



# THE CHARLOTTESVILLE LIE

## STEVE CORTES

Politicians lie. We all know that. That is not an indictment of all politicians—it’s simply part of the game.

It’s our job, as informed citizens, to figure out the truth. And that’s where journalists and the media come in. They are supposed to help us ferret out fact from fiction. So when they get a fact wrong, that’s bad. When they get a fact wrong, know it’s wrong, and don’t correct it, that’s worse. That’s not getting a fact wrong; that’s a lie. And that’s journalistic malfeasance.

The best (or maybe worst) example of this followed a presidential press conference at Trump Tower on Tuesday, August 15, 2017.

You remember what happened that previous weekend: A group of white supremacists held a “white pride” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. The ostensible reason was to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

An Antifa group showed up to counter-protest. The mayor and the police were totally unprepared to deal with the violence that ensued. Tragically, a young woman, Heather Heyer, was run over and killed by a neo-Nazi.

The press conference itself was raucous. The media was antagonistic. The president was combative. Out of it all, one phrase eclipsed the thousands of words exchanged: The media reported that President Trump described neo-Nazis as “very fine people.”

Only, he didn’t. In fact, he didn’t even hint at it. Just the opposite: he condemned the neo-Nazis in no uncertain terms. So then, who were the “fine people” he mentioned?

The answer: He was referring to *another* group of Charlottesville demonstrators who came out that weekend—protestors who wanted the Robert E. Lee statue removed and protestors who wanted to keep the statue and restore the park’s original name.

This is what President Trump said about *those* peaceful protestors: “You also had some very fine people on both sides. . . . 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.”

A few moments later, in case there would be any misunderstanding, he makes his meaning even more explicit. “...I’m not talking about the neo-Nazis and the white nationalists. They should be condemned totally.”

Lest you have any doubts that good people were in Charlottesville to protest the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue, the New York Times confirmed it in a story they published the next day, August 16.

“Good people can go to Charlottesville,’ said Michelle Piercy, a night shift worker at a Wichita, Kansas retirement home, who drove all night with a conservative group that opposed the planned removal of a statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee. After listening to Mr. Trump on Tuesday, she said it was as if he had channeled her and her friends... who had no interest in standing with Nazis or white supremacists...”

There’s another simple test that we can employ to prove that the president was not referring to the neo-Nazis as “fine people.” It’s so obvious, it’s painful to mention: The president’s daughter and son-in-law are Orthodox Jews. His grandchildren are Jewish.

And if that is still not enough to convince you, how about this: Does anyone believe that Donald Trump thinks there are “good” Antifa, the leftist thugs who were counter-protesting the neo-Nazi thugs? After all, if those two groups were the only ones involved, and there were “fine people on both sides,” that means the president believed that there were fine Antifa people.

Even MSNBC should have found that hard to swallow.

Again, the “very fine people on both sides” President Trump described at the press conference were the people who wanted to remove the Robert E. Lee statue and the people who wanted to keep it. Both of these groups were non-violent protesters—fine people with very different ideological views.

The scandal of Charlottesville is not what President Trump said about neo-Nazis. It’s what *the media* said President Trump said about neo-Nazis. It’s a scandal because news reporting is supposed to be about gathering facts, not promoting an agenda. In Charlottesville, they got it exactly backwards. We have been living with the consequences ever since.

Plainly put: ABC, CBS, NBC, NPR, the New York Times, the Washington Post and the others spread a malicious lie that has poisoned our national dialogue.

They should apologize to the American people for what they have done.

Don’t hold your breath.

Actually, I have a better idea. Let out a big sigh of relief.

Because now you know the truth.

I’m Steve Cortes, CNN political commentator and columnist for Real Clear Politics, for Prager University.