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“Charlottesville: One year later”
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[chanting voices]

BUSETTE: I do not think that Charlottesville was a one off event. And I think it's one in a long, long history of very dangerous racial relations and it's just the most recent manifestation of that. And I think at its crux what the Charlottesville protest symbolized was the fact that we as a nation have done absolutely nothing to acknowledge the brutality, the torture, the kind of terrorism that a system based on a racially-stratified society has led to. We have failed to really acknowledge that as a society, and as a result of that you still have these episodes that pop up every so often that seems so surprising.

DEWS: This is the Brookings Cafeteria podcast. I'm Fred Dews.

On August 11 and 12, 2017, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, and neo-Nazis marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, with the stated intention of opposing the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in the city's Emancipation Park.

During those two days, we witnessed these members of the so-called alt-right carrying torches, chanting Nazi slogans like Blood and Soil, and clashing with counter protestors. Many people who turned out to oppose them were injured, and a woman named Heather Heyer who was there to stand up for diversity, was killed by a man linked to white supremacist groups after he rammed his car into the crowd.

In this special edition of the Brookings Cafeteria, four Brookings experts share their views on the events of that weekend, how history and public memory inform where we are today, address the question of white supremacy as domestic terrorism, and look ahead to how we can do better.

You heard from one of them at the start of this episode—Camille Busette, who is a Brookings Senior Fellow and directs the Race, Prosperity and Inclusion initiative. And you'll also hear from Chris Meserole, Andre Perry, and Vanessa Williamson.

In the next episode of the Brookings Cafeteria, my colleague Bill Finan, director of

the Brookings Institution Press, speaks with author and Baruch College professor Thomas Main on his new book, “The Rise of the Alt-Right.”

Visit our website, brookings.edu, to find more analysis and commentary about the issues connected to the unrest in Charlottesville, and the continuing policy challenges of racism, poverty, and opportunity in America.

I had asked Camille whether she thought the violence in Charlottesville was a one-off event, conditioned on all the attention last year to Confederate memorials around the country. You already heard the first part of her answer. Here, she continues:

BUSETTE: But that can't be surprising when beneath it all you have a long history of people being treated like second class citizens, really brutally, and that has just not been acknowledged. And when you don't acknowledge that you can't move beyond that. And so those sores just keep reopening and I think Charlottesville is just an excellent example of that.

DEWS: What does Charlottesville say about racism in America today? What did we learn about the kinds of groups we saw marching and chanting over those two days? Here’s what I heard from our scholars.

PERRY: Well we learned immediately after the riots in Charlottesville, and the chaos in Charlottesville, that people didn't have the stomach nor the acumen to talk about racism, to speak bluntly and plainly that what was right in front of us including the president of the United States and several cabinet members. They were unable to say that racism is abhorrent. It is a scourge to a democracy. That the torch wielding marchers were a shame to progress. But it's a reality of where we are in the United States.

But what we did learn, it’s clear that people did not want to speak it … what is reality. And so it wasn't until later did the president acknowledge and then he retracted his statements within his initial press conference, backtracked on the on the clarification that the violence was abhorrent. But it really is a reflection of where we are in America that

people don't want to believe racism exists.

My name is Andre Perry. I'm a Rubinstein fellow within the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution.

WILLIAMSON: What we saw in Charlottesville was for I think many Americans a little bit eye opening. And in particular, I think it drew attention to the extent to which we had not actually addressed the very, very longstanding racial tensions in this country. And I think in particular what we saw in Charlottesville—with the waving of Confederate flags and Nazi flags—it made some dog whistles a little more audible to some Americans. In particular, it made the symbolism of the Confederacy more obviously—for people who had grown up with a different version of our history—more obviously a defense of white supremacy. Because when it's Confederate flags and Nazi flags what do they have in common. Those were armies raised to defend white supremacy. And I think the visible-ness of that connection was much clearer for people after that rally.

I think it also revealed to some extent the failure of our public memory and the failure of our history as it is taught in terms of educating Americans about both slavery itself and its consequences. And the system of racial subjugation that followed it with Jim Crow and the ways that echoes all the way down until today.

My name is Vanessa Williamson and I'm a fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

DEWS: We'll return to the themes both Andre and Vanessa touched on – President Trump's reaction, and the long history of constructed racism and public memory that continues to struggle with this legacy.

Here's more from the scholars on what we learned, what we saw in Charlottesville.

MESEROLE: In terms of the far-right trajectory of the far right … I think Charlottesville's says a couple of things. One, and probably the most concerning thing in the immediate term, is that what was most surprising to me about Charlottesville was the

willingness of the protesters themselves to be unmasked. It’s something that I immediately noticed because it's very unusual for a group who's carrying out a protest on such a sensitive topic and expressing a willingness to use violence on behalf of their ideology to be so publicly identified.

I think what it suggests is that they feel like they have a certain amount of immunity, and that even if they're identified it doesn't really matter to them because they feel like they have the political support and political backing potentially of our own government. to me that was probably what was most immediately concerning about the protests in Charlottesville as they happen.

I'm Chris Meserole, I'm a fellow in the Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings where I study emerging technology and violent extremism.

DEWS: And finally, here’s Camille Busette again, with perspective on what we saw and learned.

BUSETTE: I think we've learned a lot, and I think we still have a lot to learn. So let me start off by saying that I think a lot of people were really surprised by the level of violence and also the numbers of folks who came out and self-identified as white supremacists. And I think there was … a lot of fallout from that. Some people lost their jobs, you know, other people went on to try to further the cause. And yet there was also an opposition to that. So I think that's all very healthy.

But I think a year on, what we've learned is that this kind of simmering racial tension that the march really symbolized is alive and well. And we've seen that in a variety of different ways. You know obviously there's a whole string of hashtags that have to do with being black and living your normal life and having the police called on you. And I think we're very aware of that, but I think also there's been a lot of attention given to the kind of violence against young black men that we've seen who had been unarmed for the most part, et cetera.

So I think overall what we're seeing is a lot more attention to those kinds of issues. And it might seem like there's actually been an increase in them, but I actually don't think there has been an increase. I actually think it's just that now with the advantage of phones and social media that we really have an opportunity to see what's been happening for a really long time.

I think one of the interesting sort of legacies of Charlottesville is for a moment the U.S. paused and said “Oh my gosh are we really like this?” And I think that has given a lot of people some more thinking to do and has led to some reflection in some corners. Not only, you know, there's sort of higher levels of politics, but also you know in private living rooms et cetera and I think that's very healthy.

[Remarks from President Donald Trump]

DEWS: That was President Donald Trump at a press conference to discuss infrastructure policy in Trump Tower on August 15th. He also said that there was “blame on both sides” as well as “Very fine people” on both sides.

These remarks followed the president’s initial prepared remarks delivered on August 12, in which he said, quote, “we condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides – many sides.”

Were there very fine people on the side of the alt-right? Some have even called the actions of white supremacists a form of domestic terrorism. The scholars I spoke with agreed. Here’s Camille Busette again, who said she has no hesitations about characterizing the Charlottesville violence as domestic terrorism.

BUSETTE: I think we have here in the U.S., we have a pretty healthy homegrown domestic terrorist culture in some corners of the U.S, and I do think that it's actually a culture that has a long historical legacy. The KKK is obviously a domestic terrorist group. And even when people weren't organized that way the fact that you could have lynchings of people without due process is clearly a sign that we have a history of terrorism here.

And so I feel like the white supremacists who were engaging in these actions in Charlottesville were a part of one of the histories of the U.S. in that respect.

DEWS: Andre Perry and Chris Meserole agreed.

PERRY: I think white supremacy is a form of terrorism. And I think how we label terrorism is a form of white supremacy. The fact of the matter is that we don't call the attacks on black people terrorism is rife with problems. Black folk are terrorized every day in this country. Now we have the cell phone evidence to prove it.

And so we try our best to hide the harsh realities that are imposed upon black people every day and we excuse this terrorism away because white folk are doing it. But I mean but it's terrorism. It's trying to use intimidation to put certain people in their place or to move them out of existence or into another place. And that's happening all across the country.

MESEROLE: Once it escalates to violence I have a hard time seeing how it's not domestic terrorism. In terms of if we're going to define terrorism as violence against civilians in the name of a political cause or ideology.

I think within the legal framework that the United States has, terrorism is really only something that can be applied to foreign terrorist groups for the most part. So it can be very difficult to prosecute domestic terrorism by groups that are not say affiliated with al-Qaida or the Islamic State. But, in terms of the spirit of what terrorism actually is, I don't know how you would look at some of these groups and the violence that they're carrying out and not conclude that it was politically motivated in some fashion. So I do think that it's an appropriate label for the kind of violence that we're seeing.

DEWS: I asked Chris to consider whether we can apply lessons from programs designed to prevent radicalization among potential jihadists—one of his areas of specialty—to domestic right wing extremists. In his answer, note that he references the man who killed Heather Heyer with his car.

MESEROLE: Yes, and I think that there's a lot of promise in terms of taking some of what we've learned about the pathways that lead individuals to jihadism and applying them to a context of domestic extremism. I think great case in point is that two of the prime indicators of somebody who might become susceptible to radicalization in the jihadist space are growing up in a marginalized community and then on top of that growing up in a family that has some kind of pattern of domestic abuse or trauma.

And what's interesting to me about a lot of the far right cases—not all of them but some of them, some of the most prominent ones—is that you see that same kind of pattern. In the case of someone like James Field who actually used his car as a weapon in Charlottesville, you know he had a long pattern of domestic violence against his own mother, unfortunately. And I think if we want to begin to develop and implement programs that can reduce violent extremism one of the most effective things we can do is really try to reach out and find folks who are already exhibiting signs of violence in a domestic setting and begin to evaluate them for any type of ideology that they might have because the combination of those two things are a pretty strong signal that something might be about to, you know, might be about to go off the rails unfortunately.

DEWS: I'm going to continue with Chris for a few more minutes here. He had a lot of interesting observations about the domestic far-right in America based on his research of how extremist networks use technology to organize and further political violence.

I asked him how the alt-right used social media networks to gain prominence and how tech companies reacted after Charlottesville.

MESEROLE: The tech space in general was pretty much essential in terms of the rise of the Alt-Right. It provided a platform for pretty fringe voices to gain a lot of popularity, and to gain new followers, to begin to coordinate action. I think we saw…one of the most interesting things about the media ecosystem, in the lead up to the 2016 election and then thereafter, is that you saw this process emerge where there would be these right-wing

memes emerge on some pretty fringe sites. On 4Chan or some really obscure subreddits on Reddit. Then what would happen is somebody would take notice or take issue with some of these memes. They would begin to spread into Twitter or to Facebook. It would cause a controversy and then the mainstream media would then report on the controversy. In the process of doing so they would then elevate these kind of far-right messages into the mainstream political discourse in a way that allowed them to spread pretty rapidly.

And I think one of the most important things that's happened since Charlottesville is that as the tech companies have begun to shut down a lot of the far-right trolling online and a lot of the main accounts that spread a lot of the content … kind of like there was with this one example would be Pepe the Frog which is this really popular meme that really spread like wildfire in 2016-2017 of just a green frog that was kind of the mass symbol that a lot of Alt-Right supporters used. And it slowly started to wane and I think a big part of that is just that it's a lot harder for them to mobilize and spread information.

Thankfully, you know, Reddit shut down some of these really toxic subreddits, and Twitter has become much more aggressive about making it so that users can block a lot of the trolls that are that are spreading a lot of this stuff online.

DEWS: Chris added some thoughts on a phenomenon we have seen in many other instances, which is the identification through social media of perpetrators of racial aggression and violence.

MESEROLE: Now one of the interesting pieces of fallout from that in the several weeks after Charlottesville, is that even though the Alt-Right used social media to organize one of the interesting aspects in the wake of Charlottesville is that social media was also used to identify some of the individuals. And as a consequence many of them lost their jobs. Some of them lost their livelihoods. And I think it may have given some of them pause about continuing to be involved in public protests of that nature without masking. You know for a long time the KKK had masked.

And I think it will be an interesting … it'll be interesting to see going forward whether or not the all-right movement, as they hold further protests, whether they can continue to do so as publicly as possible or whether you start to see more of a reversion to the kind of cloaked protests that used to happen in the past.

DEWS: And a reminder here that the next episode of this podcast will feature a discussion with Thomas Main on his new book from the Brookings Institution Press, titled, The Rise of the Alt-Right.

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DEWS: I want to take a step back here, a big step back, and examine some of the factors that contributed to the violence in Charlottesville in August 2017. Some of these are current issues related to America's changing demographics, others are tied to this country's long history with racism, slavery, and oppression of certain groups.

Let's start in the present, and work our way back. Here's Camille Busette again on how the changing racial and ethnic composition of the nation, how the fact that the youngest generation in this country is now majority non-white, could be contributing to the rise of white supremacist extremism.

BUSETTE: So I do think that the browning of America has something to do with the origins of this particular Charlottesville episode. It's really complex, right? Obviously as you know any kind of social relations are. And I think on the one hand you have people who really feel—white supremacist who really feel—like the United States is being taken over by brown people. And you know to some extent…I mean from a demographic perspective they're not 100 percent incorrect about that, but I think what lies behind that is a sense that we have always been a racially stratified society. And even if you were poor and white you could always point to like "at least I'm not poor and black" you know? And I think there is a sense that things have shifted.

And it's not that there aren't poor and black people—there are many of them

obviously. Huge swaths of the black population are indeed poor. But it's the fact that there are people of color who are moving up economically and have become, you know, titans of industry and have become very well-known in variety of different sectors and seemed to be doing very well. And all of a sudden there's a sense that you know you could be standing in place, in a place like Kentucky, and seeing national images of African-Americans who are doing really well. And you could start to feel like you've really fallen behind.

And so it's very I think it's a very complex kind of reaction to demographic shifts. The shifts are not just demographics that people are feeling, but they're also feeling economic shifts. And in many of the places where you do have large numbers of people who affiliate with white supremacist groups you also have pretty crippled economies. And that has nothing to do with race, that has to do with the fact that you know political leaders in those areas haven't been able to innovate as the economy has changed.

DEWS: Vanessa Williamson focused on the contemporary role of the Black Lives Matter movement in bringing to the fore the ways black and other non-white Americans are living, today, with racial violence, and also how the election of the nation’s first black President, Barack Obama, not only did NOT mean racial issues were silenced in America, but in fact shifted racial attitudes in a more extreme direction.

WILLIAMSON: I think Black Lives Matter has played a really critical role in connecting the dots between what we see in policing and mass incarceration today and the long history of state violence against black people. I think, you know, there's been a sort of awakening, particularly among white Americans, to the extent that history and the extent to which that history is still with us. And so the other way in which Black Lives Matter and Charlottesville are sort of interrelated in addition to this creating of a new visibility of the extent to which racial violence still pervades this country … We're in a period of racial reaction now.

It's very clear that for a set of white conservative people the election of a black president was very frightening. Right. And you know Barack Obama said he was bringing change. For some people that was message of hope for some people it was not. They did recognize the change they just weren't very happy about it. And since that time there has been sort of an ongoing reaction, I think, that certainly the Trump presidency makes up a part of. And some of that I think dates not just to the election of a black president but to the visibility of a black political movement that was focused very specifically on the ways in which state actors have oppressed ethnic minorities in this country.

I think that the reaction that we've seen on the far right has been both to the electoral success of a black president, the proof that a multiracial coalition could elect a president in this country, but also the ... and I think there are some statistical evidence that suggest that 2014 and 2015 is when you start to see some of that shift to sort of a kind of racial conservatism as a real motivator of people's political attitudes ... It's also part of this response to a powerful black political movement.

DEWS: A New York Times/CBS News poll in 2009, just after President Obama assumed office, showed that about two-thirds of Americans deemed race relations to be generally good. In 2016, as President Obama ended his second term, that same poll found nearly 70 percent of Americans thought race relations were mostly bad. Andre Perry also spoke to this seeming contradiction between the election of a black president and the fact that this event didn’t resolve issues of racism. In fact, Perry says that many white people don’t want to admit that many of the mundane things they do still have a negative impact on black peoples’ lives.

PERRY: After the election of President Obama there was this wanting, particularly among white folk and particularly around middle class folk, to say that the problems that exist the social problems that exist in America are those of class and not race. That we've overcome racism in America. That the election of an African-American president is a sign

that anything is possible. Well if you're black, you live in Baltimore, we know that that's not true. That people prejudge and do not provide opportunities to those who are black. And the folks who are burdened with that reality are clear that that racism is still alive and well.

And so, yes, more white folk than most are those that want to believe that racism is over because they can benefit from that ignorance. It doesn't do black folk any good to believe that racism doesn't exist because again we feel it every day in our pocketbooks. You can look at wage differentials, you can look at homeownership, you can look at the cabinet of the United States of America [and] you can look at different agencies. You see it every day. The #whileblack hashtag is really a reflection of what we've known all along. People will call the police like it's customer service. That you could sleep in a dorm, you could sit in Starbucks, you can drive, you can shop, and people will assume the worst of you.

And what's worse—and a lot of my research in this area—the same stereotypes we ascribe to people we place upon entire cities. I'm from a city, [a] small black borough inside of Pittsburgh, Wilkinsburg. And there's a little there's a lot of beliefs about the potential of Wilkinsburg or the lack thereof. And those cities, and those other chocolate cities—New Orleans, Baltimore, Ferguson—those places are caught in this vicious spiral of devaluation, of disbelief and then divestment, and then economic and social depression and it just keeps going.

But it is clear that many white folk just don't want to believe that the everyday practices, the everyday the mundane things that we do, have an impact on black people's lives that are negative. And you can shield ourselves from that reality or we can confront them.

DEWS: Camille Busette also spoke to the contradiction captured in that New York Times/CBS News poll about racism in America, and turned attention back to how social media is exposing for all to see how black Americans continue to experience racial

problems.

BUSETTE: You know what's interesting about that and more recent surveys have demonstrated more or less the same distance between African-American respondents and white respondents. The main reason for that is that during the time that that initial survey was done we were just coming out of the Obama era. And for a lot of whites the fact that we had an African-American president, or a half African-American president, was a sign that we had just moved beyond you know sort of racial problems. Whereas African-Americans were still, you know, we're still in jobs and at the line in CVS and going to Starbucks where they had other experiences that are not consistent with the absence of racism. And so I think the…what that tells us is that there are just very different lived experiences. And it's perfectly reasonable and legitimate to be a white person and say "hey, you know I think we're kind of post-racism" and to also be a black person and experience that on a daily basis.

I think the issue for us as a nation is that we don't have enough kind of cross-fertilization of those experiences so that whites would understand that actually we're still having these issues. And so I think what's been really helpful about social media coverage around a variety of tensions that have erupted and police shootings, et cetera, is that that now becomes part of the national consciousness and so it's harder and harder for whites to say "well, you know racism has completely disappeared."

DEWS: This is where we are now, and recently, as a nation in terms of issues related to race and racial injustice.

Before turning to looking ahead, to solutions and ways of dealing with where we've been, I want to take you further back in history into the origins of racism in America, and how we have acknowledged it or how we have reified it in our public spaces through monuments like that of Robert E. Lee that was the immediate focal point of the alt-Right's march in Charlottesville.

Here’s Vanessa Williamson again, with a perspective on the history of the construction of racism. I had asked her what factors made the racial violence in Charlottesville Virginia particularly resonate.

WILLIAMSON: I think there's a real resonance to what we saw in Charlottesville because of the unique place in Virginia…of Virginia in American history. And, you know, last year when I was watching the events in Charlottesville I was reminded of some really superb histories that have been written about the very origins of racism in Virginia. And I think that that history really you, know 400 years ago, actually really does speak to us still today about the problems we're facing.

So this is a little bit less known than it should be, but the origins of racism codified legal racism actually date back to the beginning of the 18th century. So, what had been true in Virginia before that was that there were plantation owners, of course, who had originally relied rather heavily on white indentured servants. And frankly the reason they relied heavily on white indentured servants is because the work being done in those plantations was so deadly that people did not live long enough to see freedom. So indentured servitude was cheaper for them. But as time passed indentured servants began to live longer. And it changed the economic calculus and made the purchase of black slaves more profitable. So what you see over time is the rise of a multi-racial class of working people who are … who live in different levels of enslavement on Virginia plantations.

Over time this becomes quite dangerous for plantation owners because there are an awful lot of people who are now living long enough to form a class of people in the state. And so Virginia plantation owners are discussing with one another their concerns about the possibility of revolt. And particularly revolt that would bring together both black slaves and white indentured servants. And so in a very conscious effort, white Virginia plantation owners, white Virginia plantation owners came up with a system of divide and

conquer.

They passed a series of laws that codify racism. The first thing they do is pass a law that makes it clear that it is race that defines slavery throughout your entire lifetime of slavery for your children. It is a race that defines that condition rather than Christianity. Before it had actually been a blurry line. Some enslaved black people had sued for freedom when they were baptized and had won those cases. So there was a new, clear distinction that slavery was a category that could only be applied to black people and that Christianity wasn't going to change that condition.

Secondly, there weren't laws put in place that changed social relations so black enslaved people could no longer act in self-defense. They could no longer marry white people. And in fact there were petitions raised among poor people in Virginia opposing those laws because this invalidated marriages that actually existed at the time. And finally, in 1785 the assembly decided that white servants could own property but enslaved black people could no longer own property. So all of their property would be seized and redistributed to the poor. Well who were the poor? The white poor.

So these laws were put in place to establish a system of racial division that had previously been considerably blurrier. And it is in fact the origins of racism in Virginia. Legal racism in Virginia. And I think that this history really means something to us today because when we recognize that racism is not just bad feelings that exist in someone's mind. It is a system, a legal, political and economic system of control. When you recognize that that can be built intentionally as it most certainly was Virginia, it means we can also dismantle it just is intentionally.

[audio from President Trump]

DEWS: We know that many of the founding fathers, including Washington and Jefferson, owned slaves. But the movement that has gained momentum over the past few years, especially since the massacre by a white supremacist of 9 people in their

Charleston church in 2015, is largely focused on questioning the public display of Confederate symbols like the rebel flag and Confederate leaders, like Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, and asking why are we commemorating THESE figures in the public square. Here's Andre Perry again.

PERRY: You know, the folks who fight for statues are really fighting to say that their lives matter more than others and we're drawing a line in the proverbial sand to say "no this is our place. These lands are our lands. We get to decide who is a member and who's not a member. We get to decide who should enter the country and who should not. And we get to decide who polices who.

And so statues are symbolic and a lot of ways but the reality is that black folk and people of color, Muslims, gays, lots of "others" are not welcome. And so preserving a statue is the way to project that unwelcome onto others and to make it clear.

DEWS: Vanessa Williamson also spoke to the growing attention to public memorials.

WILLIAMSON: Across the country there are communities like Charlottesville newly aware of the implications of the memorials they have placed in their public spaces. And it is a great debate how you handle those memorials because their existence is actually also part of our history. We need not wipe out the fact that we for many years proclaimed the grandeur of generals who fought a war to defend the ownership of human beings.

So we don't want to wipe out that history because it's important to recall that that is how we saw our own history. There's a there's a real role for historians in this time to talk about how we can fact-check the public history and at the same time recalling the ways in which we have told ourselves myths that were in fact very corrosive to the public good. And I think that those conversations are ongoing.

DEWS: So how do communities, if they want to, change the way they commemorate their own history without, as some fear, erasing it? Here's Andre Perry.

PERRY: After Charlottesville there's an interesting phenomenon. The University of Virginia dedicated a building in the name of one of their first graduates, Vivian Penn. Dr. Vivian Penn has a tremendous record in the medical community. She was a director at NIH. Served as the head of many academic departments. She's just a legend in the medical field. They named the building after her. And I think it's not enough to just take Confederate statues down. What are we going to put up? What are we going to represent in their place? And so communities really do need to come together and think about what represents our democracy. Because clearly a Confederate monument did not represent democracy but there are people and symbols that do. And you know and if time passes and we determined that those folks really did not then take them down. But clearly we can do better than Confederate monuments.

DEWS: And also Vanessa Williamson.

WILLIAMSON: So I was recently visiting the National Cathedral here in Washington, D.C., which is a gorgeous monument that brings together both Christian imagery but also imagery of American history. There are monuments to Lincoln and there are monuments to Washington and for a long time there have been two stained glass windows that celebrated Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

Well, after the events in Charlottesville the church voted to remove those windows and replace them. And if you visit the National Cathedral today there are rows of beautiful stained glass windows and two pieces of plywood. And so this is still a debate, right? What's going to go in that place?

And I think both contextualizing and frankly in some cases simply removing monuments to the great gallantry of a white supremacist army is a good idea. But that's not a task that's complete yet. There's actually another monument even within the National Cathedral to Robert E. Lee. There's an embroidered kneeler in which you kneel on when you're in a pew—an embroidered kneeler celebrates him alongside the kneelers that

celebrate every president the United States has ever had. Alongside a kneeler for Harriet Tubman.

So there's that there's this interesting period of transition that we live in. And I think we both need to revise the way in which we recall the Confederacy in particular, but also we need to bring back in an enormous history that we have lost. If you visit Germany, in train stations, on public streets, on apartment buildings, there are plaques that recall the names of victims of Nazi war crimes. And those exist all across the country and they are a part of daily life so that normal people who do not want to sit down and read very long history books have a recollection of the history of their country. And that isn't something that exists here.

DEWS: Williamson noted examples of history that has been lost but now rediscovered and contextualized in places like the new museum in Alabama focused on the history of lynching, and episodes such as the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 that are being studied again.

WILLIAMSON: And so I think that we have an obligation as Americans to confront the history that our country has lived because it is only by being honest about that history that we can achieve the ideals that we've always claimed to represent.

DEWS: Looking ahead, how do we move forward after Charlottesville? Should we expect more such outbreaks of racial unrest fueled by alt-right groups? And, what are the issues that Americans should be focused on as we remember what happened in Charlottesville a year later?

Chris Meserole invoked lessons from his knowledge of political systems abroad and how they have dealt with similar problems of domestic extremism.

MESEROLE: A little bit longer term, what worries me is we've seen in a lot of other countries there have been some scholars that have tried to figure out the relationship between domestic terrorism and different kinds of democracy. And one of the things that

we've seen pretty consistently in the literature, the empirical literature, on terrorism is that countries that have proportional systems tend to have a little bit less terrorism than countries that have a majoritarian system like the United States does.

And the reason we think that that's happening is that a majoritarian system you really have to get 50 percent of the vote to be able to have any kind of political representation. Which means that anybody who feels like they represent a small or a fringe group probably isn't going to view the political process as their ally and it's going to push – it pushes extremist groups out into the margins where from their perspective their only real choice is kind of violence or acquiescence.

In contrast in countries that have proportional systems you can have a little bit more political representation without it … at a lower threshold whether it's 10 percent or 20 percent of the vote. And I think what that says to me is that as the demographics of the United States continue to change, and you know this is going well beyond even Trump to a decade or even beyond down the road, the big question that I'm both fearful of but also curious about is what does the far-right do when it becomes apparent to them that they're not going to have success using the established political process to try and gain a seat or allow their voices to be heard politically?

Are they going to you know are they going to be quiescent and just kind of fade from political view altogether or are they going to you know are we going to see them begin to carry out some further violence? I don't necessarily think that we'll see mass campaigns of terrorism or anything like that but it wouldn't surprise me if in the long run we started to see a more and more sustained terrorist attempts or terrorist acts-activity over the long term.

DEWS: Andre Perry encourages us to not focus just on the overt racial violence that happened in Charlottesville, but on a broader range of policies that are detrimental to the lives of excluded communities nationwide.

PERRY: After Charlottesville I want people to focus on the statues of policy that are just as permanent or impermanent as many of the Confederate statues. We still have criminal justice laws in this country that need to be taken down. There's no question about it. We still have underfunded schools, and school funding formulas that need to be taken down. You know we still have districts, school districts, district lines that keep funding from getting to educating white folks to stop being racist. These things need to be taken down.

And so after Charlottesville I hope that we learn that yeah these are statues, but there are policies that are more damaging on the everyday lives of black and brown people in this country.

DEWS: And finally, Camille Busette again, who ties together various strands of this conversation—the system of racial violence and stratification that endures apart from Charlottesville, the way we acknowledge, or fail to, our history, and what kinds of public policy solutions are needed to move forward in this country.

BUSETTE: What I think has been sort of lacking in the conversation around Charlottesville and post-Charlottesville is really as I mentioned earlier an acknowledgement about the brutality of a racially stratified economic and social system. And if Americans had one… 10 minutes to spend to reflect on Charlottesville I do think the thing that they should do is spend some time looking online at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice which opened in April of 2018, and which depicts our history of lynching and other brutality.

And then in terms of how do we move forward? Well you know, I do think that as we're thinking about race relations in the U.S. there are a couple of different things that I think are important. First thing is, and a lot of my work is really focused on this, is that I just don't think there is enough…there enough efforts to try to reach across to communities that are not part of. And to the extent that Americans on their own can do that through community organizations or volunteering or whatever I think that that's really important.

From a political perspective however, and a policy perspective, I do think it's going to be very important for us to think through—particularly on local, regional, and state levels—how do we address the fact that we have very isolated and segregated residential communities which are now not only segregated residentially, but they're segregated in terms of experience, they're segregated in terms of social networks, they're segregated in terms of the kind of media that they consume. So as we step back and think about policy solutions, we need to be intentional about policy solutions that try to break those kinds of silos. And I think that's best achieved at something other than the national level because people live in communities and they live in neighborhoods.

DEWS: My thanks to the Brookings scholars who participated in this episode: Camille Busette, Chris Meserole, Andre Perry, and Vanessa Williamson. And also a special thanks to our interns, Sarah Miner and Leah Kayali, who worked on this episode.

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.