Biased

Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do

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CHAPTER 9

Higher Learning

They'd come to start a race war, with weapons hanging from their belts and strapped to their chests. They were yelling Nazi slogans, wearing Confederate gear, and carrying tiki torches in imitation of the white-robed, cross-burning Ku Klux Klan. And their siege of the University of Virginia campus and the city of Charlottesville would shift the conversation around race and bigotry in America in ways that would have been unimaginable a decade before.

For more than twenty years, I had been studying the kind of unconscious bias that operates so quietly that social scientists have to prove that it exists. Now here in my living room were televised images that could have been lifted from a history book. We've been so focused on explaining and eradicating implicit bias that we did not attend adequately to the capacity for implicit bias to become starkly and dangerously explicit again. Now shifting social and political norms are giving once-closeted bigots a mouthpiece and a voice.

I tried to imagine how this must feel to UVA students, who'd come of age in a country that twice elected a black president. Now their campus was ground zero for a newly visible white supremacy

movement. The people of Charlottesville turned out in droves to challenge the marchers, but the damage was already done.

Universities, by their very nature, have long been both drivers and reflections of broad social change. Idealistic young people—unchained from parochial views and exquisitely attuned to injustice—are not afraid to challenge authority and eager to change the world.

The civil rights movement leaped onto the national agenda when four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, walked into a local Woolworth's in 1960, sat at a "whites only" lunch counter, and refused to leave. That sparked months of protests and led to Freedom Rides and voter registration drives that drew a multiracial coalition of college students from all across the country to battle discrimination in the South.

The antiwar campaign that helped force an end to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was rooted in campus activism. When four students were shot to death by National Guard soldiers during a protest at Kent State University in 1970, the nation could not turn away. The wave of demonstrations that followed engaged four million students and shut down more than four hundred college campuses. At New York University, a window banner proclaimed "They Can't Kill Us All."

That sense of agitation is still alive today. In fact, college students' commitment to activism and civic engagement is higher than it's been at any time in the last fifty years, according to surveys of freshman attitudes. And more students rate themselves "liberal" today than at any time since 1973.

But the 2016 election of Donald Trump galvanized liberal students and emboldened right-wing fringe groups, turning college campuses into battlegrounds over whose rights deserve protecting and whose voices are heard.

The clash of values came to a head at the University of Virginia on August 12, 2017, as hundreds of white nationalists, carrying guns and Confederate flags, rallied in downtown Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the city's proposal to do away with a monument of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee. That march turned into a maelstrom of brawls and beatings; one woman died when a white nationalist plowed through a crowd of counterprotesters in his car.

The night before, more than a hundred torch-bearing neo-Nazis had paraded boldly through the heart of the UVA campus, in a clear challenge to egalitarian norms on race that have been developing in the United States over the last half century.

College is a place where young people discover and reinvent themselves, where the norms that guide our thinking and govern behavior are set and challenged. What starts on campuses migrates out into the larger culture. That makes universities an incubator for nascent social movements and a barometer that can measure where our country is headed.

The violent march in Charlottesville was a throwback to a nation those UVA students were too young to remember. I wondered how that summer of hate was affecting students and professors in and outside the classroom. How were they thinking and talking about bias? What damage did the march leave? What lessons does it carry? How are people attempting to move forward? Those are the questions that compelled me to make my way to Charlottesville on November 1, 2017.

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When my flight landed, it was late and I was tired. I had interviews scheduled with twenty-seven people in the next seventy-two hours, and my mind was on the days ahead. So when my Uber driver asked, "What brings you to town?" I was yanked back to the

present, unprepared. The question was typical, but the situation was not.

How do I respond to a middle-aged white man from the South in the South, right on the heels of Nazis marching in the streets, carrying torches and guns and threatening to start a race war? *Could he be one of them?*

"I'm here to talk to people about a book I am writing on racial bias," I answered nervously from the backseat. I couldn't tell how my reply had landed. All I could see was the back of his head, closely cropped graying hair peeking out from under a battered baseball cap.

My answer, apparently, unleashed something in him. He launched into a long story about the woman who had raised him and how much he loved her. Her name was Lyta, she'd just died at ninety years old, and she was black. She was more than a domestic who'd worked for his family for years. She was one of the most important people in his life, a woman who'd cared for him as if he were her child, while his own mother was busy tending to his handicapped sister. I could hear his voice crack and choke as he shared memories of her.

Just thinking about this white man's bond with this black woman made me feel a little less on edge. Then suddenly he went silent. His mood seemed to shift, and he announced in a somber voice: "Bigotry is still in my veins."

Oh, boy. . . . "How do you know?" I asked, trying to tread lightly.

"I can feel it."

"When?" I asked. "When do you feel it?"

He paused for a moment to think that through. "When I'm outnumbered," he said. "I can feel it rising up."

He could feel it rise up when he was the only white person in a setting. Not just with black people in Virginia, but with any group

that wasn't his own. He'd spent years living in Florida, surrounded by Latinos, and felt it there as well, he said.

His raw honesty startled me. In the privacy of his car with someone he saw as an expert at hand, he was beginning to wrestle with something he'd accepted about himself but didn't understand: even though he'd grown up loving this black woman with his whole heart, bigotry was still within him, waiting to be called forth.

By the time he finished unburdening himself, we were pulling up to the entrance to my hotel. I thanked him, left the car, and checked in, still mulling over his words and what they meant.

Our encounter would set the stage for my mission in Charlottesville. The changing status of whites in America is tinder for the fire of white nationalism. When whites are the mainstream and everyone else the "others," things feel safe and comfortable for men like my driver.

But by the middle of this century, white people are likely to be a minority in this country, according to U.S. Census Bureau projections. And simply reminding some white Americans of their diminishing presence can lead them to express more negative attitudes toward blacks, Latinos, and Asians, according to a series of studies by social psychologists Maureen Craig and Jennifer Richeson.

My driver couldn't explain the bigotry "rising up" in him, but social science can. Feeling outnumbered can signal a threat to the legacy of dominance and the white privilege that affords. That can seed fear and resentment, which can fuel desperate measures to reclaim primacy. Being reminded of an "increasingly diverse racial landscape" leads some whites to express a stronger preference to interact exclusively with members of their own racial group, to feel that discrimination against whites is on the rise, and to endorse more politically conservative views and policies.

But social science is only part of the story. To really understand what is happening in Charlottesville and elsewhere, we also need to turn to history.

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The summer of hate began with white nationalists who came to Charlottesville to protest a plan to remove the statue of General Lee from a park in the city's historic downtown core. The proposal was part of a larger effort by the city's elected leaders to examine how history is communicated in public spaces and map out a path to delivering a more complete and accurate story of Charlottesville's past.

UVA history professor John Mason served as vice-chair of the city's Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Memorials, and Public Spaces. His role was to sift through elements of Charlottesville's history to provide a clearer picture of the circumstances under which the memorials were created and what they were meant to convey.

That meant not only considering the prominence of Confederate symbols but remedying the lack of attention paid to symbols of African American history.

"Virginia was a major slave-exporting state," John noted. In the thirty years before the Civil War, half a million people from Virginia were sold to southern farmers to cultivate cotton crops. "Some of them were marched south. Some of them were shipped south. Some of them went south on railroads. And every one of those people had a story of a family being torn, a community being torn apart, of losing your friends, your family, your connections to everything that you've ever known."

Yet the slave auction block on the city's town square bore only a "small plaque buried on the sidewalk that everybody steps on and overlooks," John bemoaned.

The commission was reevaluating that memorial too. "But when we had our public hearings, the conversation was overwhelmingly about the statues. And when tempers flared, it was overwhelmingly about the statues," he said.

The bronze statue of Robert E. Lee astride his horse had been a town fixture since it was erected in 1924, on parkland donated by a wealthy white Virginia businessman. That was at the height of the Ku Klux Klan's reign of terror and almost sixty years after the end of the Civil War. It was put up as a deliberate act of intimidation and as a reminder of the power of whites: rendered with vile intent, not rose-colored nostalgia.

The idea of doing away with Confederate symbols had been percolating in Charlottesville for several years. The Lee statue was the most visible and vaunted symbol of Virginia's role in the Confederacy and a perpetual reminder of an ethos that deemed blacks fit only for slavery.

White residents challenging its removal considered the statue a gift of immense historical significance. They regaled the Blue Ribbon Commission with "rosy memories" of playing in the park beneath the watchful eye of General Lee, John told me. "There was rarely racist language that was used, but there was a clear identification with white nationalism, southern nationalism. This sense that the history that matters [is] the history of white people in the South, and that to understand southern history in any other way was wrong."

The battle over the statue became a window into the broader issue dividing the city: whether to cling to that sanitized version of history or wrestle publicly with uncomfortable remnants of white supremacy.

"I hadn't appreciated how much the mythology of the war was embedded in the hearts and souls of so many people," John told me.

"How many people take a powerful sense of identity from identifying with the Confederacy as a glorious lost cause, identifying with the defeat of the Confederacy as a terrible tragedy."

Until he served on the commission, the history professor—a descendant of slaves—had failed to understand how what historians call the "lost cause" theory still shapes the consciousness of so many people. "In their minds, to dishonor Robert E. Lee was to dishonor them, was to strike at the soul of their being." That same sentiment, of reverence for Confederate icons, was animating discussions across the country, in Richmond, New Orleans, Atlanta, Baltimore, even Madison, Wisconsin.

In Charlottesville, the public dialogue over the statues had begun to lean away from moving or dismantling them. But that abruptly changed when white progressives began turning up at commission meetings. The local residents were part of a national group called SURJ—Showing Up for Racial Justice—organized "to undermine white supremacy and to work toward racial justice."

"They were more radical than I was," John recalls. "They said, 'No, no, no. None of this transformation business. Get rid of them.' People on the right thought I was some sort of black militant bomb thrower. These folks on the left thought I'm some sort of 'Uncle Tom.'"

Their resistance helped blur the racial divisions. "To hear so many white people talk about white supremacy was really important," John said. "Really, really important." Their skin color insulated them from the typical claims lobbed at blacks. No one could accuse them of playing the race card or sowing racial division.

Ultimately, the commission voted to move the statue out of Lee Park, and the Charlottesville City Council concurred. Court challenges stalled the plan, and its future is uncertain. The statue remains,

but in June 2017, one hundred years after it was established, Lee Park was renamed Emancipation Park.

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Diane was unpacking on campus the night the neo-Nazis came. It was the middle of August, and the start of school was a week away, but she'd moved in early because she was so exicited to be one of the chosen few to live in that historic dorm along the Lawn at the center of campus during her senior year.

At 8:30, as night began to fall, her phone flashed a message from the university. What she remembers is the bluntness of the warning: "The Nazis will be here at 9." As if it were announcing a long-awaited visitor.

Everyone knew about a massive Unite the Right march planned for the next day, when hundreds of neo-Nazis and white nationalists were expected to descend on downtown Charlottesville. But no one had expected them to target the campus, two miles away, on that Friday night.

Nine o'clock came and went quietly, so Diane began to relax. Then she heard the chants: "Jews will not replace us! You will not replace us!" She looked out the window at "an angry mob of hundreds and hundreds of people," she said. They were shouting, carrying torches, and marching across the campus Lawn toward her room, close enough that she could see their swastika tattoos.

She took off every piece of jewelry that might identify her as a Jew. Then she fled through a back door into an alley that led to the nearby complex where faculty members live. She would watch the chaos that night from her professor's balcony.

Eventually, another official text arrived. "It's like, 'All clear. They're moving; they're no longer here.' Like, 'Okay, go back to your

room and go to bed.' But I couldn't do that; it's like I just didn't want to be in that space," she said. Diane spent the night with the family of a friend who lived in town.

It was new to her, this feeling of being a target. She was a brown-skinned Jewish girl; her mother was white and Jewish, her father Indian and Catholic. Neither race nor religion was talked about in her family. She'd grown up in Maryland, the middle of three girls. "But I think I identify as the most Jewish," she said. "My mom and dad, they just don't understand what it's like to be a person of color just generally." At school, Diane had a multicultural circle of friends. This was the first time that she'd felt like an outsider on campus, at risk and unsafe.

I understood Diane's story on a level deeper than its specific elements. It was more than a visceral fear of bodily harm. She sensed a threat to the UVA self she'd so carefully cultivated in her three years at the school. She was vice president of her class, involved in dozens of activities, a university guide who led visitors and prospective students on historical tours. That was how she had come to define herself.

But we all have multiple selves that we carry around inside us. Which self dominates—to guide our thoughts, feelings, and actions—is, in part, a function of the situations we find ourselves in. The self that emerges at any given moment is not entirely under our control.

Within minutes on that Friday night, Diane's identity shifted from "Ms. UVA" to a Jew who did not belong. She was thrown from the center of campus to its fringes.

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As Diane fled the rallying cries of the marchers, Professor Walt Heinecke ran toward the eye of the storm.

Walt had spent Friday evening firming up plans for alternative events, to counter what felt to many in Charlottesville like a looming

alt-right assault. He was heading to St. Paul's Memorial Church, across from the UVA campus, when he spotted "groups of white supremacists" carrying unlit torches moving across the university field. He hustled to the church, where close to one thousand people of every race and religion had gathered that night to fortify themselves.

But just as the sermons and speeches were ending, someone grabbed the mic and told everyone to stay put: "The alt-right is headed here with torches. We don't know what they're planning." The church went on lockdown. It felt to them as if the entire city were under siege.

Walt got out and headed back to campus. He'd learned that the torch-carrying mob had made it to the Rotunda near Diane's historic dormitory and were menacing students who'd linked arms around a statue of Thomas Jefferson, the university's founder. "There were 150 torch-bearing, angry white men yelling, 'You will not replace us! Jews go home!'" Walt told me. "I mean just all the nastiest racial epithets you can imagine.

"Things were escalating by the moment. You could feel the tension and the danger. . . . I was scared out of my wits. I've never been in the midst of that kind of racial hatred and violence."

The students began to chant, "Black lives matter! Black lives matter!!" and the marchers drew in closer screaming, "White lives matter!"

Walt and UVA dean Allen Groves waded through the marchers to get to the students. "I started going around saying, 'Are you okay? Do you want to leave?' Anybody that wanted to leave I was ready to pull them out," Walt said. But none of the students wanted to abandon their comrades.

Suddenly a torch flew from the crowd of marchers, hit Dean Groves, and cut his arm. "And then pretty much quickly, right after that, things were happening like, boom, boom, boom," Walt recalled.

The marchers began dousing the crowd with mace. "A couple of

them started beating on the students, hitting and throwing torches at them. It got to be physical and violent at that point," he said.

Then they heard sirens and the police showed up. "The neo-Nazis had started filtering off," he said. "That part was basically over."

But the real terror was about to begin.

SHOWING UP

They held service that Saturday morning, the day of Shabbat, with thirty neo-Nazis circling the synagogue and one man shouting "Heil Hitler" from the sidewalk, his arm raised in a Nazi salute. After they finished praying, the worshippers were forced to leave the temple through a side door.

Still, Geoff was relieved that nothing worse had happened. He was a student at both the law school and the business school at UVA, and his wife was a rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel, Charlottesville's only synagogue. The day before the march, they'd retrieved a sacred eighteenth-century Czech Torah scroll from its synagogue resting space to keep it safe from marauders.

The scroll had been among thousands of religious relics confiscated by Nazis during their European reign of terror. After World War II, hundreds of Czech scrolls were rescued and ultimately made their way to synagogues around the world.

The painful irony of his rescue operation would trouble Geoff for months: "Those [Jewish] communities, they were all exterminated. And now we've got this scroll, and it's being threatened again by Nazis."

That's part of what motivated Geoff and his wife to join a protest against the march after they left the synagogue that Saturday.

"When people say 'Don't go,' that's kind of what we think that

our ancestors in Europe were told," Geoff explained. "'Just let them come. . . . They're just a small group. They're not serious. If we just ignore them, they'll go away.' I think for us, we felt like that has proven itself to be an unsuccessful strategy, so we wanted to go out."

The strategy of turning a blind eye to bias has indeed failed to stem discrimination. But there are powerful currents that pull people away from confronting bias, even when they believe that's the right thing to do. Even small-scale actions that people might take when they see discrimination in play—standing up for a victim or scolding someone for using a racial slur—can require more energy and risk than many people are willing to expend.

Research shows that people tend to grossly overestimate the extent to which they will speak out against prejudice, particularly when they are not the target of the offense. And standing up against racism can be dangerous. The death of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville testifies to that. The thirty-two-year-old woman was killed and dozens of people were injured when a car plowed through a crowd of people protesting the march. Sixteen months later, in December 2018, the driver, twenty-one-year-old James Alex Fields Jr.—a self-professed neo-Nazi from a small town in Ohio—was convicted of murder by a Charlottesville jury that recommended prison, plus 419 years.

During my visit, when the pain was still raw, practically every person I spoke to mentioned Heather Heyer's tragic death. Brick buildings near the spot where Fields mowed her down still bore tributes, scrawled in chalk pastels: "ONE HUMAN RACE. NO MORE HATE. NEVER FORGET. THE MINUTE WE STOP FIGHTING BACK, THAT'S THE MINUTE BIGOTRY WINS."

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On the morning of the march, Geoff and his wife were determined to show up. They made their way to Emancipation Park, where they found an interfaith group of clergy kneeling to counter the rabid displays of hate. One observer told me later that those religious leaders were taunted and spit on by white supremacists as they knelt.

In that southern city where the fault lines of history run black and white, Jews were not only being forced to reckon individually with the visible resurrection of virulent anti-Semitism. The verbal attacks were also meant to signal to everyone else that Jews were no longer to be accepted as white. Their status was probationary—to be threatened in threatening times.

The language of white supremacy has always demonized blacks and Jews in the same medieval style, relying on ancient stereotypes that degrade and dehumanize. The Charlottesville march, with its coalition of radical right-wingers and white nationalists, was intended to mobilize a new generation of haters to return to the good old days, when blacks and Jews knew their place.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents in the United States jumped almost 60 percent between 2016 and 2017, and much of that increase occurred on college campuses where white supremacist groups have stepped up their activity. Anti-Semitic incidents in schools and universities nearly doubled in that year. And after the wall-to-wall coverage of Charlottesville's violence, reports of threats, vandalism, and attacks on Jewish symbols and institutions spiked across the country for months.

On my visit to Charlottesville, everyone had different ways of referring to the collection of groups under the broad Unite the Right tent. They were white supremacists, Nazis, neo-Nazis, Klansmen, white nationalists, white separatists, the alt-right, or simply a collection of misfits who'd tapped into sentiments that had been percolating underground for

years. Divisive political rhetoric and new propaganda tools helped create the momentum that propelled their anger to the surface. Their willingness to brandish blatant symbols of bigotry—torches, Confederate flags, swastikas—risks making the once-unthinkable seem routine, weakening the hold of egalitarian norms that value, or at least tolerate, diversity. That shifting of norms is what allows implicit bias to emerge explicitly.

The Unite the Right rally was the largest public gathering of white supremacists in a generation. Experts who study hate groups say their ranks are growing as social media makes connecting easier and the guardrails that reined in overt displays of racism have begun to come down.

A study of flourishing white supremacist networks on Twitter in 2016 found that two hashtags drew the most retweets: #WhiteGenocide and #DonaldTrump.

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Campbell came to Charlottesville because he loves the South. He'd grown up in Nashville, a white boy with liberal views on race and politics who wanted to study law so he could change the laws that prop up inequality.

He was just beginning his second year of law school at UVA when the white supremacists showed up with their guns and their Confederate flags to stake their claim to his legacy.

Campbell wasn't surprised by their ugly rhetoric or their pride in what he knew were emblems of bigotry. What he felt was more like shame, with a dose of liability.

"Those people are part of my community," he told me. "They could be my cousins, for all I know. . . . So in some ways, [it's] my responsibility and my fault, and taking action to correct that is an important thing."

The night before the march in downtown Charlottesville, Campbell

and his classmate Brittany, a black woman from Princeton, New Jersey, were headed to a party when they saw what looked like tiny fires burning near the UVA Lawn. They figured students were holding a vigil, preparing themselves for their roles as counterprotesters the next day.

To a southern man and a black woman, the scene from a distance looked "very KKK-esque," Brittany said. She and Campbell joked about how naive those students must be to mimic what looked "so much like a KKK thing."

Then they realized it was indeed a KKK thing. White supremacists were marching across their campus, brandishing tiki torches, shouting Nazi slogans, and making crude monkey noises.

"I could not wrap my mind around the fact that they were actual torches," Brittany said. It was as if fearsome images of white-robed racists and burning crosses had sprung to life on her college grounds.

Campbell and Brittany cut their partying short that night. "We were out with other people, and it just felt really weird to be out while there were Nazis marching on the Lawn," Brittany explained. "There was just this sense of cognitive dissonance."

For Brittany, it was one of those moments where racial differences become clear and categorical. Her white classmates could hear about that scene and hold it at a distance. "They can say, 'Oh, this is horrible, but I'm not going to let it affect me.' [But] that's not really a choice that I feel like I have," she said.

For Campbell, that dissonance was compounded by crosscurrents of heritage and ideology.

"I felt very weird," he said, "because I knew that I was waking up the next morning to go protest racist anti-Semites, and most of the people at that party weren't. Most people at that party didn't really care."

The "us versus them" lines had begun to shift and blur. The

torches weren't part of a peace vigil; they were instruments of hate. The classmates he'd hoped would stand with him against racism seemed oblivious. And the people he planned to protest against looked eerily familiar to him.

When Campbell arrived to protest the march on Saturday morning, he waded through a sea of men "walking around with guns, wearing camo. . . . It was very hard to tell who the cops were and who the state Virginia Guard was and who the militia members were," he said.

As the conflict heated up and skirmishes broke out, it became harder to cleanly separate the bad guys from the good. Based on later estimates, the counterprotesters who arrived at the march were a couple thousand strong, outnumbering the protesters four to one.

Campbell wasn't afraid, but he was concerned enough to call his dad. "I was like, 'Hey, just FYI, I'm on the downtown mall today. I'm going to be fine, but just in case things go south, you should know that I'm here.'"

The counterprotesters he encountered were an eclectic bunch: clergy and churchgoers, socialists, feminists, pacifists, students, Black Lives Matter activists, militant Antifa warriors, the leftist Redneck Revolt, and a cadre of "de-escalators" trained to stand between warring factions to try to calm things down.

On the other side, marked by their long guns, bulletproof vests, and Confederate insignias, were race-baiting marchers whose uniforms broadcast their ties to the state that Campbell loves.

"There were several guys wearing Tennessee shirts, which my girlfriend pointed out to me," he said. "I'm from Tennessee and a Tennessee fan, so seeing someone who I have a common bond with marching around with a Confederate flag was not surprising, but it was difficult to see." The "them" had become him, it seemed. It was as if Campbell were fighting against himself.

That can raise uncomfortable questions of allegiance and identity. Campbell couldn't sever who he is from where he'd grown up. But he could choose which self he would be.

"If you're a liberal white person in the South, then you can't not grow up constantly wrestling with and thinking about issues of race," he said. "Distancing yourself from that is not something you would want to or could do.

"The people who were surprised by August 12, I think, were mostly not from here and were uniformly white," he said. "It was easy for them to be like, 'Well, I'm going back to New York next year. These southerners are just hicks.' "

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Sophie Trawalter, a psychology professor at UVA, was scheduled to speak at a university event Saturday afternoon. "It was meant to be the counterprotest, but sort of engaging intellectually and thinking about democracy."

But she wanted her young son "to just have one moment where he gets to just have his regular day," she said. So they spent the morning at an indoor playground near their house.

On their drive back, she came across a foreboding sight: a group of men with machine guns, standing on a street corner near her house.

Her four-year-old son was quiet until they got home. Then he asked the question his mother dreaded: "He's like, 'Mom, why did those men have those big guns?' "

Sophie blurted out the first thing that came to her: "Well, you know, there are these people who are in our town today, and I think they're really scared and that's made them angry and they're here to

scare people. I think they're here to start fights, and so we're going to stay out of the way, okay?"

Her husband wasn't thrilled with that response. Too much, he thought, for a child that young.

So they dialed it back a bit and widened the frame, to impart the sort of lesson a child could lean on. "We talked to him about how there are people who don't like other people because of the groups they belong to," she said. "And that it's not okay to be mean to people if you're angry, and it's not okay to be angry at people that you don't know just based on what they look like. Nice people look a lot of different ways."

Talking to little children about discrimination can be awkward, particularly for white parents who might not have had to deal with issues around race in their own lives. But the ugly images from Charlottesville forced parents across the country into uncomfortable conversations with their children about hate and race and history.

Under normal circumstances, for many white parents, the instinct is to show your child that race doesn't matter by not talking about it. Being color-blind is what it means to be a good parent; it's a sign of tolerance and a panoply of all the right virtues. But for most black parents, the instinct is to do the opposite: help children to understand how race does matter and show them how to move among people who might be biased. These are the conversations that protect them and prepare them for the world. Indeed, research shows that black parents talk to their children about race much earlier and more often than white parents.

At four, Sophie's son doesn't yet understand the concept of race. "He doesn't get how it functions," she said. But he does know that his babysitter and her daughter are black and that they have less money

than his family and they live in a neighborhood that's not as nice as his.

"We've tried to talk to him about these things," Sophie told me. They bought a children's book about Rosa Parks. "We thought that was a good starting point." But her son didn't quite understand. "He was horrified because he thought Ebony, our nanny, still had to sit at the back of the bus. And there was no amount of explaining to him that that was the past." He still cries at the thought of anyone being mean to Ebony because she is black.

Sometimes, Sophie said, her son asks if he's white or black. There's a picture at their local Whole Foods of a little black kid whose smile resembles his. "Every time he sees that poster, he's like, 'Mom, look! That's me!'"

It's hard to tell a boy that innocent that race-baiting neo-Nazis are marching through his town and they hate people like his Jewish father and his black nanny. And that he should still feel safe. But Sophie felt compelled to talk about the march with her son, because "all of this stuff is happening right here and he's seeing it. It's been challenging to frame this for him in a way that he's aware but he's not scared."

It was hard for Sophie herself not to be scared. She had to stifle a scream as she watched live scenes on her cell phone of a "young guy getting beaten up by a group of white supremacists with bats and sticks." A state of emergency had been declared in Charlottesville. The university's talk fest had been scrapped. The attack Sophie saw was three blocks from their house. That afternoon, the family decided to pack up and leave until the marchers were gone.

They had to take a different route than they normally did to get out of town, to avoid driving past the march. Her mother-in-law,

who's Jewish, was horrified by that; she wanted them on the front lines, battling anti-Semitism. "She was like, 'I can't believe we have to plot out our escape to avoid Nazis. This is insane.'"

"We all felt sort of that way," Sophie said. "And we were all scared." She was trapped by her dueling identities and the requisite balancing act. The mother in her accepted that it was dangerous to stay and she had a child to protect. But the psychology professor recognized the power in just showing up.

The mother won out. And when I met her three months later, Sophie was still wrestling with that choice.

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For Anne Coughlin, a law school professor who served as a medic during the Saturday march, the weekend was "devastating" in ways that unexpectedly complicated her life.

She and her husband both volunteered to serve as medics during the march. They had a van, water, bandages, and a few medical supplies. They tended to people who had been teargassed, had been beaten up, or were simply so shaken by what they'd seen and heard that they could not stop crying. For days, the chemical taste of tear gas lingered in her mouth, and thoughts of those wounded bodies and souls were stuck in her head.

As a criminal law professor with a social justice bent, she'd prodded students to think about systemic racial bias. But as the marchers and counterprotesters clashed on the sidewalk outside a church, those racial dynamics became more than academic.

She saw "waves of vehicles carrying neo-Nazis and alt-right people, you could just tell. . . . Really scary people." And too many Nazi and Confederate flags to count. But what shook her up was not the

folks "who looked like the *Duck Dynasty* guy" but the earnest young men who looked as if they belonged in her criminal law class, except that they were carrying weapons and wearing hateful expressions.

For weeks after that, "every time I see a white guy, I was having startled reactions," she said. "I would see an undergraduate [and think] maybe he was an alt-righter. . . . A white guy's walking down Fraternity Row and he's wearing a blue blazer and slacks and I'd have this startled reaction. Because that's what some of the alt-right guys were wearing, dressed like proper young gentlemen of the South."

She'd been primed by that march to link white skin with violence—just as we are primed all our lives to see random black men in that light. It was as if someone had flipped the script of her life, and the nice white lady lawyer was suddenly looking at life through a black-person lens.

The church that served as a gathering spot for the resistance was checking visitors for weapons with metal-detector wands. "They let everybody else through, but my husband got wanded," Anne told me. "They said to him, 'We're sorry, but all white guys are getting . . .' And then they realized, 'Whoa! We're racially profiling white guys.' So they start wanding everybody, which I thought was kind of hysterical."

But it stopped being funny when one of the white supremacist marchers outside the church was spotted with a gun. Anne tried to help hustle all the young black men inside so they would be safe. "And one of those guys just became enraged," she told me. "He was very close to me, in my space but not making eye contact, and screaming at me about how 'We have guns too!' Black guy. 'We have guns too.' And I thought, 'Okay. Just get in the church.'"

Then the young man lit into Anne and her do-gooder crew. "He

started saying that the worst in the world were the white liberals. 'You are the people who have let us down. You did not get our backs. Fuck you! The Nazis, at least we know who we're dealing with when we're dealing with the KKK. But it's you white liberals . . .'

"And then there was this young Jewish man, and I know he was Jewish because he was wearing a yarmulke . . . and he turned to the African American man and said, 'You're right. We've done a terrible job. We need to do better.'

"That's my story," Anne said. "How do I do that?"

THE AFTERMATH

Anne seemed shaken to her core. I had come to Charlottesville on a quest for information. Yet I found myself absorbing Anne's pain along with the information she delivered. Simply being a witness to the aftermath exposed me to more than I had imagined. I saw human struggle, and violence, and its effects, up close.

For decades, Anne had been an advocate of movements to promote equality. But that didn't seem to matter much during the summer of hate. "I like to think of myself as an ally," she told me. "I don't know anymore. . . . They think I'm a fake ally. Oh, God. I don't know what to do. What do I do?" After everything she'd been through in Charlottesville, she seemed most worried that her efforts were misguided—that in the end, they'd failed. The young black man's denouncement of "white liberals" had clearly pierced her.

But black people are wondering about failed efforts too, I said to her. Black people who stood up during the civil rights movement, who marched and held steady when met with violence, felt as if they won and the whole world were about to open up. My parents' families fled the South so we would not grow up under the

tyranny of Jim Crow. They looked to us—their children—to carry the baton across the finish line. Now many in my generation feel as if we were asleep at the wheel. What happened here in Charlottesville is about all of us.

The mistake we keep making—the mistake we all keep making—is in thinking that our work is done. That whatever heroic effort we've made will keep moving us forward. That whatever progress we've seen will keep us from sliding back to burning crosses and hiding Torah scrolls.

But this moment in Charlottesville is our lot, our inheritance. This is where our history and our brain machinery strand us—time and time again. Moving forward requires continued vigilance. It requires us to constantly attend to who we are, how we got that way, and all the selves we have the capacity to be.

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In the aftermath of that summer of hate, getting back to normal teaching at UVA was hard. Students were feeling rattled and raw. Professors wanted to make the march a teachable moment but didn't want to prolong or intensify the trauma.

It was difficult "for the faculty to really know what our responsibility is in response to these events," Sophie said. "I've really struggled with that, because it's not clear what action is going to make a difference."

Many of the courses she taught dealt with issues that made it particularly hard to dodge fraught themes. "I talk about race and gender and social class and status in all of my classes," she told me. "This year more than ever, it's been really challenging."

Just one week after the Unite the Right march, she began teaching a class on values and bias to eighty-five UVA undergraduate public

policy majors. The students seemed to her more ready to engage than in any other semester she had taught the course. But not every student saw the march and the issues it raised through the same lens.

Some could hold it at arm's length and wanted to talk about its intellectual meaning, as a test of our commitment to freedom of speech or a symbol of the cyclical sway of history. Others saw it as a challenge to their very existence. To them, it was an irredeemably ugly and emotional experience, a wholesale assault akin to terrorism.

Still, she was pleased that her students were willing to engage across that gap. "But I will say that this semester, more than any other semester I've ever taught, I've had situations where things got more heated than I'm comfortable with in the classroom."

Like those at most universities, UVA's student body leans liberal. But it's more conservative than the average college, and within its spectrum the conservative students tend to be "quite conservative . . . students for whom this is a really hard topic because they feel very easily targeted," Sophie said. "I take it as a victory in my class that those students feel comfortable speaking out."

In fact, there was so much speaking out that class discussions devolved into heated arguments. Some students would walk out in the middle of class because they were so angry or upset. "And then they'll come back," she said. "I get the sense that all my students are just sort of bubbling under the surface and just small things can lead to eruptions."

Her goal was to allow them to process what happened before, during, and after the march by making space for the emotion of it. As a social psychologist, she also considered those discussions a tool that would allow her students to understand the value of science. "It's really useful, in my mind, to have them debate these things because

the whole point of this class is that we have values and biases that shape how we come up with public policy," she said. Typically, students could see the role of bias come into focus as the discussion unfolds "and then be able to say, 'Okay, talk to me about the psychology of this.'"

But the post-march discussions didn't always work out that way. It was harder than before to set boundaries that would let students boldly explore the role of alternate perspectives without leaving someone feeling angry, wounded, or insulted.

Her ground rules were the same as they'd always been, simple and straightforward: be respectful in the tone and the content of your comments. But this time, she said, "it was amazing that students really struggled with that and couldn't do it." Their arguments were too polarizing and their emotional investment too strong.

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Students from the law school at UVA were having a tough time too. I met with a dozen students in two discussion groups during the last day of my visit. For hours we talked about what happened and what, in the aftermath, needed tending. A recurring theme they raised had to do with the notion of free speech, protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In fact that was the dominant frame for the march I heard all across the campus: First Amendment rights need to be protected, even when we despise and dispute the messages we hear. In that context, some felt the university was a champion of constitutional rights, and the students' emotional wounds were mere collateral damage.

But you can condemn what people say without condemning their legal right to say it. That's intrinsic to the success of many history-making campus movements. And many students felt there wasn't

enough support for those who resisted and tried to douse the marchers' rhetorical fires. It was as if the moral high ground belonged to those who exercised their free speech rights and not to those who acted to protect the rights of others to live with dignity.

University administrators and leaders across the country are trying to find a balance, but often seem more concerned about emphasizing the value of the legal standards than the value of the lives that are being diminished, demeaned, and dehumanized. There is a rush to protect the law but more foot-dragging when it comes to protecting egalitarian norms on their campuses.

I understand why professors are conflicted about weighing in and why universities don't want to fan the flames or encourage uncivil disputes. But numerous students told me that what they perceived as biased or insensitive comments made by their classmates often went unchallenged in class. When those comments are ignored, an opportunity for educating everyone is missed.

Brittany, the black law student from Princeton, shared with me a friend's experience in a constitutional law course, where a classmate impugned black students during a discussion about affirmative action, implying that the black students in the class weren't qualified for their law school spots.

The comment was "completely unaddressed by the professor," she said. "To say that all black people in this school are not qualified to be here or to imply that they're somehow biologically deficient is factually incorrect. So there's definitely a way for you, as a teacher, to push back on that without it being, 'I'm showing my biases' or 'I'm pushing my agenda.'" Instead, marginalized students were left to defend themselves. "That's just not a burden," Brittany said, "that they should have to bear."

Or as another student, in her final year of law school, told our

group, "Only a person that's never had to sit through a class in elementary school learning about slavery as the only black person in the class would not understand how hard and how uncomfortable that has to be."

That kind of identity threat, left unaddressed, can affect students' attachment to the school and their ability to function within it. It's hard to learn when people are challenging your right to be in the space. That takes a toll on grades, and it takes a toll on the soul.

Brittany, who'd helped the university with recruitment and developed a broad circle of friends, found herself pulling back from all things UVA. "It's a struggle to engage with the school in the same way that I had," she said. "Because all I see is just a lot of active dissociation from something that is very, very relevant. . . . I can't dissociate, and so it just feels very isolating because I'm not going to forget what happened anytime soon and I'm not going to feel secure about any of it anytime soon."

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The Unite the Right rally might have been the largest public gathering of white supremacists in a generation. But it didn't come out of nowhere. And it could have been reined in before someone died.

That was the conclusion of a report commissioned by the City of Charlottesville and conducted by Tim Heaphy, a UVA graduate and former U.S. Attorney. The police took too long to take the threat seriously and were wary of being seen as heavy-handed if they waded in to break up scattered battles, his investigation found.

That confirmed the perceptions of many Charlottesville residents, who had accused police of being unresponsive and not sufficiently prepared. Some residents presumed they just didn't care, and others thought they were siding with the race-baiting terrorists.

A month before the August 12 march, the Ku Klux Klan had held a Charlottesville rally. Forty Klansmen showed up and were greeted by one thousand people protesting their presence. The rally lasted only forty-five minutes before the police shut it down and escorted the Klansmen away, to cheers and celebrations by counterprotesters. But when that crowd failed to disperse quickly enough, the police returned, declared an unlawful assembly, and began teargassing them.

In an interview, Tim told me that translated to a narrative embraced by the counterprotesters: "You protect these racists by giving them an escort into the event and out, then you give us tear gas." The police department was lambasted then for being overly aggressive.

So when August 12 rolled around, the police stood down. There seemed to be no official plan to protect anyone. The marchers and counterprotesters were not adequately separated. And as people were taunted, threatened, and beaten, officers on the scene declined to get involved. And given that breach, an armed, militant wing of counterprotesters under the Antifa banner stepped in. For some, that was a surreal turn of events that amplified how mixed up everything had become.

When a church hosting an interfaith group came under an alt-right attack, "there were police just on the corner [who] didn't get involved at all," Geoff, the rabbi's husband, recalled. "I'm a business student and a law student, and I was being protected by communists and anarchists," he said.

The investigation confirmed the public safety breach. "There's just awful body cam footage where you have officers standing behind barricades twenty feet away from a brawl in the street, and they're not moving in," Tim told me. "I think people come out of this feeling just unsafe. . . . And there's a long-term impact of that."

His report was released on December 1, 2017. Less than three weeks later, the Charlottesville police chief stepped down. Tim's position has changed as well. He is now university counsel at UVA, his alma mater, and is eager to serve what he believes to be "the best public university in the nation."

Until that summer, Tim told me, people had regarded Charlottesville as "this idyllic community . . . a safe place. It's harder to say that now."

That feeling of insecurity engulfed the entire town. Many white counterprotesters felt so unsafe and unprotected by police at the march that they got a hint of what it's like to experience the world as black people often do.

In fact, Professor Walt Heinecke said as much to me: he "finally . . . had an inkling of what it must be like for a nonwhite person to live in this society and be always worried about your safety—always having that on the forefront of your mind. I felt that viscerally that day."

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That's the feeling that settled deeply into Diane after the neo-Nazis marched outside her dorm, carrying torches and yelling anti-Semitic chants. Three months later, it was still "really hard to navigate," she said. "Because sometimes it feels perfectly normal, and then, sometimes, if I'm walking down the Lawn at night, I picture the flames."

She felt "mentally and emotionally exhausted and traumatized." Even innocent gestures of like-minded students could trigger the sort of panic that made her feel afraid again. On more than one occasion, she saw a candlelight vigil or heard muffled chants and thought the invaders had returned, only to find out that they were rallies for peace and justice.

And those fears followed her into the classroom. Reflexively, she found herself "suddenly counting how many people of color are in the class. . . . Counting how many Jewish people are in the class."

Diane had always felt aware of herself as a nonwhite person in a predominantly white space, but now she felt threatened by that status. "Psychological safety in the classroom is a thing," she said. It didn't just make her anxious. Diane gave me a sense of other ways it affected her too, like "not being able to focus my eyes and pay attention in class, because I'm so distracted by the fact that all these white people just can move on with their lives where I'm just reeling in the aftermath."

I tried to imagine what it felt like to experience an unexpected loss of safety. I thought of my father's death, twenty-six years ago. He died suddenly at fifty-five when I was in graduate school, trying to train my mind to think like a psychologist. His death was deeply destabilizing. I came to realize that my sense of safety was tied to my father's presence in my life. It was as if I'd gone through life with him holding out an invisible force field that would protect me no matter where I was on earth. That force field dissolved the instant he died. What Diane described to me felt familiar in this way. At the broadest level, her story seemed to be about the death of security and freedom.

And yet Diane remained attached and committed to UVA. She wasn't going to let the terrorists win. "I just love this place too much to see it be known and remembered for the alt-right coming and not for how great this university is. It breaks my heart because I have to justify. People are like, 'Charlottesville? UVA? Why would you go there? Aren't there a bunch of really bad people there?' "

Diane managed to go back to giving university tours, and she learned how to talk about the summer of hate. On tours for prospective

applicants, "I am very upfront and very open about being here that day and being terrified," she said. But she also talks about new and better safety measures the university has planned and about the courage and compassion of students on the campus.

Still, the historical tours she conducts are more difficult to command. Her narrative used to have a "wonderful arc" where she would recognize the ugliness of Charlottesville's and UVA's pasts—slavery, racial subjugation, segregation, and discrimination—then focus on how far the city and the university have come. Now it feels hollow to talk about how good it feels to see the progress that's been made. She's forced instead to acknowledge the hazards we still face and highlight the fact that we can slip back.

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Locals like to say that Charlottesville is as far north as southerners are willing to go and as far south as northerners are willing to go. It's a place where different worlds collide and coexist. And there in the middle of it all is the University of Virginia—the school that Thomas Jefferson built and where he still stands atop a marble base in the ornate university Rotunda, holding court.

I could feel his presence on the campus, where he is discussed, consulted, and regularly engaged in lectures, formal presentations, and daily conversations. I saw his image, read his name, or heard his thoughts each day I set foot on the campus. Here, Jefferson is kept alive—his spirit supported and nurtured as a guiding light. The author of the Declaration of Independence was not only the founder of UVA; he was the visionary and the architect. He brought into being an institution where human progress is stirred and cultivated. And every day, his patrons praise and bow to him.

The "academical village" that Jefferson forged landed in the eye of the struggle in August 2017. UVA was poised to celebrate two hundred years since its founding when the torch-wielding neo-Nazis came marching through its cherished Lawn to face the founder and his students who locked arms around him.

The marchers had come to start a race war. But in many respects, that race war was seeded more than two hundred years ago, and Jefferson himself was the embodiment of its warring principles. The man who preached independence and equality held more slaves in bondage than almost any white man in the state of Virginia. He wrote "all men are created equal" but believed in white supremacy, contending that blacks were inferior to whites in both "body and mind." Jefferson the intellectual believed in the power of science to advance human progress, yet he also believed that blacks were incapable of intellectual growth.

Jefferson built UVA with black enslaved labor. White students enrolled and the institution ran with the support of black slaves, who were, by Jefferson's design, hidden from view, placed in pavilion basements and pushed into work yards where they lived behind serpentine walls. Jefferson used a similar architectural plan at his Monticello home, where slave quarters and work areas were built into an embankment at the back of the property, in a separate, subterranean world. Blacks were removed from sight so that free people could live in peace.

As a country, even as we have attempted to move steadily toward Jefferson's egalitarian ideals and away from his notions of white supremacy, bias has sought refuge inside us. In Charlottesville, it ripped through the pact we've made to pretend that blatant bigotry is a relic of the past. In truth, bias has been biding its time in an implicit

world—in a place where we need not acknowledge it to ourselves or to others, even as it touches our soul and drives our behavior.

In this country, blacks have become a reminder of the racial bias that we refuse to see. Indeed, blacks have become symbolic of the unwanted. And this is even apparent on college campuses, the setting for the construction of a new generation. "African American students have always felt alienated and unwelcome at this university," Professor John Mason said of UVA. "It's hard for them to articulate why, and I think a lot of it has to do with our history. . . . Slavery is really embedded here."

I talked with black students who felt exhausted from fending off narratives that question their humanity. Those dehumanization narratives may be felt most acutely in a place where the bones of slaves are buried, but they are still operating across the country and around the world. They circulate in our minds and animate our culture. They still work to help free people live in peace.