

# The NIWRC Calls for prayer and healing in response to the violence and racism in Charlottesville

August 21, 2017

We, the [National Indigenous Women's Resource Center](#), have struggled this week to find an appropriate response to the violence that ensued in Charlottesville, Virginia. In our dedication to speaking out against the violent and racist actions by white supremacist groups, individuals, their sympathizers and their enablers, as American Indians and Alaska Natives, we must also reflect on the personal nature of the events that took place. This violence is not unknown to us.

At the outset, it is necessary to make one thing clear: there were not *many sides* to the violence that occurred in Charlottesville. In the fight against pure hatred there are but two sides: good and evil. The images we saw as this week unfolded support that and yet will remain utterly horrifying; white males marching with handheld tiki torches chanting, "You will not replace us. Jew will not replace us." The bold display of racist symbols, weaponry in plain view and militia men lining the street. An image of a car plowing into anti-racist protestors, capturing the murder of Heather Heyer. It is clear that no permit could ever make these actions permissible; it is sad that we even have to clarify that.

These events were a manifestation of real hate and racism; a manifestation that is well known to our tribal communities. Countless Native nations having come together in open protest most recently against the Dakota Access Pipeline, we recognize that these experiences are not dissimilar. Those could have been our Water Protectors that could have been one of our Water Protectors murdered in broad daylight. This is the bigotry we must combat.

**But to combat, we must also name and denounce.** The terms created on the part of federal leadership to connote the demonstrators on both sides were both illogical and appalling. It is a grave moral failure on the part of the federal government to not denounce hate and to instead blame "many sides". That so many people in our society now feel empowered to give voice to the darkness inside of them serves as evidence of the path our Nation is heading. The NIWRC denounces the neo-Nazi, white supremacy, alt-right and nationalist movement. Make no mistake: they are but one in the same.

The planned protest in response to the removal of General Robert E. Lee's statue was an attempt by those who have always had power to keep it. But, the power of dominant culture is enshrined, memorialized and given prominence in the form of many statues and plaques. This contested statue is but one of the innumerable. These monuments are a preservation and exaltation of hate, a visual display that power and oppression in dominant culture walk together. Erected specifically during the civil rights movement to remind minorities of the racist foothold that white supremacy had over the United States Government, these monuments serve as nothing but a constant intimidation towards minorities. They are proudly displayed memories of the violence that those of us in marginalized communities have experienced. The violence they represent comes in many forms: institutionalized racism, systemic oppression, disenfranchisement, overt racism, segregation, and even silence. When leadership fails to respond with decency, we cannot help but feel hopeless. We call upon leadership and allies to demand censure when our government, as it has now, fails to admonish hatred and instead attempts to justify bigotry.

We recognize in our own work, the effect of white dominance. Since contact, our tribal nations have suffered genocide at the hands of our colonizers. In many ways, tribal nations continue to be colonized. That our own Declaration of Independence refers to Native people as "Merciless Indian Savages," that we must gaze upon Mt. Rushmore, celebrate Christopher Columbus as a National Holiday, walk past numerous statues of Custer, and even see Andrew Jackson's portrait intentionally and prominently displayed in the Oval Office, is a serious affront to our existence, our resilience and our experience as American Indians and Alaska Natives. That these displays of genocide, of displacement, of thievery, and of colonization are so permanently affixed to American culture is simply another way in which we, as Native people, continue to suffer historical, intergenerational and lived trauma. We should hope that genocide and civil war are not proud representations of "white culture." We would seek to remind those who seem to be confused the following: conflating pride in culture with one's own past transgressions represents a major moral failure.

In preparing for the solar eclipse today, the NIWRC calls for a national prayer for the victims of Charlottesville and to also pay respect to the natural phenomena that will take place. Our tribal communities recognize the solar eclipse as a sacred time and a time for careful observance, mediation, prayer, and cleansing.

NIWRC supports culturally grounded, grassroots advocacy and provides national leadership to end gender-based (domestic and sexual) violence in Indigenous communities. Given our mission, we fully support the non-violent resistant protests in response to the white supremacist, racist, hateful, ignorant and pro-genocidal demonstrations. We call on each one of us to stand strong and to continue the important work we have before us, the work that was started by those who have suffered before us and the work we will pass on to those who come in succession, the work to end violence in our communities, in all forms.