

Neo-Nazi convicted for murdering antiracist protester in Charlottesville, Virginia

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It took a Charlottesville jury less than seven hours' deliberation Friday to find 21-year-old James Fields, Jr. of Maumee, Ohio guilty of first-degree murder and nine other felony charges stemming from an attack on peaceful counter-protesters during a white racist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia last year.

Fields faces sentencing on Monday, as well as a looming federal trial for hate crimes, for which a guilty verdict carries the possibility of a death sentence.

On August 12, 2017, in a scene of horrific violence, Fields, then 20, plowed his Dodge Challenger through a crowd of dozens who were opposing the provocative "Unite the Right" assembly in the college town. Fields' car sent dozens of bodies flying through the air, killing 32-year old Heather Heyer on impact while inflicting traumatic injuries on many others. Susan Bro, Heyer's mother, attended the hearings and was present in the courtroom to console survivors who testified about the vicious attack.

The fascist rally was called to denounce the city's removal of pro-Confederate statues from public lands. In the days before, marchers sporting swastikas chanted "Jews will not replace us," "Blood and soil" and other Nazi slogans on the grounds of the nearby University of Virginia.

During the six-day trial, defense attorneys' attempts to present Fields as having been frightened by the peaceful counter-protesters, thus having accidentally run them down in an effort to flee from harm, were contradicted by numerous witness testimonies and social media posts and text messages authored by the white supremacist. In one text exchange between Fields and his mother sent hours before the protest, the latter warns Fields to be careful, to which he replies, "We're not the one [sic] who need to be careful," attaching a picture of Adolf Hitler.

Other communications sent by Fields after his arrest contain references to his victims as a "violent gang of terrorists," and to Bro, Heyer's mother, as an "anti-white liberal" deserving no sympathy. An Instagram post from Fields' account months earlier shows protesters being run over in the street with a caption bearing the message: "You have the right to protest but I'm late for work." Referencing this statement, prosecuting attorney Nina-Alice Antony declared that Fields had come to Charlottesville that day intending to "make his Instagram post a reality."

The "Unite the Right" protest saw hundreds of neo-Nazi and fascist thugs wielding knives, bats and piping attacking several thousand peaceful counterdemonstrators as police and law enforcement stood by, evidently sympathizing with the right-wing demonstrators. DeAndre Harris, a black man who won a lawsuit after he was assaulted outside of a police station by fascist rioters, told *The Root*, "the beating happened right beside the police department and no police were there to help me at all."

Harris's account was backed up by *Washington Post* photographer Zach Roberts, who witnessed the event and stated that police appeared uninterested in stopping the mob assault on an African American.

The response of the Trump administration to the eruption of fascist violence that day was to equate the neo-Nazis with the counter-protesters, with the president declaring there were "very fine people" on "both sides" of the dispute.

Recent revelations have shown that these comments were not merely slips of the tongue. On Wednesday, the *Post* carried a report citing exchanged emails between the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) head diversity officer, Georgia Coffey, and VA chief communications officer John Uillyot in

the week following the violence on August 12.

According to the *Post*, the emails show Coffey sought to send an internal bulletin to all VA employees strongly denouncing the fascist violence while underscoring the department's commitment to workplace diversity. Ullyot, a former US Marine and an aide to Trump during his 2016 presidential campaign, vetoed Coffey's proposal, declaring "that [he] was enforcing a directive from the White House." Coffey quit the VA soon afterward, the newspaper notes.

Other incidents occurring within the administration reveal the fascistic character of the Trump White House as well as of currents fostered within the military establishment as a whole. In October, a senior official in the VA Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization was forced to remove a portrait of the Confederate general and Ku Klux Klan founder Nathan Bedford Forrest from his office after receiving employee complaints. Later that month, the same VA office was required to remove a placard of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson from a Conference room.

John Fuller, the head of the VA Office on Diversity and Inclusion, quit the position last year, citing lack of support from the Trump administration.



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