

### Charlottesville

Two weeks after the violent episodes in Charlottesville, Virginia, and reactions to them, the story still grips the country as I write this column toward the end of August.

I know what I saw:

- a torch-lit march through the campus of the University of Virginia, whose participants chanted "Jews will not replace us," and "Blood and Soil!"
- a white nationalist driver pushing another car into a crowd of protestors, killing Heather Heyer and injuring many others;
- a synagogue worshipping in fear on Shabbat morning, and departing in small groups from a back exit;
- a large crowd of heavily armed white supremacists and neo-Nazis and a large crowd of unarmed counter-demonstrators. There was also a much smaller group of anarchist and far-left anti-demonstrators, some of them lightly armed;

What does all this have to do with us Jews?

The neo-Nazi, white supremacist demonstrations have obvious relevance. Remember that "Blood and Soil!" was a signature Nazi slogan, the idea being that it is kinship, i.e. "blood," that should determine who lives and dominates in a country. Then, it was like saying "Germany for Germans." Or, in our case, America for (white) Americans, with the demonstrators and their leaders determining who is white enough. And what kind of "replacement" by Jews can these benighted people be afraid of?

America has not seen this level of hate speech, nor such a pervasive atmosphere of menace, since the 1920s and 1930s. We cannot forget that similar hatred came to hideous fruition directed at Jews and other "undesirables" in Nazi Germany.

I am grateful that thoughtful people are rising up all over the country to combat hate speech and the threat of violence. As we, the people, have driven hate groups underground in the past, I am confident that we will do so again today.

But it is not enough to protest. We must also work harder to get to know and appreciate our neighbors—i.e., those with whom we share communities of whatever nature. Based on those relationships, we must rebuild neighborhoods, towns and, yes, our beloved country into place where compassion, justice and mutual respect are the rule.

As we approach the High Holy Days and remember our sins, let us turn toward a renewal of the values and virtues that have sustained our Jewish tradition and people. In a country of such varied heritage, we must lend our voices and our strength in the continuing effort to build an America in which every last one of us will be valued and secure.

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