

## Charlottesville and Beyond

*Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events*

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### **Topic Summary**

In August 2017, a group of white supremacist groups convened in Charlottesville, VA for 'Unite the Right,' one of the largest and most violent gatherings in the U.S. in decades. It brought together white supremacist groups including the alt right, neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. The gathering's stated goal was to save the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee because, like other places in the South, there is growing controversy about the symbolism and removal of public monuments celebrating leaders of the Confederacy. Hundreds gathered on Friday evening and Saturday to broadcast their viewpoints and ideologies, including chanting, "blood and soil" and "you will not replace us." They carried torches, homemade shields,

weapons and Confederate and Nazi flags. Many brandished Nazi salutes. After continued clashes with their opponents, a car plowed into a crowd of peaceful counter-protesters, killing one person and injuring nineteen. A state of emergency was declared by Virginia's Governor.

In the aftermath of this event, there have been many public conversations about racism, anti-Semitism, white supremacy, the alt right and the First Amendment.

White supremacy is defined as follows:

*A term used to characterize various belief systems central to which are one or more of the following key tenets: 1) whites should have dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially where they may coexist; 2) whites should live by themselves in a whites-only society; 3) white people have their own "culture" that is superior to other cultures; 4) white people are genetically superior to other people.*

White supremacy is more encompassing than simple racism or bigotry. Most white supremacists today believe that the white race is in danger of extinction due to a rising "flood" of non-whites, who are controlled and manipulated by Jews, and that imminent action is needed to "save" the white race. Events such as lynching, hate crimes, racial slurs, swastikas and burning crosses are primarily what people think of as white supremacy. However, many believe that implicit forms of racism like racial profiling, the school-to-prison pipeline, employment discrimination, voter suppression and Confederate monuments create a culture that can give rise to white supremacy.

The alt right (short for "alternative right") is a segment of the white supremacist movement consisting of a loose network of racists and anti-Semites who reject mainstream conservatism in favor of politics that embrace implicit or explicit racism, anti-Semitism and white supremacy. Many seek to re-inject such bigoted ideas into the conservative movement in the U.S. The alt right also includes many

racist users of image boards and message forums who enjoy harassing or “trolling” people who disagree with their views.

## **Age**

12 and up

### **Questions to Start the Conversation**

- How did you feel when you first heard about what happened in Charlottesville?
- Before Charlottesville, had you ever heard about white supremacy? What did you think it was?
- Why do you think the Confederate monuments are so controversial?
- How does racism and anti-Semitism relate to white supremacy?
- Have you ever seen symbols or other signs of white supremacy? What were your thoughts and feelings when you saw them?

### **Questions to Dig Deeper**

- Why do you think white supremacy has continued after all these years?
- Who is hurt by white supremacy?
- What can and should we do about white supremacy in the U.S.?

(The "Related to this Resource" provides information that address these questions.)

### **Ideas for Taking Action**

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Help to organize an educational forum in school to discuss Charlottesville, Confederate monuments, symbols and current day white supremacy. Make

connections to racial inequities in education, law enforcement, employment and other U.S. systems and institutions.

- Write a letter to your school, local or national newspaper that expresses your views about white supremacy, racism and/or anti-Semitism.
- Get involved in local or national activism around issues of Confederate symbolism, racism and white supremacy. See our resource on [engaging youth in activism](#) for some ideas.

BACK TO TABLE TALK