

White Nationalists Wield Torches at Confederate Statue Rally

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People gather at Lee Park in Charlottesville, Va., on Saturday to protest plans to remove a monument to Robert E. Lee. Allison Wrabel/The Daily Progress, via Associated Press

Carrying torches and chanting angrily, demonstrators marched Saturday in a Virginia city against a vote to remove a statue of [Robert E. Lee](#), leading the city's mayor to compare the rally to a gathering of the Ku Klux Klan.

The gathering of several dozen protesters in Charlottesville, Va., was led by [Richard B. Spencer](#), a prominent white supremacist, who posted pictures and video from the gathering to social media that showed a phalanx of demonstrators holding Confederate battle flags and a banner proclaiming, "We will not be replaced." Their chants, some of which were captured on video, included "Russia is our friend" and the Nazi-era slogan "blood and soil."

According to [local news reports](#), the protesters gathered in Lee Park, which is named for the general, shortly after 9 p.m. and were dispersed by the police after about 10 minutes.

Charlottesville's mayor, Mike Signer, condemned the gathering [in a statement](#), saying, "Such intolerance is not welcome here."

"This event involving torches at night in Lee Park was either profoundly ignorant or was designed to instill fear in our

minority populations in a way that harkens back to the days of the K.K.K.,” he said.

Civil rights activists and others used social media to denounce the rally. DeRay Mckesson, one of the organizers of the Black Lives Matter movement, called the demonstrators “[domestic terrorists.](#)”

The statue of Lee is one of many public works celebrating the memory of the Confederacy that have become flash points for debate this year, as lawmakers throughout the South reckon with a Civil War history that is being revived in [new battles over race and history.](#)

Members of the nebulous, internet-based white nationalist movement represented by Mr. Spencer have in some cases glommed onto these local conflicts.

The Charlottesville City Council voted in April to sell the statue, which stands in Lee Park. But a circuit court judge in the city issued [a six-month injunction](#) this month to halt the removal of the statue, after a collection of individuals and groups, including the Virginia Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, filed a lawsuit [against the city in March.](#)