It is true, as the president said, that there was violence on both sides in Charlottesville. But the neo-Nazis were the instigators via their idiot march, and they had a murderer in their midst. They must get the lion’s share of the blame. This shouldn’t mean turning away from the depredations of antifa. It, too, came spoiling for a fight. In fact, during much of the violence it was hard to tell which helmet-wearing, pole-wielding, punch-throwing side was which. Antifa is, contrary to its name, a genuinely fascistic movement, and the same people on the left who are lambasting President Trump for his lack of moral clarity need to demonstrate some of their own by forthrightly denouncing the violent fanatics on their side.

The extremes of the two sides feed off energy and attention they derive from street fights, and there will probably be more Charlottesvilles. Next time we hope Trump finds the words necessary to the moment.

POLITICS

The Charlottesville Melee

There’s no putting a happy face on President Trump’s ham-fisted and equivocal response to the mayhem and murder in Charlottesville, where white supremacists staged a march and rally during which one of their number murdered a young woman and injured 19 others when he drove his car through a crowd of counter-demonstrators.

The president started on the day of the violence with an oddly vague condemnation of hatred “on many sides.” Then, under extreme political pressure, he came back two days later and more specifically denounced the neo-Nazis and their allies. If he had left it at that, the media might have still carped at his tardiness, but no one would have been able to criticize the content of his final statement on the matter. Instead, he held a press conference the next day where, clearly angry at the criticism of his remarks, he let loose as only this president can. In an instantly notorious line, he said there were “fine people” marching on both sides.

Good people disagree about a great many things, including the propriety of maintaining Confederate monuments in public places. But that is not what Charlottesville was about. Charlottesville was host to a torchlight parade organized by white supremacists who were chanting slogans against Jews, flying swastika banners, and demanding racial separation. There are no good people in that parade. These ideas are not merely mistaken but evil, and the president of these United States ought to have said as much in the plainest terms possible.