned totally."

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Editors' Note: Some readers have raised the objection that this fact check appears to assume Trump was correct in stating that there were "very fine people on both sides" of the Charlottesville incident. That is not the case. This fact check aimed to confirm what Trump actually said, not whether what he said was true or false. For the record, virtually every source that covered the Unite the Right debacle concluded that it was conceived of, led by and attended by white supremacists, and that therefore Trump's characterization was wrong.

In spring 2024, **social media posts** re-surfaced raising questions about an infamous comment from former U.S. President Donald Trump related to

violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, over the removal of a confederate statue.

On Aug. 11 and 12, 2017, the so-called **Unite the Right rally** protesting the planned removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee from a park turned violent when **neo-Nazis**, white supremacists and others linked to **far-right groups clashed with leftist counterprotesters**. One self-identified white supremacist rammed his car into a crowd of people, killing one and injuring at least 19.

Richard B. Spencer and **Jason Kessler** — both white nationalists — planned the rally, and David Duke, a former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, attended.

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In an Aug. 15 news conference, then-U.S. President **Donald Trump** was asked to comment on the event and famously said there were "very fine people on both sides." This response received widespread backlash; **many**.

claimed Trump had put neo-Nazis and counterprotesters on the "same moral plane."

Specifically, Trump's critics claimed he called the neo-Nazis and white supremacists at the rally **"very fine people."** This claim spread like wildfire, with then-presidential candidate **Joe Biden** making Trump's comments on Charlottesville **a cornerstone** of **his campaign**.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer **said in a speech** that "nobody who breaks bread with antisemites like Nick Fuentes, and who called white supremacists in Charlottesville 'very good people,' or who, as was recently reported, said disgustingly that Hitler did some good things, has any right to lecture Jewish Americans about their personal political beliefs."

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Trump's supporters have consistently claimed that he actually condemned the neo-Nazis and white supremacists at the rally.

We looked into these claims, and found that while Trump did say there were "very fine people on both sides," meaning both the protesters and the counterprotesters, he also condemned neo-Nazis and white nationalists outright and said he was specifically referring to those who were there only to participate in the statue protest. We found the original clip on C-SPAN, and transcribed the relevant section below:

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Reporter: Mr. President, are you putting what you're calling the alt-left and white supremacists on the same moral plane?

Trump: I am not putting anybody on a moral plane, what I'm saying is this: You had a group on one side and a group on the other, and they came at each other

with clubs and it was vicious and horrible and it was a horrible thing to watch, but there is another side. There was a group on this side, you can call them the left. You've just called them the left, that came violently attacking the other group. So you can say what you want, but that's the way it is.

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Reporter: You said there was hatred and violence on both sides?

Trump: I do think there is blame — yes, I think there is blame on both sides. You look at, you look at both sides. I think there's blame on both sides, and I have no doubt about it, and you don't have any doubt about it either. And, and, and, and if you reported it accurately, you would say.

Reporter: The neo-Nazis started this thing. They showed up in Charlottesville.

Trump: Excuse me, they didn't put themselves down as neo-Nazis, and you had some very bad people in that group. **But you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides.** You had people in that group — excuse me, excuse me, I saw the same pictures as you did — you had people in that group that were there to protest the taking down of, to them, a very very important statue and the

renaming of a park from Robert E. Lee to another name. George Washington was a slave owner. Was George Washington a slave owner? So will George Washington now lose his status, are we gonna take down — excuse me — are we gonna take down statues of George Washington? How about Thomas Jefferson? What do you think of Thomas Jefferson? You like him? Okay good. Are we gonna take down the statue? Cause he was a major slaveowner. Now are we gonna take down his statue? So you know what? It's fine. You're changing history, you're changing culture, and you had people — and **I'm not talking about the neo-Nazis and the white nationalists, because they should be condemned totally. But you had many people in that group other than neo-Nazis and white nationalists, okay?** And the press has treated them absolutely unfairly. Now, in the other group also, you had some fine people, but you also had troublemakers, and you see them come with the black outfits, and with the helmets, and the baseball bats, you got a lot of bad people in the other group too.

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Reporter: I'm sorry sir, I didn't understand what you were saying, you were saying the press has treated white nationalists unfairly? I don't understand what you're saying.

Trump: No, no. There were people in that rally — and I looked the night before — if you look, there were people protesting very quietly the taking down of the statue of Robert E. Lee. I'm sure in that group there was some bad ones. The following day it looked like they had some rough, bad people. Neo-Nazis, white nationalists, whatever you wanna call them. But you had a lot of people in that group that were there to innocently protest — and very legally protest — because I don't know if you know, they had a permit. The other group didn't have a permit. So I only tell you this, there are two sides to a story. I thought what took place was a horrible moment for our country. A horrible moment. But there are two sides to the country.

Despite Trump's explicit condemnation of neo-Nazis and white nationalists, the majority of far-right leaders and groups **received the speech positively**.

"Thank you President Trump for your honesty & courage to tell the truth about #Charlottesville & condemn the leftist terrorists in BLM/Antifa," **Duke, a former KKK grand wizard, posted on X** in response to Trump's comments.

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On Aug. 12, 2017, prior to the news conference in which he finally condemned the white supremacists outright, Trump had **posted on X** vaguely addressing the violence unfolding in Charlottesville. "We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for," he wrote. "There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Lets come together as one!"

He then made **a statement** from his golf course in New Jersey that began: "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides, on many sides." These statements received widespread backlash for failing to address the presence of Nazis and white supremacists explicitly.

We've previously fact-checked the claim that **Trump refused to explicitly condemn white supremacists** during the September 2020 presidential debate.

In sum, while Trump did say that there were "very fine people on both sides," he also specifically noted that he was not talking about neo-Nazis and white supremacists and said they should be "condemned totally." Therefore, we have rated this claim "False."

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Updates

June 21 2024: This story was updated with an editor's note to clarify what Snopes was fact-checking; a link to NYT video of the event in question; statements Trump made prior to the "both sides" news conference; and social posts in 2024 that recirculated the rumors.

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