

## My Reflections on the Rally in Charlottesville, August 12, 2017

### Justice Park Charlottesville.

August 14, 2017 · Charlottesville, VA ·

Some reflections on Charlottesville: I had a very incomplete view of events. We did not go to Emancipation Park where the White Supremacists rallied. And we had agreed as a group in advance that we would not seek out conflict. We were very nearby in McGuffey Park initially



(see photos—there were 8 of us) and then Justice Park (which contains a statue of Stonewall Jackson) most of the time (see photo).



There was no overall crowd control, so groups encountered each other on the street all the time. Early on, in search of a bathroom, 3 of us accidentally found ourselves less than a block from the alt-right rally site, not realizing where we were, and walked along with about a dozen alt-right without immediately realizing it. But they were not provocative--maybe as surprised as we were. While there was a significant clergy and church presence at McGuffey Park in the morning, and at First United Methodist Church, where we finally did find a bathroom about 11am, there was none that I saw anywhere on the streets or at Justice Park. And Sojourners did not report any either. The church was a "safe space" that also held teach-ins during the day. The parking lot had tables circled into a perimeter, with clergy within the perimeter, singing and so forth, but seemingly not venturing out. My sign, identifying my church and saying "Jesus was a Refugee" was one of very few church-related signs at Justice Park. So that disappointed me. My main impression of the day was how much anger there was--on both sides. The purpose of White Supremacist groups was to intimidate, and the counter-ralliers responded with



intimidation in return. There were several well-organized leftist groups at Justice Park. One was Redneck Revolt, which was armed with automatic rifles and wooden poles (see photo).



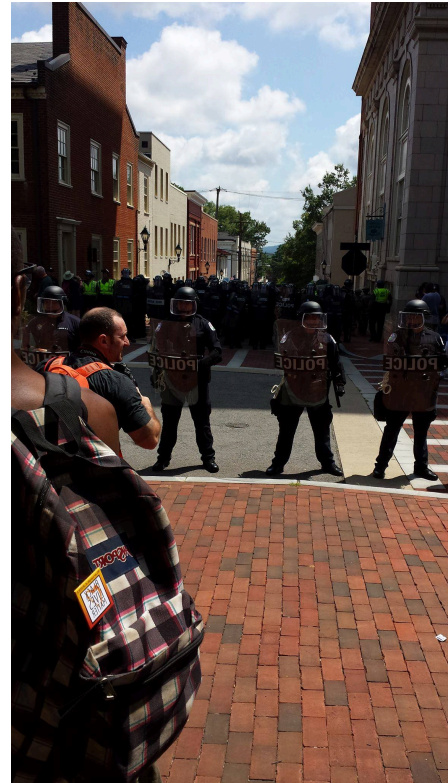
Another was (maybe) Industrial Workers of the World. I don't know if Antifa is an umbrella term, or a specific group. I saw no one identified as Antifa. One of those groups arrived at our park en masse from the direction of Emancipation Park after that park was cleared--I assume that's where they had been (see photo above). Redneck Revolt basically patrolled the perimeters of the park, and seemed to have lots of intelligence about movements of White Supremacist groups. They would try to herd folks to one edge of the park or another to confront supremacists encroaching. This generally involved shouting. At one point (see photo) dozens of armed and shielded state police passed by on their way to Emancipation Park.



The only melee that I witnessed was a small right group wearing Confederate flags as capes that approached and taunted in the street. It was an ill-considered move since they were so few. A Redneck Revolt person snuck out and grabbed one of the flags and made off with it. Then a woman tried to grab another flag and got caught. Then ensued a clash that involved wooden poles. About a dozen people beat at each other--it lasted about a minute and the supremacist group retreated. Apparently no (serious) injuries. There was a great deal of tension, increased by drummers (see photo above). There was no police presence for this. But shortly thereafter several dozen shielded state police, shoulder-to-shoulder shuffled up the street clearing the



block and stopped across the street facing the park. And then a couple dozen more came along the street along the park and took up position where the melee had been. No orders were given. (see photo)



Then one of the people in my group got ahold of a megaphone and started on a chant that equated the police and the KKK. After a minute of this I put my hand on his shoulder and when he glanced at me I said--we don't need to be provoking the police here and now. A group leader jumped in and insisted it was the truth. I said whether or not it was true, it was too provocative. I suggested he switch to "This is what democracy looks like..." which he did. Not long after that the police left. Around this time a trumpet player began to serenade us with some jazz. (see photo)



Around 1 pm we heard that Emancipation Park was shut down and it seemed the supremacists were on the run. We decided to leave. One person had separated from our group and we planned to meet back at the cars. When she didn't arrive, we found that she had been near the scene of the car murder--though it wasn't completely clear to me yet what had happened. Despite being an intense day filled with anger, I was glad I was there. I hope there are or will be some ways in which the church can be present on the front lines, so to speak, which is where it is necessary. Perhaps paradoxically, I was glad for the presence of the Redneck Revolt and the state police. I did not see any sign that the church is ready to take any sort of lead. Perhaps that will be a long process. Teach-ins will not do anything. (Read comments for my elaboration of this.)

[James C. Klagge](#) Someone asked me to clarify what I meant at the end about teach-ins. I meant...in lieu of an active presence, as they seemed to be at the church.

[James C. Klagge](#) One thing I will credit the First UMC in Charlottesville for--when they let folks into the perimeter to access the bathrooms, they only searched white males! I was happy to oblige.