

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Three Dead Following Clash At White Nationalist Rally In Charlottesville, Virginia

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Scene from deadly clash in the city of Charlottesville on Saturday.

Many Americans were in disbelief at what was unfolding in the city of Charlottesville, Virginia on Saturday, as white nationalists, neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klan members and counterprotesters clashed in what has been described as one of the bloodiest episodes in the battle to remove Confederate flags and monuments from U.S. public areas, prompted this time by the city's decision to remove the statute of Robert E. Lee.

The protest had long been planned by the white nationalists, but the event quickly descended into the hurling of bigoted words, shoving, and moments later full-blown brawling. So violent the event had turned that the governor of Virginia declared a state of emergency, clearing the way for the state's National Guard to join the police in clearing the area.

And while the skirmishes mostly resulted in cuts and bruises, a horrific scene unfolded after the rally, held at a city park, was cleared. A car bearing an Ohio license plate drove with speed into a crowd near the city's downtown mall, plowing through the small gathering and sending people hurling into the air. The incident killed a 34-year-old woman, and left at least 19 injured. Overall, some 34 others were injured, according to a spokeswoman for the University of Virginia Medical Center.

Col. Martin Kumer, the superintendent of the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail, confirmed Saturday evening that James Alex Fields Jr., 20, of Maumee, Ohio, had been arrested and charged with second-degree murder, three counts of malicious wounding and failing to stop at the scene of a crash that resulted in a death. But the authorities declined to say publicly that Mr. Fields was the driver of the car that plowed into the crowd.



said a grey sports car accelerated into a crowd that had been of the white nationalists protesters.

James Alex Fields (Credit: Charlottesville Police Department)

Hours later, two state police officers died when their helicopter crashed at the outskirts of town. Officials identified them as Berke M.M. Bates of Quinton, Va., who was the pilot, and H. Jay Cullen of Midlothian, Va., who was a passenger. State police said their Bell 407 helicopter was assisting with the unrest in Charlottesville. Mr. Bates died one day before his 41st birthday; Cullen was 48, [according to the Washington Post](#).

Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D), who had declared a state of emergency, said at an evening news conference that he had a message for “all the white supremacists and the Nazis who came into Charlottesville today: Go home. You are not wanted in this great commonwealth.”

“It was probably the scariest thing I’ve ever seen in my life,” said Robert Armengol, who was at the scene reporting for a podcast he hosts with students at the University of Virginia, [according to The New York Times](#). “After that it was pandemonium. The car hit

reverse and sped and everybody who was up the street in my direction started running.”



Scene from deadly clash in the city of Charlottesville on Saturday.

The planned rally was promoted as “Unite the Right” and both its organizers and critics said they expected it to be one of the largest gatherings of white nationalists in recent times, attracting groups like the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis and movement leaders like David Duke and Richard Spencer, according to The Times.

Many of these groups have felt emboldened since the election of Donald J. Trump as president. Mr. Duke, a former imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, told reporters on Saturday that the protesters were “going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump” to “take our country back.”

Mr. Trump responded to the incident on Saturday afternoon, while speaking at the start of a veterans' event at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey. The president described the occurrence as “the terrible events unfolding in Charlottesville, Virginia.” Mr. Trump condemned the protesters, but came under criticism because he did not specifically criticize the white nationalist rally and its neo-Nazi slogans. Instead, the president blamed

“hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides.”

“It’s been going on for a long time in our country, it’s not Donald Trump, it’s not Barack Obama,” said Mr. Trump, adding that he had been in contact with Virginia officials. After calling for the “swift restoration of law and order,” he offered a plea for unity among Americans of “all races, creeds and colors.”

According to The Times, the Department of Justice late Saturday night announced that it was opening a civil rights investigation into “the circumstances of the deadly vehicular incident,” to be conducted by the F.B.I., the United States attorney for the Western District of Virginia, and the department’s Civil Rights Division.

“The violence and deaths in Charlottesville strike at the heart of American law and justice,” Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement. “When such actions arise from racial bigotry and hatred, they betray our core values and cannot be tolerated.”