

The Sono-Affective and Charlottesville's Response to the "Summer of Hate"

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ABSTRACT

In August 2017, Charlottesville was the scene of a highly public expression of white supremacy, evinced by hateful chants; renditions of the Confederate “Rebel Yell”; singing, shouting, and taunting by anti-racist counter-protesters; and harrowing screams in reaction to brutally violent, and in one case deadly, attacks. Members of the “alt-right” used Charlottesville as an audible stage in which sound was weaponized to construct an affective climate of hostility, intimidation, and fear. Despite widespread trauma among members of the local community, other effects, including feelings of empowerment, emerged from the increased activism by residents during and in response to the “Summer of Hate.” Locals not only countered and de-legitimized the alt-right, but also took on more concerted efforts to address community issues. These efforts have continued throughout the preparation of this dissertation and do not show any signs of abating.

In this study, I explore the *sono-affective* dimension of this local historical moment as it shapes and defines the Charlottesville community. I argue that the lens of sound and affect offers a unique depth and range of insight into the Summer of Hate, and that the value of the sono-affective lens extends to the profound impact that this historical juncture has had on local life. The alt-right, for example, emitted battle cries meant to evoke terror, while in their testimonials local residents describe recent events through stories teeming with emotion and sonic markers. A number of community members argue for the transformative potential of audible activism, specifically its ability to arrest attention, instigate action, and to empower individuals, collectives, and the larger community. And

local government, in particular public meetings held by the City Council, has become a site of debate: what should democracy sound and feel like? My investigation of these phenomena draws especially upon the disciplines and frameworks of ethnomusicology, sound studies, and affect theory. The result is a sensory ethnography informed by historical analysis and practiced as a form of activism.

Chapter 1 frames a sono-affective historical foundation for the dissertation by highlighting background aspects of local history, and more specifically the ways in which narratives of this local history exist within a sono-affective realm. I delve into some of the predominant historical narratives which, as applied locally, have clouded perceptions about recent events, and have skewed representations of the past in terms of the present. I particularly focus on contemporary sono-affective histories of the University of Virginia that blindly follow Thomas Jefferson's aural ideals for the University at the expense of ignoring an audible trail of white supremacist ideologies and systems continually nurtured on Grounds.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I examine the sono-affective consequences of August 11 and 12 as they relate to the Charlottesville community. These consequences are, in part, a result of the intentions and actions of "Unite the Right" rioters, who used a number of tactics while in Charlottesville, including the sono-affectively violent Rebel Yell. In chapter 2, I analyze the after-effects of trauma pervading local lived experience and discourse by centering local residents' testimonials, including my own. I additionally explore the ways in which sound is used by the community as a means for healing or, at the very least, a

mechanism through which locals can move forward from the traumatic events of the recent past. The various sounds created for and emanating from these initiatives, as I explain, have been an occasional source of contention within the community, highlighting local disagreements over the appropriateness of certain audible activities.

I detail my investigations of the sono-affective tactics of the alt-right in chapter 3, as well as the consequential alt-right affective “misfires” that counter-sparked local activism. The alt-right created a significant cache of documents — YouTube videos, Discord conversations, audio recordings — that laid bare evidence of their white supremacist desires and plans. They argued for and engaged in physical, audible, and emotional violence to accomplish their goals, which led to a number of misfires, and especially an effective counter-response among Charlottesville residents who understood the transformative potential of sono-affective interventions. I focus on the efforts of the collective “Noise Against Nazis,” which illustrate the complex culture of local activism.

Lastly, I turn to Charlottesville City Council meetings in chapter 4. In years past known by many local residents as a politically anemic forum for inconsequential bureaucratic minutiae, these meetings became spectacles featuring frequent disruptions by chants, boos, hisses, cackles, speeches, pop music, finger snaps, and other sonic markers of a reinvigorated citizenry. I argue that these aural activities, and attempts to police them, enact competing conceptions and feelings about what living in a democracy should or might be in the wake of the Summer of Hate.

For Charlottesville

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LIST OF RECORDINGS

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- Community “scream” on August 12, 2018 at Washington Park. Recorded with H2n Zoom. (0:45 duration, 1.8 MB file size).
- Audio Recording 2. “3_Chattleton_Kyle_2022_PhD.mp3” 171
- Dave Ghamandi remarks at September 5, 2017 City Council meeting. Recorded with Sony ICD-PX312. (3:15 duration, 4.7 MB file size).
- Audio Recording 3. “4_Chattleton_Kyle_2022_PhD.mp3” 172
- Kristin Szakos remarks at September 5, 2017 City Council meeting. Recorded with Sony ICD-PX312. (1:06 duration, 1.6 MB file size).
- Audio Recording 4. “5_Chattleton_Kyle_2022_PhD.mp3” 173
- Jim Baker remarks at September 5, 2017 City Council meeting. Recorded with Sony ICD-PX312. (3:30 duration, 5 MB file size).
- Audio Recording 5. “6_Chattleton_Kyle_2022_PhD.mp3” 175
- M. Rick Turner remarks at September 5, 2017 City Council meeting. Recorded with Sony ICD-PX312. (3:35 duration, 5.2 MB file size).

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Jason Kessler remarks at March 5, 2018 City Council meeting, plus interactions with Mayor Nikuyah Walker, other Councilors, and members of the audience. Recorded with iPhone 7, formatted to 480p. (11:11 duration, 215.2 MB file size).

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A dissertation advisory committee is meant to steer the advisee toward sound scholarship, but I cannot help but think that my committee was truly also a cohort of warm friends and invaluable colleagues.

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Noel Lobley became a fast friend from the moment when I first was introduced to

him. His positive energy is infectious, and in his presence I always felt a renewed commitment to explore the world and learn something new. In particular, Noel fostered in me a deep love and interest in sound and its innumerable meanings. I hope that we will have many more chats to come, and might even enjoy watching a Premier League match or two together.

Nomi Dave was my first advisor at the University of Virginia. She left an indelible mark on me from those early interactions as she warmly encouraged me to explore what I found most interesting. This led, curiously enough, to a seminar paper in which I focused on the obscure (for an ethnomusicologist) legal topic of public forum doctrine. Little did I know then that this paper and her encouragement would lead me to explore the relationship between sound and power, a scholarly theme that would run throughout my research at the University, including this dissertation. Then as now, Nomi has enriched my life with her caring and understanding voice.

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I have looked back longingly on my college years, where each day brought about a new musical discovery — in the recital hall, on YouTube, over the radio, at the Segerstrom and Walt Disney Halls. My life was awash in music, and this led to my graduate pursuits. At UVA, however, my friends and I would laugh at the irony of our lives: we were working toward PhDs in music, yet had little time to spend with music beyond our studies. Nevertheless, I found ways to include it here at the University, albeit to a lesser extent than in prior years. If it were not for these sounds, my life would have been dreary. For that, I am thankful to the New Music Ensemble (our performances in front of Philip Glass, our improvisations, our workshops at Kevin's); trips to the Bridge; the many organizations who brought eighth blackbird, Renee Fleming, Mamadou Diabate, and the Bach Collegium

Japan to Charlottesville; the Front Porch and specifically Christen Hubbard, who taught me how to play the banjo; spell-binding Grits and Gravy dances downtown; an incredible and inspiring night at the Jefferson Theater with Kamasi Washington; the fabulously queer Escafe (RIP), where I first met Matthew; and an unforgettable evening with members of the African Music and Dance Ensemble, featuring honorary guest Cornel West.

And now, for those who are most important...

My family, and especially my mother Sloan, my father Dez, and my sister Alexa, who have forever stood by my side with endless love: this life is breathtakingly beautiful with you in it.

And to Matthew: the world will never know how much you mean to me, only because the feelings are impossible to express aloud. However, Aristophanes came close: τότε καὶ θαυμαστὰ ἐκπλήττονται φιλία τε καὶ οἰκειότητι καὶ ἔρωτι.

PREFACE

As delivered at the Dissertation Defense on April 21, 2022 in the Rotunda

This dissertation, I believe, represents both the culmination of six years of research and the first step toward new possibilities of scholarship and activism. In it, I make the case that Charlottesville's recent history, especially the 2017 Summer of Hate, can be productively analyzed through the dimensions of sound and affect and their interrelationship. I have done my best to make this argument through a number of specific case studies, but I also understand that there is much more to be explored. In this introduction, I will highlight some aspects of the dissertation and then discuss some areas where questions remain that point to future research for which this dissertation provides a foundation.

Most of us here today are familiar with the events that occurred in this city in the summer of 2017, when Charlottesville became a vortex for individuals and organizations bent on violently promoting the ideology of white supremacy. One of the images and memories I frequently returned to throughout my research comes from the first anniversary of "Unite the Right." On August 12, 2018, I visited the site where, exactly one year earlier, Heather Heyer had been murdered and dozens of others physically injured, while many others suffered less visible trauma that would change them forever. I count myself and Matthew among the lucky ones, as we were only a block away from the intersection where a white supremacist named James Fields, Jr. intentionally drove his car into a crowd of

people. On the anniversary of that day, I came across some flowers with a note that read: “We will always be here, together.”¹

The flowers and the note are only a few of the markers of locally lived affective experience that became the focus of my research. They are evidence of the collective trauma that is central to local understandings of our recent history. For these community members, “our trauma,” as many of them describe it, represents an emotional state that has continuously permeated the town since the Summer of Hate. At the same time, as I came to realize over the course of my investigation, it is not only the trauma itself that has been so pervasive within the Charlottesville community. Rather, on closer inspection, a broad spectrum of affective and emotional responses revealed themselves: concern and confusion, angry disagreement, exuberant triumph, and cautious optimism. As an ethnographer, grappling with the affective nature of the Summer of Hate, as well as decoding the meaning behind the messy tangle of lived experience, including my own, was one of the greatest challenges of composing this dissertation.

Sound, in particular, became a crucial aspect of this research wherever it took me — the University archives, the City Council chambers, the local coffee shop, or the streets of Charlottesville. I found myself surrounded by various sonic practices, which were, in turn, tied to practitioners’ competing understandings of the role of sound in everyday life and in activism, and more specifically the affects and emotions these sounds engender. I

¹ See figure 15.

increasingly recognized this interrelationship between sound and affect, and began to understand my research as circumscribing what I came to term a *sono-affective* dimension.

Sound and affect, as I perceive them, complement one another. I am not the first scholar to make this point. The ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong writes about the “dialogic relationship” between affect and embodied sound-creation and listening: “Sound and listening are interconstitutive, and languaging about sound constructs what we hear.”² Other scholars, describing sound and affect separately, seem to echo this idea. Paul Carter argues that listening is the “cultural work” required by the ambiguity of sound: “Listening [...] values ambiguity, recognizing it as a communicational mechanism for creating new symbols and word senses that might eventually become widely adopted.”³ These qualities of sound and listening — ambiguity, cultural mediation, and the production of new possibilities — perfectly mirror the amorphous and transitory character of embodied affects. And Kathleen Stewart observes that such affects “point to the jump of something coming together for a minute and to the spreading lines of resonance and connection that become possible and might snap into sense in some sharp or vague way.”⁴ What I call the *sono-affective* sits, therefore, at the crossroads where the constant state of embodied potential in affect and the ambiguity of sound and listening intersect. And I found throughout my research that the community could, in many ways, perceive the reality of this connection.

² Wong, *Louder and Faster*, 26.

³ Carter, “Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing, and Auditory Space,” 44.

⁴ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 4.

This is the theoretical background that informs my approach, but, in my view, the more important question remains: What does all of this look like in practice and experience? Let's take a specific example. One of my informants, who I refer to by the pseudonym "Isaac" throughout the dissertation, created a sound ensemble he called Noise Against Nazis. The initial goal of this group, as he shared with me, was to use sound and noise to drown out white supremacists demonstrating in Charlottesville throughout the Summer of Hate. It was not meant to be an angry form of activism, however. As he explained it to me: "Let's just make a lot of noise and have fun in the face of this terrible, terrible group, and maybe that could make something positive about it."⁵ In other words, Isaac understood the function of his group to be making noise and, through this sonic intervention, subverting the goals of white supremacists in a joyful way. But sound doesn't always affect us and others in the ways we expect it to. I witnessed and experienced some of Noise Against Nazi's activism, and had this exchange with Isaac about my memories and feelings.

Kyle: If I remember this correctly, [...] the rhythms [of the drums] were more kind of serving as kind of a foundation for all the chants [by fellow counter-protesters nearby].

Isaac: That's what we realized very quickly, which was that, that was our purpose, you know — the rhythm of the chants.

[...]

And it was great, because we could keep playing pretty indefinitely, because, well, compared to shouting, it's not, it's not quite as draining. So we'd keep playing, people would stop chanting, but there would still be this cacophonous sound keeping the energy of the whole protest up, which I was very pleased to discover that we served an actual purpose, rather than what I had

⁵ "Isaac," interviewed by Kyle Chattleton at Oakhurst Inn Café, September 5, 2017.

originally intended.

Noise Against Nazis, therefore, did not create what they initially planned, in part, because of the sono-affective tools that they were purposefully wielding. They wished to use their sounds to drown out white supremacists, but instead the noise they made unexpectedly shifted to audible and emotional support for fellow counter-protesters nearby. And as Isaac expressed to me, he was delighted by that result.

I found that the sono-affective constituted a form of practice and performance. I felt that this was best illustrated in the City Council chambers, a space that captured the messiness of Charlottesville's politics as sounded out during Council proceedings. This included sonic subterfuge — heckling, chanting, coughing — from local activists advocating for certain policies, which demonstrated a capacity to sway government decisions in unpredictable ways. Decisions by Councilors to either enforce or put aside rules of decorum were variously motivated by the emotions of apprehension, anxiety, despondency, and hope. As various participants described to me, the stakes for local governance and the community were high. Each act of sonic disruption and each act to temper noise was an attempt to gain control of local politics.

These ethnographic case studies from those recent events constitute perhaps the most significant methodological component of my dissertation. But another component of my study, which informs any understanding of the Summer of Hate, is *historical* inquiry. Throughout my many interactions with community members, I frequently encountered a belief that understanding history was essential to understanding present realities, including

the decision, by white supremacists, to use Charlottesville as a violent stage for their ideologies. I found that the most provocative and powerful single example of history and its impact was the alt-right's purposeful wielding of the Rebel Yell in Charlottesville. In their online conversations, "Unite the Right" organizers expressed a desire to recreate this infamous Confederate battle cry as a means of terrifying community members, just as Union soldiers were terrified by the war cry more than one hundred and fifty years ago. As one alt-right forum member expressed, "I'm just saying we could do the most frightening rebel yell in over 100 years if we wanted to."⁶ I scavenged many hours' worth of videos documenting August 11 and 12, and came across numerous examples of the Rebel Yell being deployed in Charlottesville by these white supremacists, especially throughout the torch-lit march on August 11 at UVA.

This evidence led me to ask the following questions: How does the sono-affective function here? And how is the historical component connected to it? I came to understand that there was not just an affective purpose underlying these activities (namely, to terrify and frighten), but also a deeper structure: they displayed a desire to viscerally embody, and then manifest in the world, through sound, a white supremacist history. In other words, the alt-right saw their violent behavior as instantiating the actions of other historical individuals, collectives, and causes meant to bolster and institute a system of white supremacy in this county. These activities were debated and negotiated beforehand online, showing that the alt-right believed the Rebel Yell *had* to be similar and authentic to the original

⁶ See figure 24.

Confederate versions if they were to truly resonate with history. As I argue in chapter one, moments in the present resonate *with* and *because* of the past, and a better understanding of this resonance can help inform our collective understanding of recent events in Charlottesville. Equally, a knowledge of history might be also wielded in order to anticipate, counter, and eliminate white supremacist manifestations. My opening chapter one study of the historical soundscape of UVA Grounds and its attendant mythologies offers another avenue to understanding the sono-affective context of the Summer of Hate.

I believe there is a great deal of future research that can build upon the foundations that I have supplied in this study. Firstly, there is quite a lot of research material that did not make it into this dissertation. I attended dozens of protests, demonstrations, and community events that point to a complicated and complex culture of audible activism in Charlottesville. I hope to prepare more of this research in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed how City Council operates, and with it the types of sonic engagements and strategies that can be deployed during those proceedings; I am very curious to see what the chambers will be like when everyone can return to them. And while I made clear in my dissertation that my own research was not extensively focused on alt-right culture, I nevertheless see the research I have conducted in this area as an intervention worthy of further study: In what other ways did these far-right actors wield sound for their purposes, and why? This question is important not only for the Summer of Hate, but also the enduring culture of far-right violence we see across this country, including moments like the January 6, 2021 insurrection in Washington, DC.

Human beings suffer,
 They torture one another,
 They get hurt and get hard.
 No poem or play or song
 Can fully right a wrong
 Inflicted and endured.

[...]

History says, *Don't hope*
On this side of the grave.
 But then, once in a lifetime
 The longed-for tidal wave
 Of justice can rise up,
 And hope and history rhyme.

[...]

Call miracle self-healing:
 The utter, self-revealing
 Double-take of feeling.
 If there's fire on the mountain
 Or lightning and storm
 And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing
 The outcry and the birth-cry
 Of new life at its term.

—*The Cure at Troy*, Seamus Heaney

INTRODUCTION

“What understanding begins to do is to make knowledge available for use, and that’s the urgency, that’s the push, that’s the drive. [...] I had to know I knew it first — I had to feel.”

—Audre Lorde, “An Interview: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich”

A11/12: A Synopsis of Events

White supremacists converged at the University of Virginia late in the evening on August 11, 2017.⁷ The group was led by two alums of the University: Jason Kessler, a local resident who graduated in 2009, and Richard Spencer, a prominent leader within the “alt-right”⁸ who graduated in 2001. They congregated at Nameless Field, a space adjacent to the University’s Alderman Library, and began lighting dozens of tiki torches. In this group of overwhelmingly white men, many had complied with an exhortation to wear polo shirts and khaki pants so as to create an image of nonthreatening normalcy⁹ and professionalism.¹⁰ The presence of these individuals was ostensibly to protest the planned removal of a Confederate monument in Charlottesville¹¹ and to unite disparate far-right collectives,¹² but their actions throughout the course of the weekend, as well as their

⁷ For a historical review of the events discussed in this section, see Baars, et al., “United We Stand”; Hunton & Williams LLP, *Independent Review of the 2017 Protest Events in Charlottesville, Virginia*.

⁸ “Alt-right” is a term that Spencer purportedly coined, and has subsequently taken on a number of meanings.

⁹ See Wolf, “The New Uniform of White Supremacy.”

¹⁰ See Silman, “For the Alt-Right, Dapper Suits Are a Propaganda Tool.”

¹¹ See “Kessler Discusses KKK, Unite the Right Rallies and His Political Beliefs.”

¹² See Morlin, “Extremists’ ‘Unite the Right’ Rally.”

clandestine plans,¹³ revealed the their true intention was to uphold violently the ideology and system of white supremacy in the United States of America.¹⁴

Spencer gave a signal to his followers that a march through UVA was about to begin, causing the crowd to erupt in sonic manifestations of a Confederate war cry, the “Rebel Yell,” which had been rehearsed online a few weeks prior on a chat server labeled “Charlottesville 2.0.” As the name of the server implies, this was not the first foray into Charlottesville by Spencer and his men.¹⁵ Their rehearsals and renditions of a Civil War battle cry revealed their desire to intimidate perceived enemies in the present by invoking the iconic Confederate cries against Union soldiers from a century-and-a-half earlier. The march route twisted through the campus, and the mob made audible a climate of terror. Chants of “Blood and Soil,” “You will not replace us,” “Jews will not replace us,” and an ironically anti-democratic “Whose streets? Our streets”¹⁶ resonated alongside the shriek-like Rebel Yell and hyper-masculine, guttural “ROOO.”

The mob eventually made its way to the Rotunda, the symbolic center of academic life at the University, climbing down the north steps to a centrally-placed statue of the “Father of the University of Virginia,” Thomas Jefferson. A group of counter-protesters had encircled the statue, chanting “Black Lives Matter” as they awaited the alt-right. Spen-

¹³ See Flynn, “Subpoena for App Called ‘Discord’ Could Unmask Identities of Charlottesville White Supremacists.”

¹⁴ See Center on Extremism, *New Hate and Old*.

¹⁵ Spencer led two smaller rallies in Charlottesville near the downtown statues of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson on May 13, 2017. “Torch-Wielding Protesters Gather at Lee Park.”

¹⁶ See Neiwert, “When White Nationalists Chant Their Weird Slogans, What Do They Mean?”



Figure 1. White supremacists surrounding counter-protesters. (Photo by Stephanie Keith, *Reuters*)

-cer, Kessler, and the rest of the mob surrounded these demonstrators, as depicted in figure 1, eventually bludgeoning them with their torches and fists, while also macing them with chemicals. The local police had gathered nearby, aware that members of the alt-right would make a display at UVA the same evening, but they refused to intervene until many students and counter-protesters had already been brutalized.¹⁷

The next day the alt-right engaged in a riot called the “Unite the Right Rally.” In a downtown park, under the watchful gaze of the prominent statue of Robert E. Lee, they arranged themselves in testudo formation along a series of stairs leading to the park. There they staged violent attacks with clubs and mace, launching themselves into the nearby crowd of counter-protesters; figures 2 and 3 detail this militaristic strategy. One rioter fired

¹⁷ See Heim, “Charlottesville Response to White Supremacist Rally Is Sharply Criticized in Report.”



Figure 2. Members of the alt-right in testudo formation. (Photo by Steve Halber, *Associated Press*)



Figure 3. Members of the alt-right launching an attack. (Photo by Go Nakamura, *ZUMA Wire*)

a gun into the crowd, while others lobbed tear gas and urine-filled water bottles. Locals pled for the nearby police to stop the violence, but the officers instead chose to refrain from taking action. Chants of “Black Lives Matter” by demonstrators were countered by the alt-right with “Faggots go home.” The Governor of Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, declared an unlawful assembly hours later. Rather than separate the two opposing groups, the police pressed the alt-right into the street where counter-protesters were stationed. The white supremacists dispersed into different directions — some headed to the nearby Market Street parking garage, where they would physically assault local Black resident DeAndre Harris. Others marched to the large recreational area of McIntire Park; a speech was offered there by former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan David Duke: “I believe today in Charlottesville is the first step in making a realization of what Trump alluded to in his campaign. This is the first step in taking America back.”¹⁸ Locals continued to counter-demonstrate

¹⁸ It would be inconceivable to take stock of the Summer of Hate without acknowledging the rise and impact of Donald Trump in America. Duke refers here to the campaign slogan of the 2016 Trump presidential campaign — “Make America Great Again!” — which served as a symbol for white identity politics. During his campaign, Trump stoked the fires of white racial animus in America and advocated for nativist policies, describing Mexican immigrants as “rapists” and making a southern border wall his chief campaign promise, for example. One of Trump’s first actions as president was banning travel from predominantly Muslim countries. He has since decried immigrants from Africa and Latin America as coming from “shithole countries,” while also expressing a desire for newcomers from places “like Norway.” In a tweet, Trump labeled Baltimore, a city with a majority Black population, as a “rat and rodent infested mess,” and in another tweet he explained that the 2020 protests responding to the murder of George Floyd would be met with violence, borrowing a phrase with a notoriously racist history: “When the looting starts, the shooting starts.” And after the August 12 violence in Charlottesville, he stated that there were “very fine people on both sides.” All of these actions, and much more, have helped fuel the rise of the far-right in America. Duke’s solidarity with Trump, therefore, is entirely coherent. See Clark, “How White Supremacy Returned to Mainstream Politics”; Foran, “How the President, the Police, and the Media Embolden the Far-Right”; Harcourt, “How Trump Fuels the Fascist Right”; Mukherjee, “Make America Great Again as White Political Theology.”



Figure 4. Counter-protesters converging on Water Street, moments before the car attack.

against the alt-right by following them and shouting that they were not welcome in Charlottesville.

When counter-protesters sensed that victory was near — that they had flushed the alt-right out of the downtown area — they converged on Water Street and began marching east, a moment I captured on my phone in figure 4. In stark contrast to the use of the chant the night before, a triumphant rendition of “Whose Streets? Our streets!” rang out through the multitude. For the first moment since the violence began the previous evening, members of the crowd sensed hope. The marchers turned left onto 4th Street. Waiting further up the road was James Fields, Jr. in his Dodge Challenger. Horror, trauma, violence, and death would soon follow: Fields gunned his car into the group, injuring dozens and murdering one, Heather Heyer.

The events of the weekend became international discourse, crystallized in the “Charlottesville” moniker and hashtag that represented a microcosm of current societal troubles: the rise of explicit neo-fascism and white supremacy across the globe¹⁹ and, more specifically, in the United States²⁰; the racist policies of the Trump administration²¹; how the Internet facilitates and harbors far-right culture²²; and the pervasive presence of systemic racism in America.²³ It also sparked conversations about free speech,²⁴ collective memory,²⁵ and anti-racist tactics, including the debate over whether it is ever appropriate to “punch a Nazi.”²⁶ Nearly seven hundred vigils were held across the country and internationally.²⁷ “Charlottesville,” in other words, was a “turning point.”²⁸

¹⁹ E.g., Glaser and Chemali, “It’s Time to Get Serious About Sanctioning Global White Supremacist Groups”; Jipson and Becker, “White Nationalism, Born in the USA, Is Now a Global Terror Threat”; Strickland, “White Nationalism Is an International Threat.”

²⁰ E.g., Clark, “How White Supremacy Returned to Mainstream Politics”; Fausset and Feuer, “Far-Right Groups Surge Into View in Charlottesville”; Helmore and Beckett, “How Charlottesville Became the Symbolic Prize of the Far Right.”

²¹ E.g., Karl, “The Second Battle of Charlottesville”; Row, “Why America Still Can’t Face Up to Trump’s Racism”; Shafer, “How Trump Changed after Charlottesville.”

²² E.g., Gardner, “Social Media”; Glaser, “White Supremacists Still Have a Safe Space Online”; Lapowsky, “Tech Companies Have the Tools to Confront White Supremacy.”

²³ E.g., Love, “Charlottesville One Year On”; Stafford, “Racism Never Died in Virginia”; Tolentino, “Charlottesville and the Effort to Downplay Racism in America.”

²⁴ E.g., Blasdel, “How the Resurgence of White Supremacy in the US Sparked a War over Free Speech”; Schauer, “When Speech Meets Hate”; Shapiro, “Reflections on Charlottesville.”

²⁵ E.g., Bond, “How Charlottesville Has Exposed Competing Narratives in America’s Cultural Memory”; Konga, “From Charlottesville to Brussels”; Rieff, “Why Battles over Memory Rage On.”

²⁶ E.g., “Can I Punch Nazis?”; Dancyger, “Charlottesville Jury Fines Man \$1 for Punching White Nationalist”; Singal, “The Careful, Pragmatic Case Against Punching Nazis.”

²⁷ See Stein, “How to Find Your Local ‘Solidarity with Charlottesville’ Demonstration.”

²⁸ E.g., Graham, “Charlottesville Was a Turning Point”; Stout, “Two Years after White Supremacist Violence, Change Continues in Charlottesville”; Waldman, “Why Charlottesville Is a Turning Point.”

For those *in* Charlottesville, however, the “Charlottesville” moniker is seen as an often crude and callous reduction of local lives and experiences. It has been countered by the corrective nomenclature “A11/12” and “Summer of Hate,” local colloquialisms for moments in recent communal memory that have origins, as many in the city argue, in mostly overlooked local realities: systemic racism, economic disparity, false narratives, and persistent histories. “Charlottesville” is a community and place, these individuals explain, that deserves to be fought for and have its *full* story told.

Hearing and Feeling “Charlottesville”

I have endeavored to take on the task of telling this local story throughout the preparation of this dissertation. I cannot say that I have told the *full* story of this community and its recent history. Rather my study contributes to a city-wide effort of responses to and analyses of the Summer of Hate that intentionally work toward a fuller telling of local experience and history. In particular, I focus on the ways in which the *sono-affective* has shaped and defined the Charlottesville community over the past five years.

I did not begin this dissertation with these thoughts in mind. As with any primarily ethnographic project, I followed the trail of discovery guided by my environments, experiences, interactions, and investigations. In my initial dissertation prospectus, I intended to explore the relationship between sound, place, and the law as it pertained to the National Mall in Washington, DC. Starting in mid-2016, I made frequent trips up north from Charlottesville, scoping out different sites in DC for potential research and building a list

of organizations and individuals to engage with down the road. I spoke with protesters who audibly interrupted a session of the Supreme Court, for example, and attended demonstrations organized by far-left collectives.

This research took place during the 2016 presidential election, which in itself was a disturbing period. The election featured a visible and audible resurgence of far-right, racist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic, and other venomous ideologies that united in the candidacy of Donald Trump. Trump used his platform, both during his campaign and in his subsequent presidency, to channel what I and many see as the worst of American culture, including white supremacy and hyper-masculinity, so as to wage war against especially vulnerable communities — refugees, undocumented immigrants, and religious minorities. As local Charlottesville resident and *New York Times* columnist Jamelle Bouie stated toward the end of Trump's term in office:

Everything we've seen in the last four years — the nativism, the racism, the corruption, the wanton exploitation of the weak and unconcealed contempt for the vulnerable — is as much a part of the American story as our highest ideals and aspirations.²⁹

Many, myself included, incorrectly saw the Trump campaign as an aberrant momentary fever dream and nothing more. Unfortunately, his victory was an “impossibility” that became a reality. The reaction against his win, however, was immediate and profound: protests became a regular fixture across the United States and most notably in Washington, DC. So I directed my research toward these demonstrations, specifically as they were

²⁹ Bouie, “Don’t Fool Yourself.”

occurring in the nation's capital, and became well-versed in the culture and synergistic effects that made protesting “successful” and impactful. Participating in and observing these events made me realize that my initial research expectations — that I would investigate “sound, place, and the law” — did not align with my actual experiences.

Instead, I became fascinated by the interrelationship of sound and affect. The protests *audibly moved* various actors in the immediate moment (the creative interplay of chanting at the huge “Women’s March” the day after Trump’s inauguration, for example) and subsequent events (the spread of the “Me Too” movement). I was intrigued by the ways in which sound and affect twisted and ruptured, oftentimes mystifying collectives and individuals, including myself. For instance, during a counter-demonstration at the January 2017 Presidential Inauguration I witnessed simultaneous reactions to Trump’s oath of office that ranged from obstreperous and angry shouts, to a mournful and intoned rendition of “We Shall Overcome,” to silent sitting with tears in eyes and raised fists in the air.

I was experiencing similar moments back in Charlottesville during this period, as well. Locals were engaging in planned and spontaneous demonstrations on an almost weekly basis, and the sonic and affective dimensions of this activism were likewise palpable to me. But there was another level of complexity at play in Charlottesville: the resonance of past histories. Local activists were often acknowledging and directly challenging predominant narratives told about Charlottesville’s past, and were making direct connections between the past and present. There was perhaps no starker emblem of this reality than the



Figure 5. Front and reverse images of a poster.

presence of statues and markers around the city memorializing and celebrating the Confederate insurrection which led to the American Civil War, and the efforts by locals to have these icons recontextualized or removed. These efforts would take on different forms: late-night statue defacement by individuals, often involving paint and graffiti; demonstrations and community-led events occurring around and near the statues; posters found throughout the city framing the statues as “monuments to racial terror” and “built to support white supremacy,” as shown in figure 5; and educational tours of the statues guided by UVA professor Jalane Schmidt focusing on the history of racism and the politics of collective memory in Charlottesville. Figure 6 captures one of these ongoing tours as it took place on March 7, 2020.



Figure 6. Jalane Schmidt leading a tour.

While I was initially using my experiences in Charlottesville to help frame and supplement my research on the various Washington, DC protests, the Summer of Hate forced me instead to reconsider once again what my dissertation should focus on; like so many others in the community, this moment in local history had a profound impact on me: videos of torch-lit marches replete with Nazi-era slogans *disturbed*, collective chants of “Black Lives Matter” supported by the sounds of sundry percussion instruments *inspired*, and the miasmic wave of traumatizing events throughout the course of the August weekend and beyond *brought together* concerned locals eager to renew efforts toward civic change. Additionally, this was a community that I, in that moment, had known for four years as compared to only having spent a few months in distant DC.

The Summer of Hate also felt more relevant to me than the protests occurring a hundred miles away, not because of the discourses that centralized “Charlottesville” nationally and internationally, but because the sonic and affective implications of the events here and their aftermath made it a heightened crossroads that was both historically and immediately ripe for creating positive progress. More specifically, while community members were affected first-hand by the audible and violent instantiations of white supremacy, many of these same individuals were then moved to participate directly in counteracting the forces that led to Summer of Hate. The alt-right and what they stood for were countered by locals in Charlottesville — not only made to feel unwelcome in town, but also their intentions were subverted by a fervent desire to address community needs and issues such as systemic racism. The city has experienced “a blooming and flowering of activism,” according to local civil rights attorney Jeff Fogel,³⁰ and these efforts have continued throughout the preparation of this dissertation and do not show any signs of abating. While like millions of others I have been continually disheartened by national and international developments, I have also found the local efforts occurring in Charlottesville to be a source of hope and inspiration.

Local residents have, of course, been engaging in activism for centuries, especially members of the Black community. I am particularly reminded of the words of Isabella Gibbons, who was enslaved by UVA professors William Barton Rogers and Francis Henry Smith, and, after winning her freedom, helped educate Black city residents until her death

³⁰ Suarez, “Through a Year of Chaos, Charlottesville Has Seen ‘A Blooming and Flowering of Activism.’”

in 1889:

Can we forget the crack of the whip, cowhide, whipping-post, the auction-block, the hand-cuffs, the spaniels, the iron collar, the negro-trader tearing the young child from its mother's breast as a whelp from the lioness? Have we forgotten that by those horrible cruelties, hundreds of our race have been killed? No, we have not, nor ever will.³¹

She is among the countless individuals who have worked throughout Charlottesville's history to make it a community that is welcoming and empowering for *all* people. This dissertation attempts to follow those same goals, while paling in comparison to the heroic efforts of people like Isabella Gibbons. This historical material has become a source of inspiration for me as I engage in my own forms of activism in the present.

I also find myself humbled by the work taking place around me in the present. I not only strive to document the local efforts of this contemporary moment, but find myself constantly being *moved* for the better by these efforts. As a result, I view this dissertation as combining with local endeavors among Charlottesville residents (and wider actions across the country and the world), to combat systemic racism and a resurgent neo-fascism in order to create a city environment in which social justice can more effectively take root. This critical juncture in history offers me the opportunity to address this moment in real time as a research scholar in ethnomusicology and sound studies, and my focus on the Summer of Hate is motivated by a keen concern for justice and a desire to redress injustice. My study is an attempt to offer a clear-eyed exploration of the struggles that have recently

³¹ Isabella Gibbins, "Extracts from Teachers' Letters," 104.

gripped this town, while following a personally positioned journey of ethnographic discovery through the sounds, affects, and experiences that attest to this city-wide struggle.

Framing the Dissertation

This dissertation stems from the actions of, but focuses only in part on, the alt-right or other white supremacist collectives. The local community upon which I focus more broadly, however, recognizes these actors as the main source of the trauma, terror, and violence of the Summer of Hate. Therefore a succinct definition and a contextualization of my use of the terms “alt-right” and the “Summer of Hate” are required at the outset.

Richard Spencer coined “alt-right” in 2008.³² The term is purposefully intended to encompass a wide-ranging set of ideals and ideologies that are all united by a white identity politics, which is rooted in the belief that the “white race” is, culturally and materially, under attack.³³ “Unite the Right” was an attempt, in part, to connect these disparate white supremacist organizations under a single “alt-right” banner. It is important to note that not everyone who participated in “Unite the Right” saw themselves as members of the alt-

³² As Spencer explains, he was inspired by philosopher Paul Gottfried’s work, specifically an article Gottfried wrote in 2008 titled, “A Paleo Epitaph.” In it, Gottfried argues that there is a rising movement of young writers and political activists providing an “alternative” to neo-conservatism (a dominant ideology on the political right in the Western world). It was, in Spencer’s mind, “the proto version of Alt-Right,” and he discussed this “alternative” extensively with Gottfried. Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 51–52. See also Gottfried, “A Paleo Epitaph.”

³³ “Alt right adherents identify with a range of different ideologies,” the Anti-Defamation League explains, “all of which center on white identity.” This includes a desire “to preserve European-American (i.e., white) culture in the U.S. [...] to preserve the white majority in the U.S., claiming that whites losing their majority status is equivalent to ‘white genocide’ [...] as well as] a belief that one’s race governs traits such as behavior and intelligence — with non-whites being inferior to whites.” “Alt Right.”

right, and many distanced themselves from the term following A12 and the ensuing backlash. But because members of the Charlottesville community interchangeably uses “alt-right” and “white supremacists” to describe the instigators of August 2017, I have chosen here to do the same.³⁴

The “Summer of Hate” is used discursively by community members to denote a period in recent history (in 2017) that includes A11/12, but also encompasses other events both before and after it. Specifically, two torch-lit rallies led by Spencer on May 13 and October 7, along with a July 8 Ku Klux Klan rally, are often included with A11/12 as part of the Summer of Hate. As these events progressed, the community began to *feel* the Summer of Hate as a distinctly unified timeframe. As one community member, “Isaac,” explained to me, there was a sense that the community was in the midst of something terrible, or, as he recollected about the May 13 event: “That kind of stirred something in me to the point where I was like, *this is not the end of this [...] they’re coming back.*”³⁵

The Summer of Hate was profoundly sensorial and, as a consequence, this dissertation draws upon the theoretical framework supplied by affect theory. While affect theory is understood and utilized in many ways across numerous disciplines, my investigation is particularly influenced by the “affective turn” in scholarship, as defined by critical theorist Patricia Ticiento Clough. The “turn to affect,” as she explains, represents a:

³⁴ There is significant research by scholars that fully explicates alt-right culture, some of which I mention in chapter 3.

³⁵ “Isaac,” interviewed by Kyle Chattleton at Oakhurst Inn Café, September 5, 2017.

Shift in thought [by scholars interested in] ongoing political, economic, and cultural transformations. [...] For these scholars, affect refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, to engage, and to connect. [...] Affect constitutes a nonlinear complexity out of which the narration of conscious states such as emotion are subtracts, but always with "a never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder."³⁶

Throughout my study, the conceptual domains of both the emotional and the affective frame the dissertation. As I deploy them, *affects* (in accordance with Clough's understanding) are the bodily experiences that are unconscious, yet registered — "the body's ongoing and relatively amorphous inventory-taking of coming into contact and interacting with the world," as expressed by Deborah Gould.³⁷ *Emotions*, by contrast, are our conscious efforts to mark moments of affect. As Brian Massumi puts it, emotions are "the expression of affect in gesture and language, its conventional or coded expression."³⁸ Both are helpful in making sense of my research. There have been times in which an emotion from the past has been clearly remembered and shared with me by someone as they tell a personal story. In other situations, I came across actors and activists who thought, wished, and engaged with sound in order to affect and cause a psychophysiological response. There were still further moments when, over the course of conversation, an individual was surprised to discover that they had been affected in the past, and then rendered their experience into a story dominated by emotion. These moments are reminiscent of Kathleen Stewart's poetic description of affects, which can:

³⁶ Clough, "Introduction," 1–2, referencing Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual*, 25.

³⁷ Gould, *Moving Politics*, 20.

³⁸ Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 32.

Surge or become submerged. They point to the jump of something coming together for a minute and to the spreading lines of resonance and connection that become possible and might snap into sense in some sharp or vague way.³⁹

The affective realm, therefore, is rife with *possibility*, and asks the researcher to refrain from assuming and instead to explore, and explore further.

In order to better sense, recognize, and understand the affects and emotions of the Summer of Hate, I conducted my research primarily through sensory ethnography,⁴⁰ namely, participant observation, conversation, and collaboration rooted in embodiment and in felt lived experience, ranging from the individual to the communal. More specifically, this involved attending dozens of hours of City Council meetings, watching numerous videos from A11/12, conversing and interacting on many occasions with community members, participating in dozens of local protests and counter-protests, and, when many

³⁹ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 4.

⁴⁰ Sensory ethnography is a methodology that privileges embodied knowledge, somatic experience, and the senses in field research. In 1990, Thomas Csordas argued that embodiment represented a “paradigm” for anthropology: “This approach to embodiment begins from the methodological postulate that the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture” (Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology”: 5). This scholarly focus on embodied experience has continued into the twenty-first century. It is a “multisensory anthropology,” as David Howes describes it, that “stands for a cultural approach to the study of the senses and a sensory approach to the study of culture.” Howes, “Multisensory Anthropology”: 18.

Through sensory ethnography, scholars may begin to perceive of the visceral and affective qualities of sound, for example, that have been historically devalued in favor of aesthetics. In her research on Syrian dance music, Shayna Silverstein argues, “Listening to dabke, among other genres of Syrian dance music, is less about the aesthetic structures of sound than about an intensely somatic environment in which the senses constitute a totality through which the body perceives the world” (Silverstein, “Disorienting Sounds,” 242). The resulting research can “bring scholarly attention to ‘ephemeral and fleeting senses,’” as Jennifer Hsieh states, in addition to “emergent actions” and “sono-sociality.” Hsieh, “Making Noise in Urban Taiwan”: 53.

residents had expressed to me the importance of history for contextualizing recent events, delving into archives to better understand the connections between past and present. In many ways, this research began on August 12, 2017, when I witnessed and experienced first-hand the violence of that day. Through sensory ethnography, I was able to perceive “public feelings”⁴¹ of trauma that permeated parts of the local community. As activists shared their memories of A11/12, I noticed how they repeatedly framed their experiences in the language of emotion. Local conversations about city politics, to my ear, were often informed by expectations about what democracy *feels* like. Again and again, I found that the Summer of Hate could be analyzed productively through an affective lens, and that an ethnographic research practice focused on the senses, feelings, and embodied experience was critical to this analysis.

Sound, in particular, became a crucial aspect of this research. I approached it through a purposefully broad framework, recognizing that labels such as “music” could unnecessarily complicate my scholarship and, instead, choosing to “follow the trail of sound, noise, and silence, which makes powerfully audible the questions I find most important,” as Deborah Wong writes.⁴² I found the definitions and expectations surrounding

⁴¹ Borrowing Ann Cvetkovich’s use of the phrase (Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*). See also chapter 2 § Public Feelings and Refrains of “Our Trauma.”

⁴² Wong, “Sound, Silence, Music: Power”: 352. “Many ethnomusicologists spend our professional lives arguing against powerful assumptions that are wholly normalized in music departments, where juries and western art music theory courses still dominate,” Wong argues. “If ethnomusicologists want our work to matter, we must de-link (not rescue) our work from music as a historical and ideological construct. [...] If we ever hope to say what we really want to say, we will need to reject music” (Ibid, 347–349). Her argument, I find, is especially salient within and for the fight against white supremacy, as the predominant Western ideology surrounding music is framed by the supposed superiority of white forms of music, especially Classical or Western art music.

the auditory to be the most illuminating aspect of my research. What, for example, does “noise” mean to the countless actors throughout the history of the University of Virginia who have engaged with it, and how do these definitions influence the ways in which the local community perceives the Summer of Hate? Why does sound, or the absence of it, engender competing feelings about what local democracy is and should be? What is the Rebel Yell, and why were the alt-right so intent on recreating it in Charlottesville? How did community members use their voices, musical instruments, and other sound-making devices to counter the forces of white supremacy they perceived around them?

The research on affect and sound did not follow two separate tracks. Instead, I increasingly recognized their interrelationship⁴³ and began to understand my research as

⁴³ An interrelationship already recognized by scholars in their own research. For example, Nina Sun Eidsheim explores the embodied voice in *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice*. “*Sensing Sound*,” she writes, “rejects the position that sound is a fixed entity and the idea that perceiving sounds depends on what we traditionally refer as the aural mode. [...] I maintain that not only aurality but also tactile, spatial, physical, material, and vibrational sensations are at the core of all music. Because the figure of sound produces a listening practice and a subject position that can perceive only within that mode, it is challenging to imagine anything outside it. Therefore, it is within these limits that I found my case studies.” Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 8.

Martin Daughtry, in *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq*, argues that “attending closely to belliphonic sound,” his term for the sounds of war, “gives one access to new forms of knowledge; at the same time, exposure to belliphonic sound can degrade or even negate the very bodily capacities through which such knowledge is acquired.” Daughtry, *Listening to War*, 5.

In her *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko*, Deborah Wong explains that “taiko tells us something about the affective world of Japanese and Japanese American sound. I reflect here on the dialogic relationship between that affective soundworld and kumi-daiko. Sound and listening are interconstitutive, and languaging about sound constructs what we hear.” Wong, *Louder and Faster*, 26.

Anahid Kassabian provides another example of sono-affective research at work in *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*. The thrust of her book, “put bluntly: *Ubiquitous musics*, these musics that fill our days, are listened to without the kind of primary *attention* assumed by most scholarship to date. That *listening*, and more generally input of the *senses*, however, still produces *affective* responses, bodily events that ultimately lead in part to what we call emotion. And it is through

circumscribing a specifically *sono-affective* dimension. In a variety of circumstances, community members demonstrated this dimension in their actions, observations, and experiences. They made audible the implicit possibilities that affect creates — the “spreading lines of resonance that become possible and might snap into sense,” as Stewart states⁴⁴ — while also emotionally communicating the inherent ambiguity of sound, which constantly forces the listener to find meaning within it. In my interview conversation with Isaac, mentioned above, through his recollections he again spoke in terms that resonated strongly with my research; he explained that his audible activism constantly transformed as it simultaneously engendered different feelings — joy, concern, anger, and hope. I argue that the lens of sound and affect offers a unique depth and range of insight into the Summer of Hate, and that the value of this scholarly and ethnographic lens extends to the profound impact that this historical juncture has had on local life and beyond.

I have used (and will continue to use) such terminology as “the community,” “we,” “locals,” and “Charlottesville” to describe the primary subject of this dissertation. However, this language raises the question of who, precisely, is included within the inherent complexity of the “community of Charlottesville” and, more importantly, how this community understands itself.

this listening and these responses that a nonindividual, not simply human, *distributed subjectivity* takes place across a network of music media.” Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, xi.

This interrelationship has become the focal point of edited anthologies, as well, including *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience* from 2013, and 2021’s *Sound and Affect: Voice, Music, World*. Critically, it is important to note that, while scholarship surrounding sound and affect has been growing more recently, this research can be traced back to seminal works like Steven Feld’s *Sound and Sentiment* from 1982.

⁴⁴ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 4.

Some locals, for example, refer to “our trauma”⁴⁵ in describing the after-effects of the Summer of Hate, thereby framing recent events as being a collective and inclusive experience. But such terms do not address the very real differences in lived experience among specific community groups, especially between Charlottesville’s white and Black citizens. At a City Council meeting, Dr. M. Rick Turner, a local Black resident, expressed how Black voices and experiences are frequently undermined in this city at the hands of Charlottesville’s white residents and historical institutions, like the local police department:

You know, after reviewing the report I knew that I had to be here this evening, because if I wasn’t, perhaps, what I have to say wouldn’t be said. I agree with the report, that the city and state police were unprepared to deal with the CHAOTIC events that occurred in July and August. ONE OF MY COLLEAGUES... commented that there’s plenty of blame to go around. Some of the chaos occurred because of the historic RACISM in this city, AND I DOUBT THAT Chief Thomas, City Manager Maurice Jones or the City Councilors ANTICIPATED that RACISM would raise its ugly head to the extent that it did. Our city officials, like so many of us, tend to avoid issues of race. The problem of racism in the Charlottesville police department is an OLD one.⁴⁶

A challenge for this dissertation, then, is taking note of the multiplicity of experiences within this community — experiences which *create* this community — and understanding Charlottesville as both a cohesive *and* disjointed entity. It is, for example, recognizing the difference between recent “our trauma” and historical racial trauma. Many residents were

⁴⁵ This use does not necessarily refer to a “clinical” form of trauma, but more to a negative physical, emotional, and psychological experience that has profoundly affected local life. Trauma here, in other words, marks a “public feeling” that frames a “cultural and social phenomenon,” as the scholar Ann Cvetkovich describes it (Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 1–2). See chapter 2 § Public Feelings and Refrains of “Our Trauma.”

⁴⁶ For more on the silencing of Charlottesville’s Black voices, specifically as it takes place in local politics, see chapter 4 § “I’m Loud and I’m Black.”

traumatized by the Summer of Hate, and, to this extent, I write about a “general” and “shared” trauma. But it is also clear that the trauma manifested differently in the Black and white communities, and the Summer of Hate was profoundly more burdensome on Black locals precisely because it compounded on the historical racial violence present throughout much of Charlottesville’s past. This is what Turner is expressing when he explicitly connects the events of August 11 and 12 to the “OLD” “problem of racism” in the Charlottesville Police Department.

What I mean by “community,” therefore, is malleable and context-dependent, changing from chapter to chapter. Chapter 1 is singularly focused on a particular class of individuals — white, wealthy, male, educated — who have profoundly influenced a current and predominant (re: white) understanding of the University of Virginia’s character and history. Chapter 2 and part of chapter 3 draw on the experiences of local activists who were present throughout the Summer of Hate and suffered trauma as a result of it. These individuals come from a range of backgrounds — old and young, students and graduates, many races — that are made cohesive through their political actions. Chapter 4 similarly centers on a diverse set of actors who are united by their regular attendance at City Council meetings, yet they frame, through their different behaviors during these events, competing understandings of local experience and history.

When I was present with these individuals and groups — in the archives, in the streets, in the Council chambers — I practiced *listening* as an ethnographer. In other words, I intentionally paid notice to the ways in which they framed themselves as actors within a

community and how they defined this community based on their individual positions within it. It meant, for example, listening to *race*, recognizing that recent events and Charlottesville's longer history have been influenced and structured around it.

The "community" is affective: it is something that is felt by its members, but is also constituted by the felt and lived experiences it is comprised of. This meant that, at times, what was shared with me by locals was inherently contradictory: "we" and "community" were actually *aspirational* terms that, at the same time, envisioned a *present* reality that could never be fully recognized as united. As a member of this "community" myself, and as an ethnographer, I felt it best to transmit these terms within the dissertation; my research purposefully mirrors what I heard from locals in Charlottesville. As such, the "community" of this dissertation will *feel* disjointed at times due to its very real disjointed nature.

My ethnography can only capture so much, however. I will never experience and fully understand, for example, the realities faced by Charlottesville's Black residents. My position as a scholar — a white, male, graduate student from California in Charlottesville — has remained constant throughout this research. This ethnography, in other words, will always be a "partial truth."⁴⁷ My sincere hope, however, is that it might affect this city positively and, even in a small way, help it move toward the aspirational community so many of its locals yearn for.

⁴⁷ As James Clifford describes ethnographic research in his important essay. See Clifford, "Introduction."

Moving Forward

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to informants by pseudonym to help maintain their confidentiality. This is so as not to enable any possible doxing⁴⁸ of these individuals and to comply with their wishes for privacy or anonymity.

As an appendix, I have included a timeline of important local and national events that inform this research project. In the days after A11/12, I began saving website links, tweets, newspapers, and jotted thoughts concerning noteworthy moments surrounding and marking Charlottesville's recent history — moments that, I thought, might prove worth remembering for the dissertation. By no means comprehensive, the resulting timeline offers a glimpse into the endless stream of cascading affective moments that mark, constitute, and push forward local life, focusing exclusively on 2016 through 2019. I believe that this selective chronology helps provide context for the overall study.⁴⁹

In chapter 1, I frame a sono-affective historical foundation for the dissertation by highlighting background aspects of local history, and more specifically the ways in which narratives of this local history exist within a sono-affective realm. I delve into some of the predominant historical narratives which, as applied locally, have clouded perceptions about recent events and skewed representations of the past in terms of the present. I specifically

⁴⁸ Someone is “doxed” when their personal information has been revealed by others in an online setting so that they might become the target of negative attention. See Lee, “How Right-Wing Extremists Stalk, Dox, and Harass Their Enemies.”

⁴⁹ For a more expansive, centuries-long look at the history that informs these four years, I encourage you to explore the “Chronology” section in the book *Charlottesville 2017* (Nelson and Harold, eds.). And for a micro-chronology of August 11 and 12, the local alt-newspaper *C-Ville Weekly* has published a minute-by-minute account of the weekend's events. Baars, et al., “United We Stand.”

focus on contemporary sono-affective histories of the University of Virginia, which center on conceptions and examples of ‘noise’ and blindly follow Thomas Jefferson’s aural ideals for the University at the expense of acknowledging an audible trail of violent behavior continuously nurtured on Grounds. My research for chapter 1 was supported by the William R. Kenan, Jr. Foundation and involved exploring the Small Special Collections Library at UVA. I analyzed documents that engage with the idea or experience of ‘noise,’ and I investigated examples of noise and sound that have framed narratives about the history of the University of Virginia. Through this historiographical work, I came to understand how moments in the present resonate *with* and *because* of the past, and how better understanding this resonance could help inform our collective understanding of recent events in Charlottesville. Local history, I additionally argue, can help us better understand, expect, counter, and eliminate neo-fascist and white supremacist manifestations, like those on A11/12.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I examine the sono-affective consequences of August 11 and 12 as they relate to the Charlottesville community. In chapter 2 I focus on the after-effects of trauma pervading local lived experience and discourse. For Charlottesville residents, “our trauma” has become both a description of an emotional state that has continuously permeated the town since the Summer of Hate, as well as a refrain that refers to instances where local lived experience has been used by others for purposes that feel exploitative. I explore examples of these alongside individual accounts that, in part, explain and give voice to this trauma as they also detail varying experiences of A11/12. I additionally

examine the ways in which sound is used by the community as a means of healing or, at the very least, as a mechanism through which locals can move forward from the traumatic events of the recent past. The various sounds created for and emanating from these initiatives, as I explain, have been an occasional source of contention within the community (I analyze democratic iterations of these disagreements in chapter 4).

I detail my investigations of the sono-affective tactics of the alt-right in chapter 3, as well as the consequential alt-right affective “misfires” that counter-sparked local activism. The alt-right created a significant cache of documents — YouTube videos, Discord conversations, audio recordings — that laid bare evidence of their white supremacist desires and plans. They argued for and engaged in physical, audible, and emotional violence to accomplish their goals, which led to a number of misfires, and especially an effective counter-response among Charlottesville residents who understood the transformative potential of sono-affective interventions. I focus on the efforts of the collective “Noise Against Nazis,” which illustrate the complex culture of local activism.

Finally, in chapter 4, I turn to Charlottesville City Council meetings. Known by many local residents in years past as a politically anemic forum for inconsequential bureaucratic minutiae, after A11/12 these meetings became spectacles featuring frequent disruptions by chants, boos, hisses, cackles, speeches, pop music, finger snaps, and other sonic markers of a reinvigorated citizenry. I argue that these audible activities, and attempts to police them, enact competing conceptions and feelings about what living in a democracy should or might be in the wake of the Summer of Hate. City residents acutely recognize

the affective potential of sound, as well as the high stakes for local governance and community — each act of sonic disruption, each act to temper noise, each act to bolster one vision or the other for the City Council soundscape is an attempt to gain control of local politics. For this chapter, I draw upon dozens of hours of participant observation during City Council meetings, conversations with audience members, and local texts.

* * *

There is a “battle in the streets,” according to political scientist and UVA alum Deva Woodly, that has been articulated throughout this century.⁵⁰ “The problems are not new,” she explains:

The crisis, as ever, is white supremacy. The crisis is racial capitalism. The crisis is the debilitating misogyny of patriarchy and its economic, political, and social effects. The crisis is that most people around the world are prevented from living in their full dignity.

[...]

What ought to have become clear in the protest cycle that has characterized this century, from Occupy Wall Street forward, is that protest is not only an expressive activity, it is a specific and essential political tactic that can change the way people understand reality. Protests that are connected to clear and resonant messages are not one-off events. [...] If resonant messages persist over time, they begin to shape the way we encounter the world, even for people who do not (yet) agree.

But there is more. Protest is not only a political tactic. It is a learning experience for both those involved and those observing. The present uprising is not a replay of any other. [...] Each iteration of the struggle in the streets teaches the organizers galvanizing people’s consciousness, the activists showing up at actions, and the observers trying to figure out what is going on. What they learn is more about the principles at stake, where they stand, and what they are willing to do to create the change they seek.

⁵⁰ Woodly, “An American Reckoning.”



Figure 7. Community members marching on the first anniversary of A11.

At a time when the act of breathing has become an urgent, rallying cry for Black Americans, and after neo-fascists came to Charlottesville with their purposefully theatricalized chanting, I see my position as a scholar necessarily to be part of a broader intellectual and ethical imperative to attend more closely to the sonic and affective dimensions of activism and its subsequent effects. My project seeks not only to better understand why and how these sounds have come into existence and the ways in which they wield affect, but also ultimately to suggest how an informed understanding of this dimension of experience might steer Charlottesville, in microcosm, toward a positive future.

One of the answers, I believe, is hope. The philosopher Cornel West traveled to Charlottesville twice in 2017. The first time was to bear witness to and take a stand against the hatred present during A11/12. A few weeks later, he visited the city once more to offer

his thoughts on the “spiritual blackout” of the present moment. “I am an adult,” he admitted, “I am not optimistic.” Nevertheless, he went on to describe himself as a “prisoner of hope,” because hope was essential for creating a better world. Brian Massumi, another philosopher, similarly argues for the transformative potential and power of hope. Echoing West, he explains that his idea of “hope” is not the “opposite of pessimism,” but rather another word for “affect”: “‘where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do’ in every present situation.”⁵¹

I conclude this dissertation by extending this theorization of hope and applying it to contemporary Charlottesville. Looking at the present situation in the city and beyond — the disfunction of local politics, national weaponization and distortion of history, and global rise of far-right ideology and violence — I cannot keep from determining that there isn’t much to be hopeful about. Yet, at the same time, hope is what drives activism and protest, and what has been inherently fueling the work of Charlottesville locals as they attempt to realize a better community that might be possible. I believe, therefore, that this hope (which, despite my misgivings, I feel permeates the present study) is a fitting culmination to this project.

⁵¹ Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 3.

CHAPTER 1

Finding Clarity in the Echoes from the Past

“The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do.”

—James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt”

“Unprecedented”

In my nine years of living in Charlottesville, I have come across a recurring narrative about the city. “Happiness is a place called Charlottesville, Virginia,” declares *The Guardian* in 2014.⁵² Three years later, the website Livability.com lists its reasons “Why Charlottesville Is One of America’s Best Places to Live.”⁵³ And *Time* includes the city in its 2014 ranking of “America’s Best College Towns.”⁵⁴ There are so many similar paeans that the city’s tourism website keeps a running tally of them that spans decades.⁵⁵ The reasoning for each follows a familiar pattern: the food and wine scene, the college town vibe, the idyllic surroundings. *HuffPost*, for example, in its ranking of the “9 Most Romantic Cities in the South,” offers this summary for “#6” Charlottesville:

Virginia is for lovers, and Charlottesville is no exception. Go for a hike on the nearby Appalachian Trail, take a relaxing drive on some beautiful country roads, and make sure to stop for lunch at nearby Pippin Hill Farm. We think we’ll stay forever.⁵⁶

⁵² Helmore, “Happiness Is a Place Called Charlottesville, Virginia.”

⁵³ Hill, “Why Charlottesville Is One of America’s Best Places to Live.”

⁵⁴ Hopewell, “America’s Best College Towns.”

⁵⁵ “Charlottesville Accolades.”

⁵⁶ Ledbetter, “The 9 Most Romantic Cities in the South.”

In my experience, these rankings, descriptions, and other positive framings match a predominant narrative about the city — that Charlottesville is a wonderful place to live — that comes from a particular, yet influential subsection of the city’s population: white, financially well-off, and college-educated. Many of my friends and colleagues, who are often members of these classes, have waxed poetic about the quality of local restaurants and wineries, the surprisingly extensive entertainment scene, the charming local passion revolving around the UVA men’s college basketball team, and, in general, the profound sense of community. I myself have described Charlottesville to family members as the best of both worlds: big city amenities and a small-town feel.

Flattery for the University of Virginia echoes that for the city. *U.S. News & World Report* has consistently ranked UVA as one of the elite public universities in the country. Numerous publications have noted how beautiful the “Grounds”⁵⁷ are.⁵⁸ Locals, students, faculty, and staff extol the historical foundations of the University by tracing its origins to three US presidents, and more specifically to the “Father of the University of Virginia,” Thomas Jefferson. He has long been warmly referred to on Grounds as “Mr. Jefferson,” and members of the student body fiercely defend and practice his vision of student self-governance.

When the violence of August 11 and 12, 2017 became international news, I could not help but notice that these same narratives were used to defend the city and University.

⁵⁷ The colloquialism used by members of the University community to describe the campus.

⁵⁸ E.g., “Accolades”; “Most Beautiful College Campuses”; “The 100 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America.”

I heard on CNN, for example, the then-Mayor of Charlottesville, Mike Signer, explaining that Charlottesville was “one of the world’s truly great cities” and that the racism proudly displayed by the alt-right in town over the weekend was not in line with local values and the city’s “democratic” history.⁵⁹ I read multiple Facebook posts by friends and neighbors stating that the city was “invaded” by hateful outsiders. UVA President Teresa Sullivan wrote two emails to me and other members of the University community, claiming that what took place on Grounds was “unprecedented.”⁶⁰

These narratives — of a great city and excellent university standing in supposed contrast to recent events — are both a projection of an idea of “Charlottesville” and a lived experience that tracks the city’s affluent, white community. In other words, what is said about Charlottesville is neither the full story nor an accurate reflection of what life is like for *all* of its citizens. While these narratives continue to predominate in local and national discourses about Charlottesville, I and other politically active members of the community have woken up (if we were not already awake) to a more complex reality, and have actively worked to dispel and counter what we see as misleading, inaccurate, or at best incomplete accounts, whether intentional or not. What many, mostly white and privileged, locals have said about our city’s character and history, and what some outsiders have written about it, fail to grasp how familiar recent events have felt to those of us who live in the neighborhood — how rankings and plaudits that tout the “happy,” “romantic,” and “truly great” nature

⁵⁹ CNN, “Charlottesville Mayor’s Full CNN Interview.”

⁶⁰ Teresa A. Sullivan, email message to author, August 15, 2017; Teresa A. Sullivan, email message to author, September 11, 2017.

of Charlottesville ignore the realities that entire communities, the Black community within the city limits in particular, face on an everyday basis, and have faced for centuries.

These “happy” narratives mask the violence and persistence of white supremacy and systemic racism in Charlottesville and at the University of Virginia. Narratives of the University’s founding, for example, have often glossed over or ignored outright the presence and reality of slavery on Grounds, and the central role that enslaved African American individuals and families had in the construction and functioning of academic life. Former UVA professor Maurie McInnis states:

For decades a fairly simple narrative, one that focused on the genius and creativity of Jefferson’s designs, dominated the early history of Thomas Jefferson’s university. Of the popularly available books that told the history of the university, or in the materials the university itself presented in official publications or in the exhibition space of the Rotunda, slavery was never mentioned. The narrative skipped quickly from Jefferson’s designs to the Civil War, to the twentieth century. Changing the narrative and uncovering this history has been a multiyear effort of many individuals.⁶¹

Louis Nelson, also a UVA professor, has delivered lectures across Grounds that highlight these absences in the prevailing story of UVA’s founding.⁶² He notes how University-sanctioned tours given to visitors and potential students on Grounds tend to focus on the “genius” of Jefferson’s design for UVA. For example, the tours mark how Jefferson interspersed student housing spaces with two-story apartments for professors that included a classroom on the first floor, making for an intimate and enriching learning environment.

⁶¹ McInnis, “Introduction,” in *Educated in Tyranny*, 15.

⁶² I was fortunate enough to hear him deliver one of these lectures to the University Judiciary Committee on February 16, 2020.

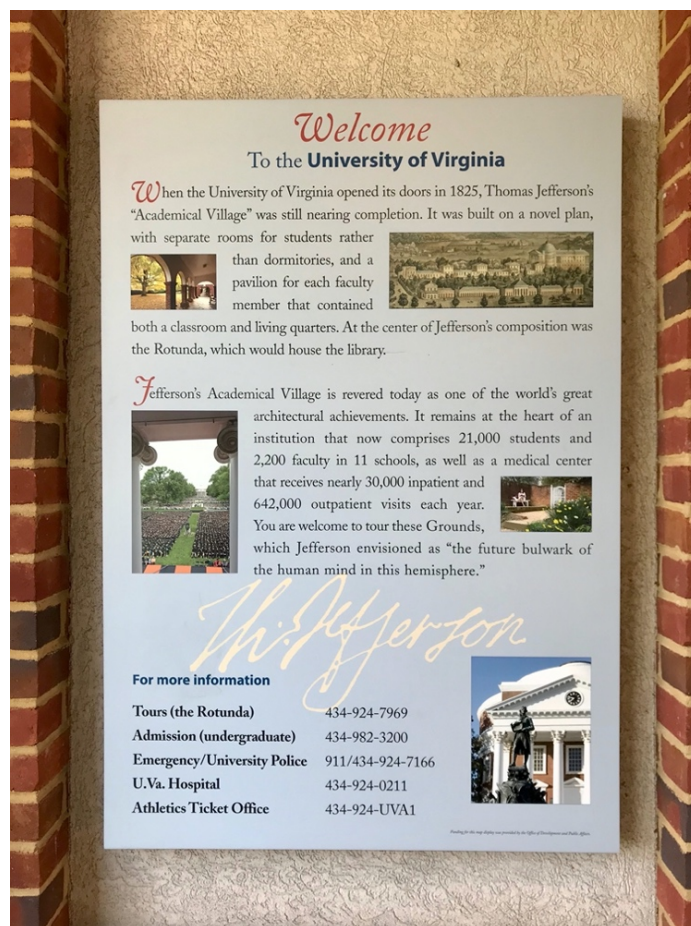


Figure 8. A sign located near an entrance to the Central Grounds Garage at UVA.

What these narratives ignore, according to Nelson, is an additional floor of the apartments, the basements, which housed the enslaved community on Grounds. Nelson argues that the UVA community must confront not only the purpose of these apartments, but also the prevailing absence of the basements in the oft-shared narrative of the University's founding. I have found other forms of this narrative across Grounds: a placard introducing guests to the University while also touting the "novel" form and function of Jefferson's designs, shown in figure 8; a plaque describing Jefferson as the "builder" of the Academical Village's garden walls, as I photographed in figure 9, which has since been corrected at the

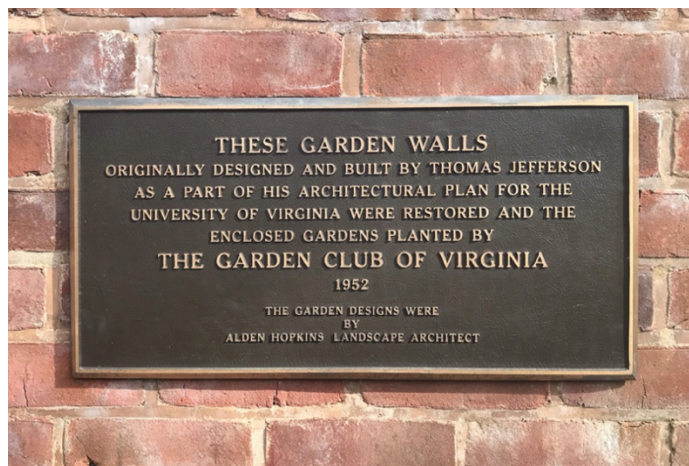


Figure 9. A plaque displayed along the wall of Garden I at UVA. As of September 2020, the plaque has since been replaced with language that acknowledges the enslaved laborers who built the walls.

University; and, in a particularly symbolic example captured in figure 10, a poor attempt to memorialize the enslaved laborers who built UVA's initial campus through a faded, inconspicuously placed plaque on the floor of a tunnel running beneath the Rotunda. Another nearby plaque commemorating the labor of two white hired workers, James Dinsmore and John Neilson, is notably more eye-catching and descriptive, as shown in figure 11. Therefore, the kind of public history in which Nelson and others are engaging is necessary and long overdue, and, as McInnis explains, "has taken on even greater urgency" since the events of August 11, 2017.⁶³ University administration officials have taken some steps to address these issues by commissioning reports,⁶⁴ renaming prominent buildings across Grounds, and directing the construction of the Memorial to Enslaved La-

⁶³ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁴ Including the "President's Commission on Slavery and the University" and the "President's Commission on the University in the Age of Segregation."



Figure 10. A plaque memorializing UVA's enslaved laborers placed in 2007.



Figure 11. A plaque commemorating James Dinsmore and John Neilson.

-borers. Additionally, UVA has recently incorporated aspects of this history into its first-year student curriculum. But, as I explain in this chapter,⁶⁵ more substantial and lasting correctives need to be pursued and established.

Nelson also points out that there are a number of recent statistics that counter any notion that “happiness is a place called Charlottesville.” In his lecture, he notes how, while the local white community has a high living standard, Charlottesville’s Black population is five times more likely to face arrest than whites,⁶⁶ the city’s schools rank in the top twenty nationally for the largest Black/white achievement gaps,⁶⁷ and infant mortality for Black babies in Charlottesville is two-and-a-half times greater than white infant mortality.⁶⁸ Since these statistics are absent from how white locals talk about their city, Nelson asks, “Are we telling the truth?” Put another way, the city’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Memorials, and Public Spaces bluntly states:

Few institutions and communities in the United States, if any, have ever fully explored the truths and legacies of slavery, Jim Crow and white supremacy. Charlottesville is no exception. Many of the ways in which our history is presented [...] do more to hide these wrongs, to justify them, and even to glorify them, than to reveal them. The impact of this neglect and distortion may be seen in continuing systems and structures [...] that disenfranchise, disempower, and devalue African Americans, Native Americans, and other people of color.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ See below, § A New Century.

⁶⁶ See Stout, “Charlottesville Arrest Data Show Racial Imbalance.”

⁶⁷ See Green and Waldman, “You Are Still Black.”

⁶⁸ See Fitzgerald, “Summit Addresses Charlottesville’s Infant Mortality Rate.”

⁶⁹ Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Memorials, and Public Spaces, *Report to City Council*, 2.

Local activists argue that projects that strive to counter and complicate the dominant narratives of local life and history are critical to the well-being of community members. The Commission points out that getting closer to the truth does not automatically correct the problems in the neighborhood, but recognition of the nature of those problems is an important step toward disassembling the “systems and structures” that harm residents.

Nelson’s lectures are among several examples of locals, some affiliated with UVA and others not, working to correct the record and contribute to a more holistic narrative of the community. These individuals do this work, in part, to try to steer the future away from the damage and violence that results from whitewashing and allowing for white supremacist narratives. This is true not only in terms of addressing contemporary realities, but also when it comes to reconsidering history. It is important to recognize, for example, how it is that this city in particular became the staging ground for a highly public expression of white supremacy in August 2017. We should not simply accept the oft-repeated impression that Charlottesville was “invaded.”⁷⁰ As UVA professor and public historian Jalane Schmidt argues:

There are those who denounce the alt-right by telling them to “Go home!” [...] But this denunciation fundamentally misunderstands the alt-right, their origins and appeal [...], and the white supremacist history and present of Charlottesville, and Virginia, and the United States: they **are** at home.⁷¹

Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler, the organizers of “Unite the Right,” found common

⁷⁰ E.g., Schragger, “When White Supremacists Invade a City”; Signer, “Charlottesville Is an Enduring Symbol”; Vaidhyathan, “Why the Nazis Came to Charlottesville.”

⁷¹ Schmidt, “No, I Won’t ‘Ignore’ the Alt-Right.”

cause⁷² in the racist views espoused in some of the writings of Charlottesville's most famous resident, Thomas Jefferson.⁷³ It makes sense, then, that members of the alt-right led by Spencer and Kessler ended their torch-lit march through the UVA Grounds at the prominent statue of Jefferson that stands at the street-side of the Rotunda. Notably, Spencer and Kessler themselves could hardly be called "invaders," as they are former UVA students who knew their way around the Grounds. Further still, claims that this violent rally was "unprecedented," as stated by UVA President Sullivan in her post-A11/12 emails,

⁷² They, as well as other members of the alt-right, have consistently argued for and championed racial inequality, specifically the idea that white people are superior to Blacks. Spencer, for example, once stated in a speech, "We would be remiss not to mention that the history of racial confrontation throughout the centuries is rarely characterized by multiculturalism, individualism, or a 'friendship of the peoples.' More often, it is characterized by conflict and domination, even enslavement and genocide. In such conflicts, races of higher average intelligence — with greater abilities to strategize, plan, and develop technology — have predominated over races with lower average intelligence. In recent history, Africans and Amerindians, despite their great numbers, had little chance of resisting European colonialists, who possessed the 'guns and steel' of an advanced society." Devlin and Spencer, "Race 101."

Kessler has argued that different races should not come together and live with one another: "Africans and Europeans sharing a country is a disaster. [...] The most fair thing to do would be to let them have a portion of the country & tell them, 'No more gibmedats.'" Tanner, "Who Is Jason Kessler?"

⁷³ Throughout his life, Jefferson consistently shared the belief of racial inequality, once telling abolitionist Edward Coles, "The idea of emancipating the whole at once, the old as well as the young, and retaining them here, is of those only who have not the guide of either knolege or experience of the subject. for, men, probably of any colour, but of this color we know, brought up from their infancy without necessity for thought or forecast, are by their habits rendered as incapable as children of taking care of themselves, and are extinguished promptly wherever industry is necessary for raising the young. in the mean time they are pests in society by their idleness, and the depredations to which this leads them." Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, August 25, 1814.

In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson additionally argues that European Americans and African Americans could not coexist in the United States: "Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expence of supplying by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions, which will never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race." Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 138.

fail to recognize that white Charlottesville residents, including UVA students, have historically engaged in similar practices, as shown, for instance, in the testimony of Philena Carkin,⁷⁴ a Freedmen's Bureau teacher in Charlottesville in the 1800s, and in other examples that I will detail further in this chapter.⁷⁵

It is important to understand, however, that at least in the case of Sullivan the fault is not entirely hers; she was reiterating a common yet rarely questioned trope. Unpacking this trope and others that intersect with it is one of the goals of this chapter. Expectations, feelings, and subject positions all exist on a continuum; some members of the Charlottesville community are more familiar with the city's history than others, or they come with an awareness of different aspects of that history and view it from different subject positions. This reality, coupled with our own histories and privileges, necessarily affects the ways in which we perceive the world around us. Once we understand these circulating narratives, it is no longer surprising that a violent, torch-lit mob rife with hateful chants and hyper-masculine displays caused members of the community, such as Sullivan, to presume that the event was "unprecedented," and for many others felt like an "invasion" of the city, while for other residents this racialized violence was part of a long continuum. A more widespread knowledge of Charlottesville's history can help us better understand, ex-

⁷⁴ In her *Reminiscences*, Carkin writes about the violent behavior of some UVA students, including the "calithump": "Woe to the unfortunate individual [...] who in any way gained the ill will of one of these students. With faces masked, and torches made of brooms dipped in tar and lighted they would march to his house to the music of tin horns, and surrounding the building make night hideous as only yelling demons can." Carkin, *Reminiscences*.

⁷⁵ See below, § (Re)Constructing the Narrative.

pect, counter, and eliminate these not-so-foreign neo-fascist and white supremacist renderings.

The task is more complicated than sorting out these histories and subject positions, however, because in a literal sense the city *was* in fact invaded. As I detail in chapter 3, members of the alt-right, many of whom traveled from long distances, carefully coordinated and designed their actions specifically for Charlottesville, a city that they purposefully targeted. Both realities — of a pre-planned riot led by outside white supremacists and of a local microcosm of entrenched racial violence — can co-exist.

Coming to terms with this co-existence has been fruitful for me as a scholar trying to more fully understand the Summer of Hate. Put another way, exploring the connections and boundaries between past and present has led me to better recognize the ethnomusical and sono-affective “field” of recent events. In many ways, the Summer of Hate was a performance of history,⁷⁶ and hearing it as such both acknowledges the singular, pre-planned and recent rendition that was “Unite the Right,” as well as the embedded systems and histories that give power to that very same rendition. Dwelling in the “paradox and disjuncture” that past and present create, therefore, can more readily reveal the complex sinews across (and performances of) history, or, as Philip Bohlman describes it, “an ethnographic and historical space that [past and present] open.”⁷⁷ And for the purposes of this chapter, there is an additional benefit, in that “history can no longer be recuperated into

⁷⁶ See chapter 3 § The Discord Server, in which I discuss the alt-right’s purposeful wielding of a Confederate battle cry, the Rebel Yell.

⁷⁷ Bohlman, “Returning to the Ethnomusicological Past,” in *Shadows in the Field*, 248.

teleological narratives that ‘once happened’ and now can be told again and again in their inscribed versions.”⁷⁸ An ethnographic study that acknowledges the past and present as comingling and fluid can avoid the same trappings of predominant narratives that describe history as consigned to a distant and disjointed realm, while also recognizing that the Summer of Hate was a singular event with intention and purpose surrounding it.

* * *

There is a saying, often dubiously attributed to Mark Twain, that “history does not repeat itself, but it rhymes.” What I argue, along with McInnis, Nelson, Schmidt and others, is that the UVA community must become aware of these rhyming moments and develop a more critical ear for the narratives that, to our peril, ignore the harsh truths of the past and how they have shaped the realities of the present.

What I specifically want to consider are the ways in which sound and affect have been key to the framing of these narratives and may also become the tools through which we can better contextualize the past. My argument is informed by historiographical research that I conducted as a Kenan Fellow during the summers of 2017 and 2018. I spent time in the Small Special Collections Library at UVA, investigating and analyzing documents that engage with the idea or experience of ‘noise.’ I encountered examples in which noise and sound framed narratives, past and present, about UVA’s history. I came to recognize how moments in the present resonate *with* and *because of* the past. This is especially important to acknowledge given recent events in the city; knowledge of this resonance, I

⁷⁸ Ibid., 249.

believe, can help us better understand the Summer of Hate.

Narratives of Noise

Thomas Jefferson writes in a number of documents and correspondences of the need for and fruits of state-sponsored systems of education.⁷⁹ These institutions would embody the supposed intellectual goals of a new nation: an educated citizenry actively participating in the advancement of liberty, democracy, and happiness.⁸⁰ The “infinitely better” university, Jefferson postulates,⁸¹ is a community where professors and students can fraternize with one another within and outside of the classroom. To Jefferson, the architectural aspects of the university would help facilitate this objective. Rather than follow the model of other American universities — large buildings housing all facets of the academic experience, including education, dining, housing, and offices — the University of Virginia as Jefferson

⁷⁹ Perhaps the most representative example is found in Jefferson’s Bill 79 for the Virginia Assembly, *A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*: “It is believed that the most effectual means of preventing [tyranny] would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large. [...] It is better that such should be sought for and educated at the common expence of all.” Jefferson, *A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*, June 18, 1779.

⁸⁰ Jefferson argues that educated citizens are better equipped to combat the rise of tyranny, thus allowing a democratic nation, such as the United States, to more readily flourish: “If a nation expects to be ignorant & free, in a state of civilisation, it expects what never was & never will be. the functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty & property of their constituents. there is no safe deposit for these but with the people themselves; nor can they be safe with them without information.” Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey, January 6, 1816;

Relatedly, Jefferson also stipulates that the distribution of knowledge among the people will allow them to live more fruitful lives and recognize their lives as such, which therefore leads to human progress: “I look to the diffusion of light and education as the resource most to be relied on for ameliorating the condition, promoting the virtue and advancing the happiness of man.” Thomas Jefferson to Cornelius C. Blatchly, October 21, 1822.

⁸¹ Thomas Jefferson to the Trustees of the Lottery for East Tennessee College, May 6, 1810.

envisioned it would be open and classically, in an architectural sense, balanced. The final result, as he explained, would be an “academical village” providing a quiet environment essential to the pursuit of knowledge, a theme I will return to below.

This is where my project as a Kenan Fellow began in the summer of 2017. As a budding graduate student drawn to scholarship within the field of sound studies, I was interested in the sonic aspects of Jefferson’s vision. As a student at the University of Virginia, I was also aware of how sound has played into the narrative of UVA’s founding. This awareness emerged from discussions with my undergraduate students. They were eager to relate what they had been told about UVA’s history, especially the loud and riotous behavior of early students; the numerous student-led guided tours occurring across the University Grounds — which always stop at the site where a student shot a professor in 1840; and the books⁸² detailing the noisy misbehavior of UVA’s first few cohorts of students. What many of these sources explained was that Jefferson’s plans for the University were revolutionary and, unfortunately, too advanced for his time. The student body was initially poorly behaved, their narrative contends. Riots were the norm, and the professors, staff, and local Charlottesville community complained about the disorderly conduct of the University’s first few decades of students.⁸³ These activities culminated in an infamous shooting in 1840 that left a professor dead and the student body shocked. The sources conclude

⁸² E.g., Bowman and Santos, *Rot, Riot, and Rebellion*; Dabney, *Mr. Jefferson’s University*; Wilson, *Thomas Jefferson’s Academical Village*.

⁸³ I have frequently encountered a particular letter from 1825 by Albemarle resident George Pierson, who offers an enduring and comical description of the early UVA students, discussed further below.

that the subsequent institution of the Honor System in 1842 acted as the beginning of a new age of disciplined student behavior.⁸⁴

What I recognized in this predominant narrative about the University was, within it, an embedded narrative about ‘noise.’ Many of the University’s early days were actively spent dampening, or attempting to dampen, the noisy student body. The 1824 policy of banning guns on Grounds, for example, came from a desire not only to prevent violence, but also to clamp down on raucous behavior:

No Student shall admit any disturbing noises in his room, or make them any where within the precincts of the University, or fire a gun or pistol within the same, on pain of such minor sentence as the faculty shall decree or approve.⁸⁵

“Disorderly conduct,” the policy continues, could result in expulsion from UVA. This focus on noise in the University’s history highlights the contrast with Jefferson’s vision — a quiet learning environment made to seem natural by its architectural configuration — and the noisier reality.

In my preliminary research, I discovered that the prevailing historical narrative did not fully capture the facts of the University’s past. It was news to me, for example, that there had been loud student protests in the 1960s and 70s. I also began to wonder about Jefferson’s vision: Would he appreciate the prevalence of student a cappella performances around Grounds, or the presence of howling and streaking fourth-year students on the

⁸⁴ The Honor System has a lengthy and complicated history, but, put simply, it is a form of student self-governance through which UVA’s student body regulates its own behavior. The purpose of the System, at least in writing, is to prevent students from lying, cheating, and stealing.

⁸⁵ Meeting Minutes of the University of Virginia Board of Visitors, October 4, 1824.

Lawn? And considering his iterations of racist doctrines,⁸⁶ how would he look upon the classes held today in the Music department at his University — A.D. Carson’s “Rap Lab,” or the BaAka performances from Central Africa by students enrolled in Michelle Kisiuk’s courses? Put another way, what did ‘noise’ mean to Jefferson and his contemporaries, and would he find it on the present-day Grounds of his University? I began to ask more precisely how noise, as affect and experience, has reflected history through a tinted prism.

Scholars across multiple fields have used their research to consider the role of sound in society.⁸⁷ This is a difficult undertaking, as sound is a fleeting physical phenomenon that involves the expressly cultural act of listening in order to comprehend. Sound studies scholar Paul Carter puts it this way:

Listening becomes *cultural work* where the ground rules are not established. There, vocalizations may or may not signify. They produce ambiguous auditory traces. Listening [...] values ambiguity, recognizing it as a communicational mechanism for creating new symbols and word senses that might eventually become widely adopted.⁸⁸

In other words, sound has no inherent meaning but draws us in, requiring us actively to hear meaning in it: the act of listening both produces and responds to a cultural ear that

⁸⁶ Seen, for example, in his *Notes*: “The improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by every one, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition in life.” Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 141.

⁸⁷ Hardly exhaustive, examples from musicology, ethnomusicology, communication studies, and elsewhere include: Blesser and Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?*; Cusick, “You are in a place that is out of the world...”; Daughtry, *Listening to War*; Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*; Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*; Novak, *Japanoise*; Plourde, *Tokyo Listening*; Radovac, “The ‘War on Noise’”; Rodgers, *Pink Noises*; Small, *Musicking*; Sterne, *The Audible Past*; Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*; Wong, “Sound, Silence, Music: Power.”

⁸⁸ Carter, “Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing, and Auditory Space,” 44.

influences how we receive sonic phenomena around us. For scholars, this presents a unique challenge to deciphering how sound is working within specific cultural contexts, and this challenge is further complicated when the sounds in question are historical. For example, when I consider these issues within the framework of the “noise narrative,” predominant in the traditionally-told story of the University of Virginia, I recognize that I must first grapple with what ‘noise’ meant in this past in order to contextualize a history of it in the present. As the sound historian Mark Smith states:

Although we live in a world where definitions of noise and sound parade as axiomatic and exquisitely neutral [...] in reality we have inherited a bourgeois rubric of what is noise and what is sound, and to assume that the past was the same gives historical transcendence to that construction. If understandings of modern sound and noise are in part invented, what of past auralities?⁸⁹

The sound historian must therefore reckon with the ephemerality and culturally contextual nature of sonic experience, and account for conceptualizations of audible phenomena as they change across time and space.

I strove to take this into account in assembling a sonic history of the University of Virginia. I offer my (re)constructed narrative in the following pages: a historical soundscape first envisioned by Jefferson, then re-shaped by countless (en)actors over two centuries. As the soundscape transformed throughout time, it was discursively used to tell various narratives of the University by focusing on noise, or its absence, as a sono-affective phenome-

⁸⁹ Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, 264.

non, eventually becoming the prevailing story told across Grounds. A nuanced and textured history of the University, I argue, needs this sound and affect-based contextualization. The different ways in which the sounds of the past were in fact received, according to my archival research, illuminates and unfixes what the prevalent and persistently myopic current narrative would have us believe. In other words, definitions of noise are as transitory as the noises themselves, and the belief that noisy student “misbehavior” was limited to the first half-century of UVA’s history is incorrect. In fact, the events of August 11, 2017 are part of an audibly white supremacist refrain evident throughout the University’s two centuries.

Constructing the Narrative, 1810–2017

In order to understand how noise is an important, yet misrepresented component of the history of the University of Virginia, I go back again to Thomas Jefferson. There are a number of documents related to Jefferson’s vision for UVA that range in topic from which subjects should be taught, to how the school would be funded, to personnel suggestions for the first instructors.

For my purposes, the example that most explicitly brings into focus sound and its relevance to an academic institution is in Jefferson’s response to a February 1810 letter sent to him from a group of trustees at East Tennessee College.⁹⁰ Jefferson responded in May from his home at Monticello with suggestions for that relatively young institution. This

⁹⁰ Now the University of Tennessee.

passage would shape the way many would subsequently frame the formation of the University of Virginia:

I consider the common plan, followed in this country, but not in others, of making one large & expensive building as unfortunately erroneous. it is infinitely better to erect a small and separate lodge for each professorship, with only a hall below for his class, and two chambers above for himself; joining these lodges by barracks for a certain portion of the students opening into a covered way to give a dry communication between all the schools. the whole of these arranged around an open square of grass & trees would make it, what it should be in fact, an academical village, instead of a large & common den of noise, of filth, & of fetid air. it would afford that quiet retirement so friendly to study [...] I pray you to pardon me, if I have stepped aside into the province of counsel: but much observation & reflection on these institutions have long convinced me that the large and crowded buildings in which youths are pent up, are equally unfriendly to health, to study, to manners, morals & order.⁹¹

The key elements here are Jefferson's notion of an "academical village," its creation through specific architectural choices, and the resulting soundscape of "quiet" that leads to a flourishing student body of scholars and well-behaved individuals with moral integrity. For Jefferson, this belief may have stemmed partially from his own experiences as a student at the College of William & Mary, which in Jefferson's time consisted of one building (named after Christopher Wren, the famed English architect). Classrooms, dormitories, a chapel, and a dining hall were all placed within that single building. In 1800, Jefferson writes that the College was "just well enough endowed to draw out the miserable existence to which a miserable constitution has doomed it."⁹² He had argued earlier that the whole

⁹¹ Thomas Jefferson to the Trustees of the Lottery for East Tennessee College, May 6, 1810.

⁹² Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, January 18, 1800.

architectural identity of the building was lackluster.⁹³ Instead, the ideal university, Jefferson believed, would marry form and function.

I have heard Jefferson's arguments taken for granted as uncontested history among many at UVA, reiterated in the accolades about the University mentioned earlier. But wider recognition of Jefferson's "academical village" vision, and Jefferson's role in designing it, came well after the founding of UVA. Architectural historian Richard Guy Wilson writes that "in the 1890s, historians and architects began to discover the genius of Thomas Jefferson as an architect and to appreciate the importance of his University"⁹⁴ while locally individuals had long recognized and claimed Jefferson and his "genius."

With this broader re-appraisal came a further solidification of the idea of an "academical village." A number of texts from the early twentieth century, for example, emphasize the relationship between Jefferson's philosophical vision and his architectural plans for the University. These include the writings of UVA architectural historian Fiske Kimball,⁹⁵

⁹³ Specifically arguing, "The College and Hospital [in Williamsburg] are rude, mis-shapen piles, which, but that they have roofs, would be taken for brick-kilns. [...] The genius of architecture seems to have shed its maledictions over this land." Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 153.

⁹⁴ Wilson, *Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village*, 68.

⁹⁵ Kimball writes, for example: "Among the colleges which now rapidly multiplied on every hand, the fruitful idea was again that of Jefferson. [...] This conception [referring to Jefferson's letter to the East Tennessee College trustees] he realized in the University of Virginia, which remains to this day the most beautiful of American groups. [...] Ordered, calm, serene, it stirs our blood with a magic rarely felt on this side of the ocean. A single impress of form unites all the parts into an overwhelming artistic effect [...] which in its perfection surpasses analysis, and tells us we are in the presence of the supreme work of a great artist." Kimball, *American Architecture*, 82–84.

Wilson states, "Kimball's contribution to our appreciation of Jefferson as an architect remains unsurpassed in spite of voluminous outpouring of subsequent books and articles. He delineated an avenue of scholarly interest that has guided subsequent evaluations of the University and its meaning." Wilson, *Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village*, 82.

as well as Philip Alexander Bruce's monumental *History of the University of Virginia, 1819–1919*.⁹⁶ Edwin Alderman, UVA's first president, also received notice from professor Walter Fleming of Vanderbilt University in 1923 about Jefferson's May 6, 1810 letter to the East Tennessee College trustees.⁹⁷ By then, Duke University, Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, Rice University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology had already mirrored the design of the Academical Village in their campuses. As time went on, Jefferson's architectural vision was known widely, and became synonymous with his "genius" and the character of the University of Virginia.

Alongside the focus on Jefferson's designs, the inability of UVA's first few cohorts of students to match Jefferson's vision is part of the commonplace narrative. I witnessed an iteration of this at the Bicentennial Launch Celebration at UVA on October 6, 2017, a spectacle geared to an audience comprised mainly of alumni and donors, but which also included current students, faculty, and staff. An audio-visual montage presentation was

⁹⁶ Bruce states at length that Jefferson cannot be compared to other university founders. He argues: "It cannot be said of them to the degree [...] that their transmitted influence has never ceased to shape those creations of their benevolence. [...] Jefferson] was not merely the father of [the University of Virginia] in the spiritual and intellectual sense: he was the father of it in a corporeal sense also, for he designed the structure in the main from dome to closet, and he superintended its erection from its earliest to almost the last brick and lath. It was he who had carried at the front of his mind for more than a generation the unrealized conception of a university for his native Commonwealth." Bruce, *History of the University of Virginia*, 1:4–5.

⁹⁷ Fleming writes to Alderman, "I do not know whether the letter has ever been published. If it has not been published possibly this copy may be of some interest to the historian of the University of Virginia since some of the suggestions which Jefferson made in 1810 were afterwards worked out with modifications at the University of Virginia" (Walter L. Fleming to Edwin A. Alderman, February 28, 1923). Alderman responds warmly a few weeks later, "The wonderful versatile old man [Jefferson] had evidently reached the conclusion that in the University of Virginia there had been laid down a model for all future educational construction." Edwin A. Alderman to Walter L. Fleming, March 10, 1923.

projected onto the Rotunda, detailing the early history of UVA. The narrator described how, in spite of Jefferson's desires, the first generation of students at UVA liked, simply put, to "party." During this narration there were silhouettes of students drinking and dancing, against a background soundtrack of yelling, laughing, glasses clinking, and guns firing. Next we heard the reenacted voice of Professor John A. G. Davis, a law professor at UVA from 1830–1840 and chairman of the faculty, who explained that some seventy students would be expelled for their behavior. A chorus of boos rang out from the imagined student body, but this was suddenly cut off by the sound of a bullet. We heard the oft-told tale: that Davis was killed by a student, that the Honor System was installed shortly afterward, and that, it was implied, disorderly behavior was no longer a major issue at the University.

Other modern historical accounts tell this same narrative. Rex Bowman and Carlos Santos, in their 2013 book, *Rot, Riot, and Rebellion: Mr. Jefferson's Struggle to Save the University That Changed America*, explain how the first students at UVA nearly sank Jefferson's vision:

But while Jefferson's elective scheme, utilitarian curriculum, and secularization spread to universities across the nation and are the hallmarks of today's system of public higher education, his lofty philosophy of student self-government nearly destroyed his young university. Jefferson had expected his inaugural class to be mature young men from Virginia and the southern states, students upright and eager to learn. Instead, many of the students, away from their parents' watchful eyes, went wild, more intent on entertainment than education.⁹⁸

The authors argue that this perilous period lasted only until the institution of the Honor

⁹⁸ Bowman and Santos, *Rot, Riot, and Rebellion*, 4.

System in 1842, when students learned how to take charge of their own behavior and earnestly undertook Jefferson's vision of student self-governance. In *Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village: The Creation of an Architectural Masterpiece*, Richard Guy Wilson similarly states:

Jefferson found his hopes initially thwarted at the University, which got off to a rocky start when it opened in 1825. [...] Some of the students were drunken louts who created near riots on the Lawn, destroying property and inflicting injury. [...] The killing of a professor by a student in 1840 prompted the adoption of the now-famous honor code two years later.⁹⁹

Wilson, like the other sources, ends the story there. These authors all present a sonic portrait of the University's infancy — a soundscape of rioting, shenanigans, violence, and noise. This environment contradicted Jefferson's vision, as they all explain, but was remedied in the early 1840s after a professor was murdered by a student and the Honor System was put in place.

In time, I began to notice how similar these descriptions of historical student rioting were to recent events in Charlottesville. The Summer of Hate also involved young adults engaging in violence within the confines of, and near, the University. In addition, this behavior was presented by some as being not in character with the community, just as Wilson et al. have argued that the early UVA students countered Jefferson's plans for the Academical Village.

And just as other members of the local community argue for another interpretation of the Summer of Hate — that it was actually predictable and not as foreign as others have

⁹⁹ Wilson, *Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village*, 103.

maintained — I also noticed that there were additional narratives of UVA’s early history in the archive. Consider Edwin Alderman’s account. On the occasion of his inauguration as President of the University in 1905, Alderman presents a rosy picture of the institution and its past students — of their “deep seriousness,” “earnest ambition,” and “calm faith in the power of the cultured will and the honorable life.”¹⁰⁰ He explains that Jefferson’s vision was entirely logical and “began the first real American university,” in part thanks to Jefferson’s fostering of “discipline which imposes on each individual the responsibility for forming his own habits and guiding his own conduct” amidst “the quiet and still air of study,”¹⁰¹ here mirroring Jefferson’s thoughts in the letter to the East Tennessee College trustees. To me, this narrative seems both alien and familiar: Alderman recognizes the genius of Jefferson’s vision, yet ignores the reality of the University’s infancy and instead narrates an imaginary history of “quiet” Jeffersonian students.

In the early 1920s, Philip Alexander Bruce would present a different story in his multi-volume *History of the University of Virginia, 1819–1919: The Lengthened Shadow of One Man*. Jefferson, Bruce argues, wanted to create a village of student self-governance where professors and students were on equal footing.¹⁰² Part of this came with the architectural scope of the University plan: “each dormitory was a separate house in itself, a legal castle, a monastic cell.”¹⁰³ This was “idealistic,” according to Bruce, like “a code of

¹⁰⁰ Alderman, “Inaugural Address by President Alderman,” 75.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 70, 92.

¹⁰² A belief which has seemingly influenced the current practice at UVA of professors being referred to as “Mrs.,” “Ms.,” or “Mr.” as opposed to the more “elevated” “Dr.”

¹⁰³ Bruce, *History of the University of Virginia, 1819–1919*, 2:259.

laws adopted by the sublimated Parliament of Utopia.” He explains that no one should be surprised by the noisy outcome from Jefferson’s vision. Indeed, Bruce argues that noise was not merely facilitated by the form and function of the University of Virginia, but even became part of its identity:

The most primitive form of the disorder which so often exhilarated the lives of the students was loud noise created by a variety of instruments. They raised a hubbub,—sometimes for the purpose of giving vent to youthful spirits; sometimes, and perhaps more often, for racking the nerves of unpopular professors.¹⁰⁴

Noise, riots, and protests, in other words, were common during the formative years of UVA. Bruce, like Wilson, Bowman, and Santos, connects these noises to “entertainment,” and, again like these later authors, explains that this period of disorderly behavior ended in the 1840s: “In the main, the spirit of disorder that did show itself was the aftermath of the anterior [before 1842] period, and except in small and quickly passing outbursts, was not revived after 1850.”¹⁰⁵ But unlike the other authors, who state that the students failed to match the ideals offered by Jefferson, Bruce believes that Jefferson’s vision was “utopic,” and that his expectations could never match the reality.

While all of these accounts look backwards toward the past from the then-present, there are also sources from the supposedly critical year of 1842 itself — the year the Honor System was adopted at UVA — that are worth mentioning. I found in the archives, for example, the words of Henry St. George Tucker, a law professor at UVA from 1841–1845

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:256.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3:1–2.

and a figure who helped develop the Honor System. In an 1842 address to the student body, Tucker does his best to idealize his audience. He “knows” they will chase honor and destiny, unlike the students of the past. Yet he also recognizes that the future is in their hands, and that only they can take charge of their circumstances:

They [the current student body] have neither time nor tempers for the poor amusements of college riots, or the humble honor of leading a rebellion, or a midnight revel, with the unenvied distinction of a disgraceful dismissal. [...] It may seem perhaps ungracious at the very threshold of our undertaking to indulge in such remarks. It may seem too much as though we did anticipate the evil. By no means. I trust we shall escape it. Yet it would be a silly affectation to pretend that what, alas! has too often occurred, may never happen again. It is more wise I think to contemplate *what has been*, as a warning for the future.¹⁰⁶

Tucker does not take the past or the future for granted. He keenly recognizes that his students are capable of greatness, as well as the opposite. He continues by noting that there is a reason for laws, namely to establish order and decorum, which would lead to a proper environment for study and a more useful university. “Hence riotous, disorderly, intemperate or indecent conduct are punishable at the discretion of the Faculty,” he continues, “as also disturbing noises, either within or without the dormitories, which annoy and interrupt the studious.”¹⁰⁷ This additional information continues the logic initially espoused by Jefferson, that a “quiet” environment is the best for academic pursuits. Importantly, Tucker’s comments show that he does not see the then-current student body as being mere “drunken

¹⁰⁶ Tucker, *Address to the Students of the University of Virginia*, 5–6. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

louts” as Wilson bluntly states, or as the University’s Bicentennial celebration more humorously and benignly portrays them. Tucker sees promise in the students before him. And, more critically, while he does hear a noisy soundscape in UVA’s past like the primary accounts and contemporary authors mentioned previously, he also uses his address to characterize the future as uncertain.

After considering all of these sources, I began to recognize that they were all intentionally framed, through *sound* and *affect*, with or against Jefferson’s vision for the University. Consider, for example, the admonitory nature of Tucker’s address from 1842 — right at the supposed moment of transition for the University with the murder of Professor Davis and the creation of the Honor System. Tucker cautions his students against repeating past actions, reminds them of the rule of law and its purpose in civic life, and brings up Jefferson’s ideal “quiet” vision for the University, emphasizing that quiet *would result* in a better education. Alderman altogether ignores the noisy past and sees a continuous line from Jefferson’s philosophical blueprints up until his own time, recognizing a longstanding history of “honorable” behavior from the University’s many students throughout the years. In his view, Jefferson’s vision *led to* an honorable student body. Bruce offers a contrasting picture by acknowledging that the “idealistic” foundation Jefferson constructed *naturally resulted* in rebelliously noisy and disorderly behavior.

More recent surveys of the past similarly rely on Jefferson’s initial vision. Wilson dismisses the first students as drunken louts who deviated from that vision. Bowman and

Santos explain that the early student body was more keen on being entertained than educated. The Bicentennial Launch portrayed these students as partying too hard.¹⁰⁸ These distinctions are focused through the lens of Jefferson, presumably because this mythical and inaugural period of seventeen years stands, supposedly, in stark contrast to the many years that followed. In other words, these recent sources imply that the studious observer can and should conclude that Jefferson's vision was well-founded, in that the University of Virginia outlived this short early period of 1825–1842 to become one of the most distinguished academic institutions on the globe.

This narrative unfortunately falls apart under scrutiny. In the following two sections, I will explain how it fails to contextualize what is meant by “noise” and “disorderly behavior;” it uncritically relies upon Jefferson's actions and ideals in order to explain the past and rashly confines the University's early history and student “misbehavior” to a set timeline that mythically ends in 1842 with the creation of the Honor System.

Contextualizing Sound

How did Jefferson understand ‘noise’ within the context of an academic environment? In most of the relevant historical record, ‘noise,’ to Jefferson, implies any sonic activity that could be construed as *un-academic* or *disorderly*. Revisiting his letter to the East Tennessee College trustees, for example, Jefferson describes his vision for UVA's architectural layout:

¹⁰⁸ Supposedly in contrast to the present-day student body, which is well-known for its “work hard, play hard” ethos. See Levy, “The Smartest Party Schools in the Country”; Martin, “WORK HARD, PLAY HARD.”

The whole of these [structures] arranged around an open square of grass & trees would make it, what it should be in fact, an academical village, instead of a large & common den of noise, of filth, & of fetid air. it would afford that quiet retirement so friendly to study, and lessen the dangers of fire, infection & tumult.¹⁰⁹

Jefferson directly contrasts “noise” with an “academical village,” and reinforces this idea by similarly associating the presence of “quiet” with an environment “friendly to study.” Furthermore, at an October 4, 1824 meeting of the Board of Visitors prior to the opening of the University to students, Jefferson presided over the adoption of various policies governing the behavior of future students, including the stipulations:

No Student shall make any festive entertainment within the precincts of the University, nor contribute to, or be present at them there or elsewhere, but with the consent of each of the Professors whose school he attends, on pain of a minor punishment.

No Student shall admit any disturbing noises in his room, or make them anywhere within the University, or fire a gun or pistol within the same, on pain of such minor sentence as the faculty shall decree or approve. but the proper use of musical instruments, shall be freely allowed in their rooms, and in that appropriated for instruction of music.¹¹⁰

What is clear here is that all potentially untoward behavior, namely that which involves “entertainment” and “noise,” must be vetted by the faculty. This implies that student activities must be in accordance with academic pursuits. (Relatedly, students were allowed to

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Jefferson to the Trustees of the Lottery for East Tennessee College, May 6, 1810.

¹¹⁰ Meeting Minutes of the University of Virginia Board of Visitors, October 4, 1824.

engage in musical pursuits, so long as they were conducive to one's education.)¹¹¹ Historical documents, however, show that these policies were not followed by a significant number of students in the early years of the University. That behavior led the Board, again with Jefferson in attendance, to issue a statement directed at the students (first drafted on October 3, 1825, almost one year after the implementation of the above policies), which directly connects the noisy behavior of the students with a failure to embody the image of the ideal scholar. On the night before the statement was written, students had, according to the Board, "masked & disguised themselves and gone out on the lawn where they had made some noise but denied they had committed any trespasses or insults on the Professors."¹¹² The Board responded by denouncing these actions as working against "the usefulness of an Institution [the University of Virginia], which their country has so liberally established for their [the students'] improvement, and to place within their reach those acquirements in knowledge."¹¹³ It was during this visit to UVA that Jefferson memorably rose to speak about his disappointment with the students, yet was unable to utter a word

¹¹¹ Music and its role at UVA, along with the question of what Jefferson and his peers believed constituted music as opposed to noise, is a topic beyond the scope of the present study, but worthy of future research. Scholars such as Bonnie Gordon note that "music and noise in Jefferson's world was bound up with" an American nation-building project that set white culture, as "metropolitan and cultivated, in opposition to the subordinated, enslaved, black, and mixed-race populations" (Gordon, "What Mr. Jefferson Didn't Hear," 109–110). It is likely that these sonic entanglements extended to the soundscape of the University of Virginia, ideal and real.

¹¹² Meeting Minutes of the University of Virginia Board of Visitors, October 4, 1825.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, October 3, 1825.

and instead began to weep.¹¹⁴ The reality of a noisy student body was distressing for Jefferson, since he saw such behavior as going against the very goal of an academic institution, namely the education of the student body.¹¹⁵

Henry St. George Tucker advanced a similar ideology in his 1842 address to the students. His words are strikingly similar to those of the Board of Visitors from 1825: “They [the student body] have no disposition to bring down reproach on their noble institution which has opened her arms to receive them, and pours all her treasures into their laps.”¹¹⁶ He continues by noting the purpose of laws in establishing order and decorum, and warning that “riotous, disorderly, intemperate or indecent conduct are punishable at the discretion of the Faculty.” “Disturbing noises, either within or without the dormitories,” he concludes, “annoy and interrupt the studious.”¹¹⁷ For Tucker, as for Jefferson, the purpose of UVA is the education of students, and noise works against those goals. This is because, as they both argue, noise is un-academic and disorderly, since it prevents individuals from engaging in study.

Edwin Alderman offers a related thought in his Inaugural Address from 1905. He

¹¹⁴ See Tutwiler, *Address of H. Tutwiler*, 10.

¹¹⁵ There is a worthwhile question to be pondered here about how privileged “noise” is to Jefferson and other sources discussed. In other words, is Jefferson upset *especially* because of the noise, or is noise but one factor among many to be distressed about? I believe that this question is worth pursuing in future research, but it does appear that Jefferson et al. pay special attention to sound. One example from Francis H. Smith’s *College Reform*, discussed below, classifies noisiness as a particularly negative student activity. Jefferson’s letter to the Trustees itself lists only a few benefits for his architectural scheme including those concerning health and safety, but also expressly mentions “noise” and “quiet” in relation to the main goal of education.

¹¹⁶ Tucker, *Address to the Students of the University of Virginia*, 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

ignores the negative behavior of students during the University's infancy, but when describing the "great citizen" that universities can create, he mirrors Jefferson's thoughts when implying that an ideal academic environment is a pacific one, where students better their university and country through study:

He shall be an upward striving man who wants the truth and dares to utter it [...] who has a care, whether amid the warfare of trade, or in the quiet and still air of study, for the building of things ever better and better about him.¹¹⁸

Both Alderman and Tucker see studious academic behavior as a silent pursuit, and these ideals match those initially set out by Jefferson.

It is an ideal that has persisted into the present. While the Bicentennial Launch on October 5, 2017 did not judge the early student body as negatively as Jefferson and Tucker had — by attributing the student behavior to the common and currently acceptable activity of "partying" — the event nevertheless portrayed the students as contravening Jefferson's wishes. These students were, in other words, being disorderly and un-academic, drinking late into the night while their professors chastised them and set about punishing various students with expulsion.

* * *

But I must pause here and recognize that this idea of 'noise' is not as clearly and rigidly defined as Jefferson imagined within the framework of his university. Indeed, there

¹¹⁸ Alderman, "Inaugural Address by President Alderman," 91–92.

are historical records that complicate our understanding of the early University soundscape. Virginia resident George Pierson, in his 1825 letter to Albert Pierson, asserts that the *non-religious character* of the University explains the noisy and improper behavior:

I regard it [the University of Virginia] as a School of infidelity — a nursery of bad principles, designed in its origins to crush the Institutions of Religion in Va. Think me not harsh or rash in my censures. I am not single in my belief. Many of the virtuous and pious of Va. look upon it in the same light; and a still greater number doubt of its ultimate success.

[...]

You have probably heard some intimations of the disturbances, which prevailed there lately. On one occasion, some of the Students succeeded in forcing an Ox or bull up into a lofty part of one of the College edifices, called the Rotunda and then left it to amuse the students and to awake the Professors by its noisy bellowings. On a late occasion some of the Students, put on masks and disguised themselves in old clothes and then made their way into one of the Lots belonging to the College and amused themselves by several antick tricks and by a good deal of noise.¹¹⁹

Pierson highlights and contrasts the noisy behavior of the students with Jefferson's desire¹²⁰ for the University to be a non-religious institution — uniquely so among American universities of the same time period. Pierson's criticisms were shared by others, and these collective thoughts eventually led to the construction of the Chapel on Grounds in the late

¹¹⁹ George Pierson to Albert Pierson, November 2, 1825.

¹²⁰ For example, when Jefferson received notice about potential religious activity taking place at the University, he responded disapprovingly, seeing this activity as going against UVA's "purpose": "The buildings of the University belong to the state that they were erected for the purposes of an University; and that the [Board of] Visitors, to whose care they are committed for those purposes have no right to permit their application to any other. [...] Your proposition therefore leading to an application of the University buildings to other than University purposes, and to a partial regulation in favor of two particular sects, would be a deviation from the course which they [the Board of Visitors] think it is their duty to observe." Thomas Jefferson to Arthur S. Brockenbrough, April 21, 1825.

1800s.¹²¹ Noise, within this frame, is especially *anti-religious*. As Pierson understands it, noise is a deeper symptom of the lack of a religious institutional presence, and not merely evidence of student impropriety.

Francis H. Smith's *College Reform*, published in 1851, brings another historical perspective to the concept of 'noise.' Smith, professor and first superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, explains the value of a military organization within state colleges, and in doing so argues for the reform of the American college system; the Virginia Military Institute would, in his mind, serve as a model for education throughout the United States. In a section outlining a code of discipline, shown in figure 12, Smith ranks a series of behaviors that would warrant different numbers of demerits for an enrolled student. Most intriguingly, the sonic activities bear some of the highest demerit numbers: "Profane language" would earn the maximum of ten, and "Noise in college" could result in five to ten demerits. A student who receives a total of one hundred demerits before the end of the academic session would be expelled, because, as Smith explains, "no young man of bad habits, or who has been detected in a willful act of moral delinquency, should be allowed to remain in college."¹²² He connects the acquisition of demerits with the level of scholarship from each student, but additionally argues that it is not intellect alone that "se-

¹²¹ "The struggle to build a chapel, which eventually took 55 years and involved at least four architectural schemes, was envisioned as an effort to reverse a strong public perception that the University was an atheist institution, and to correct what many saw as a lamentable gap in Jefferson's plan." Dashiell, "Between Earthly Wisdom and Heavenly Truth," 1.

¹²² Smith, *College Reform*, 43.

OFFENCES.	DEMERIT.
Profane language,	10
Irreverence in religious exercises,	5 to 10
Disorderly conduct,	5 to 8
Absent from class duty,	3
Want of preparation in lessons,	3
Late at class-call,	1
Talking in lecture-room,	2 to 5
Abuse of college property,	5 to 10
Neglect of police in room,	3
Neglect of personal neatness,	3 to 5
Visiting during study hours,	5
Absent from college,	5
Absent at night,	8
Using tobacco,	5
Spitting tobacco juice on lecture-room floors,	5
Noise in college,	5 to 10
Not rising at prescribed time,	3
Not retiring at prescribed time,	3
&c. &c.	

Figure 12. The demerit system from Smith's *College Reform*.

-cures distinction," but "the union of this with industrious, methodical, and virtuous habits."¹²³ What he presents, therefore, is a slight variation on the ideas espoused by Jefferson, Tucker, and Alderman. Specifically, Smith argues that academic success alone will not create a good student and that, additionally, a university must instruct a student in how to behave and conduct himself — that morally upstanding behavior is worth cultivating *for its own sake*, and not just because good behavior might lead to a better

¹²³ Ibid., 44.

environment for studying. Noise, within this context, implies actions that not only detract from academic activities, but can also lead one's moral compass astray.

(Re)Constructing the Narrative

These distinctions are important. As I mentioned earlier, the scholar Mark Smith notes 'noise' is not "axiomatic" and "neutral," but rather transforms culturally throughout time and space:

Although we live in a world where definitions of noise and sound parade as axiomatic and exquisitely neutral [...] in reality we have inherited a bourgeois rubric of what is noise and what is sound, and to assume that the past was the same gives historical transcendence to that construction.¹²⁴

Throughout this chapter, I argue that there has been a lack of contextualization surrounding noise and the history of the University of Virginia, which has led to lacking full and nuanced narratives about the past. The failure to contextualize, I believe, has additionally resulted in inconsistencies among numerous sources that address UVA's history.

The historical conversations about UVA's founding years, including the predominant narrative that currently surrounds this period, do not take into account the co-presence of racial violence¹²⁵ and the history of slavery at the University along with the prevalence of noise during those early decades. The Bicentennial Launch Celebration in 2017,

¹²⁴ Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, 264.

¹²⁵ Nor class and gender, both of which are worth considering for future research.

for example, emphasized the enslaved labor that went into the construction of the University, but only discussed student “misbehavior” in the context of “partying” and the violence perpetrated against a white professor. Bowman and Santos spend only a couple of paragraphs in their book noting the violence perpetrated against enslaved individuals.¹²⁶ And neither Alderman’s, Bruce’s, or Tucker’s interpretations of the past empathize with or consider the perspectives of Black individuals, families, and communities who were intertwined with, through various circumstances, the University of Virginia.

There are, however, recent efforts to reconstruct the narrative of the University’s early decades, especially as it relates to the institution of race-based slavery.¹²⁷ I find the 2019 anthology *Educated in Tyranny: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson’s University* to be among the most notable, especially in terms of how the authors consider the complexities of slavery

¹²⁶ See Bowman and Santos, *Rot, Riot, and Rebellion*, 71, 119–122.

¹²⁷ I must acknowledge here the work of Andrew O’Shaughnessy, a colleague at the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, who has written extensively about the University of Virginia. In *The Illimitable Freedom of the Human Mind: Thomas Jefferson’s Idea of a University*, O’Shaughnessy commendably weaves together a holistic narrative of UVA’s past, including an entire chapter on slavery and the early University.

Without detracting from the very real value of this holistic approach, I must nevertheless take issue with his portrayal of other recent research on UVA. In the “Introduction” to his book, O’Shaughnessy explains, “This study departs from the vogue of recent bicentennial histories that ascribe all characteristics of the University of Virginia to slavery” and “seeks to provide a more balanced and deeply contextualized approach to Thomas Jefferson’s vision for the University of Virginia” (O’Shaughnessy, *The Illimitable Freedom of the Human Mind*, 7). In the first place, O’Shaughnessy’s evidence for the existence of such a “vogue” is paltry, and he supplies only two examples in support of his statement (n. 16): the “President’s Commission on Slavery and the University” and *Educated in Tyranny*. Secondly, neither of these texts actually makes the reductive argument that O’Shaughnessy alleges (namely, that *all* characteristics of UVA can be ascribed to slavery), nor do they claim to be fully comprehensive in scope. Rather, they are important forms of corrective scholarship that aim to expand the common understanding of UVA and its past, as O’Shaughnessy himself concedes in the same paragraph: “These works are laudable in addressing a virtually ignored subject in previous scholarship and in reinforcing current efforts by the university to address its history of slavery and legacy of racial discrimination.” It seems to me that this is a much fairer assessment of the intention of these studies, and that, by generalizing so broadly, he is diminishing crucial work which contributes to the holistic narrative he is seeking.

underlying much of UVA's past. Maurie McInnis, in her chapter, "Violence," describes an instance in 1856 when a student, Nathan B. Noland, "savagely beat a ten-year old girl."¹²⁸ "The beating this young girl received," she states, "was one of many acts of violence perpetrated by students on the enslaved people who lived and worked in and around the university."¹²⁹ This violence enacted and fed off a sono-affective climate of white supremacy defined by a complex social order,¹³⁰ an institutionally and individually espoused belief in racial hierarchy,¹³¹ and episodes of "loud conduct" and "noisy" behavior.¹³² The noise of these moments underscores not only how, while left unspoken in centuries of narratives concerning the University, the "misbehavior" of these students came from a desire to avoid academic pursuits and to instead find entertainment, but also that their "loud conduct" included instances of white supremacist violence.

These are pieces of contextualization worth considering, and when they are considered they create a space in which the past becomes a more complex area of examination and where the connections between past and present come into starker relief. The idea of

¹²⁸ McInnis, "Violence," in *Educated in Tyranny*, 97.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 99.

¹³⁰ She writes, "Mostly the children of planters, the students were used to being treated as masters and young patriarchs. At the university, however, they were not at the top of the hierarchical ladder, the faculty were; some students responded by testing that authority. [...] It is clear that many students resented their new status" (Ibid., 102). But the complexity also extended to the enslaved community, as they "found themselves in an unusual situation. Their life differed in many important ways from that on the plantation; many of them likely had lived on one prior to coming to the university. Now instead of clear lines of authority, the owner and the enslaved, they encountered a much more complicated social order. [...] Their situation was that they were owned simultaneously by no one and everyone." Ibid., 110.

¹³¹ Ibid., 101. See further below.

¹³² Ibid., 107.

early UVA students hell-bent on “entertainment,” as contemporary sources portray, for example, is complicated by evidence of racial violence at the hands of UVA’s white student body; these forms of “entertainment” should cause one to pause before insinuating that past students liked to “party hard” just as current UVA students do today.

When I consider these various pieces of contextualization, I also notice that there are discomfiting realities — the sono-affective threads across history — that need to be acknowledged. These include the actions of former UVA students Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler, who led a noisy and violent parade of white supremacists across the UVA Grounds. In the numerous videos I watched from A11,¹³³ I saw white supremacists who were entertaining themselves as they purposefully terrorized the local community, ultimately assaulting a group of anti-racist counter-protesters at the end of their march with lit torches, pepper spray, and fists, all while smiling and laughing. Moments such as these, which resonate *with* and *because of* historical precedence, reveal that “noisy,” “un-academic” students might be more realistically described as acting within the parameters of a long line of racist actors bolstering a system of violent white male supremacy and entitlement.

It is a system that both past UVA students and the alt-right expressly rely on and fearfully defend, in order to preserve their status within it. After Nathan Noland physically assaulted the enslaved ten-year-old child in 1856, he argued to University faculty that he

¹³³ E.g., Bitcoin Uncensored, “Charlottesville Alt Right March – RAW and UNCUT”; Daniel Shular, “Unite the Right and Counter Protests in Charlottesville, VA August 11-13, 2017”; jake westly anderson, “INSANE NEW FOOTAGE FROM CHARLOTTESVILLE!!!”

did so because she had spoken to him with “impertinence,” further adding:

The correction of a servant for impertinence, when done on the spot & under the spur of the provocation, is not only tolerated by society, but with proper qualifications may be defended on the ground of the necessity of maintaining due subordination in this class of persons.¹³⁴

His answer satisfied the faculty, according to McInnis, as they “rescinded their decision to expel him.”¹³⁵ These sentiments resonate with the actions of the alt-right on A11, who surrounded a group of students — a number of whom were chanting phrases like “Black Lives Matter” — and violently attacked them. In the lead up to this brutality, these predominantly white men chanted their own phrases that sent an altogether different message: “You will not replace us,” “Blood and Soil,” “Whose streets? Our streets.” In other words, they were communicating a desire to subordinate, and to take ownership of and defend their perceived hierarchical status in society. They were doing so on a campus with a historical legacy that has upheld the ideology of the superiority of the “white race.” In the example of Noland, for instance, McInnis states:

The faculty’s decision to allow Noland to continue at the university is telling. [...] His defense was rooted in conversations that were part of campus life and southern society. In the debating societies and in the school’s literary magazines, students argued for the superiority of whites; they argued for natural hierarchy. [...] The faculty] probably agreed with many of Noland’s assertions.¹³⁶

There are other moments that echo from UVA’s past. For instance, UVA was a leader in

¹³⁴ “Session 32 of the Faculty Minutes October 1, 1855–June 29, 1856.”

¹³⁵ McInnis, “Violence,” in *Educated in Tyranny*, 101.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

the development of eugenics in the United States during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries,¹³⁷ it resisted desegregation,¹³⁸ and, as of the writing of this dissertation, it has a police force that disproportionately targets Black individuals and communities.¹³⁹ The connections between past and present, therefore, are ever-present and were tapped into by the alt-right during their riotous sojourn across the UVA Grounds. In fact, the historical combination of noise and white supremacy at the University formed *necessary preconditions* for the alt-right event. That is, without this history, it would have been much more difficult for the alt-right to galvanize support for and, in their own way, justify to themselves the choice of UVA for their violent torch-lit march. Perhaps a broader knowing of this history within the local community, or at least those in power, might have prompted a more proactive response to alter or stop what happened on A11.

The year of Noland's assault, 1856, and the actions of the alt-right on A11, lead me to an additional point: predominant narratives surrounding UVA's history consign "noisy" student misbehavior — and what misbehavior entails — to a mythical seventeen-year period that was supposedly concluded in 1842, the beginning of the Honor System era defined by student excellence extending into the present. This notion, as I have explained, can be found in Bruce's *History of the University of Virginia, 1819–1919*, Wilson's *Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village*, Bowman and Santos' *Rot, Riot, and Rebellion*, UVA's

¹³⁷ A historical fact that is only more recently being openly discussed and addressed within the present University community. See Reynolds, "Eugenics at the University of Virginia and Its Legacy in Health Disparities," in *Charlottesville 2017*.

¹³⁸ See Sky Lark, "Unlocking Doors."

¹³⁹ See Di Maro, "My Anxiety Was Kicking In."

Bicentennial Launch Celebration, and in student tours across Grounds. Such segmentation does not match the historical record, and it is this fact in particular that causes me to take issue with statements that argue that the events of August 11, 2017 were “unprecedented.” Consider the testimony of Philena Carkin, who was an instructor for the Charlottesville freedmen after the Civil War. She writes of the “Calithump,” a term for a “noisy parade”:

Woe to the unfortunate individual [...] who in any way gained the ill will of one of these students. With faces masked, and torches made of brooms dipped in tar and lighted they would march to his house to the music of tin horns, and surrounding the building make night hideous as only yelling demons can.¹⁴⁰

These UVA students harassed her and the Black community of Charlottesville by going around drawing Ku Klux Klan symbols, breaking window panes, and engaging in various forms of violence. This behavior is strikingly similar to the activities of members of the alt-right on August 11 — individuals marching down the Lawn with lit torches, chanting white supremacist propaganda, and attacking students who were expressing support for their Black peers. “Un-academic behavior” as a descriptor fails to match the “noise” as espoused in Carkin’s testimony. The noise that she describes is instead reminiscent of “terrorism” and “trauma” that has been historically reiterated. Such activities, past and present, destabilize the dominant, genteel timeline of UVA history.

¹⁴⁰ Carkin, *Reminiscences*.

A New Century

But noise does not always represent or sound out oppressive violence; it can also mark or even constitute forces that work to *counter* oppressive violence. When former UVA President Teresa Sullivan claimed that the events of A11 on Grounds were “unprecedented,” as she did on August 15 and again on September 11, 2017,¹⁴¹ she perpetuated the same selective historical narrative that I have detailed throughout this chapter. But her statements also *symbolized* and *ignored* the reality that the University (and specifically those in power at UVA) has historically fostered environments and events of oppression, including A11, through troubling narratives and other behavior. This has led to decades-worth of noisy activism at UVA hoping to destabilize and stop the University’s actions.

For example, in May 1970 the UVA student body responded to the Kent State Shootings and Vietnam War by protesting and striking. Events ranged from the “Freedom Day” rally shown in figure 13, to an occupation of Maury Hall, to blocking traffic, to protesting the University President at that time, Edgar Shannon. The 1970 University administration, much like the 2017 administration after A11, reacted to the May 1970 events as if they were “unprecedented,” as Rory Little writes:

The administration, if anything, was less organized and prepared than were the students. Although campus riots and disorders had been taking place at other Universities for two or three years, the Virginia administration, faculty, and students alike took an “It can’t happen here” attitude; consequently, there was no “master plan” for dealing with mass protests at UVA — “We just sort of flew by the seat of our pants” said then-Assistant Dean

¹⁴¹ Teresa A. Sullivan, email message to author, August 15, 2017; Teresa A. Sullivan, email message to author, September 11, 2017.



Figure 13. Students attending a "Freedom Day" rally next to the Rotunda in 1970. (Photo by Dave Skinner, University of Virginia)

of Students Robert Canevari.¹⁴²

The University reacted by coordinating with police, who mass-arrested students and loaded them up in a moving van. In other words, UVA student protesters — who were aiming to re-establish the University as an anti-war and anti-violence institution — were themselves violently repressed by the University of Virginia.

It is notable that the 1970 administration was unable to acknowledge the significance of the protests occurring elsewhere around the country and recognize that such

¹⁴² Little, "Strike!," 43.

events could happen at UVA. It is even more disappointing, I find, that these events of only fifty years ago — not to mention the distressing fact that the more recent administration was well aware that there was the potential for terrorism on Grounds due to warnings from students and faculty¹⁴³ — were not considered by the administration in August 2017. Instead, University officials saw anti-violence student activism, in both examples, as the *actual* threat facing the UVA, and continues to do so. When students planned to demonstrate during the anniversary of A11 in 2018, for example, administration officials had police officers stationed in riot gear, ready to disperse and arrest students for noisily advocating against violence; it was only when they were confronted by a line of concerned community members, including myself, that they deescalated and left.

Students, faculty, and staff have repeatedly made noise against a culture of white supremacy continually nurtured in and around Grounds. In March 2015, for instance, Black UVA student Martese Johnson was pummeled by Virginia ABC officers on the Corner, a district next to the University frequented by the student body, allegedly for attempting to enter a bar with a fake I.D.¹⁴⁴ This led to a statement from the Woodson Institute

¹⁴³ In an article published by Jack Stripling of the *Chronicle for Higher Education*, numerous sources indicate that UVA administration officials were adequately alerted despite statements arguing otherwise: “In the tense days that followed the demonstration, Virginia’s president criticized student activists for what she described as their failure to pass along concerns about the white supremacists’ march. ‘Nobody elevated it to us,’ Ms. Sullivan said in a videotaped exchange with a student. ‘Don’t expect us to be reading the alt-right websites. We don’t do that. Now you guys have responsibility here too. Tell us what you know.’ But records and interviews show that students and faculty members did just that, even as they feared being dismissed as social-justice crusaders crying wolf. Intelligence about the march circulated through a network of students and professors before reaching the top ranks of the university’s administration and police force.” Stripling, “Inside the U. of Virginia’s Response to a Chaotic White-Supremacist Rally.”

¹⁴⁴ Faulders, “Martese Johnson.”

at UVA:

We want you to know that we share the frustrations and pain expressed by the broader black student community. We want you to know that we stand steadfast with you, our students, in your desire to create a just, inclusive and socially conscious university.¹⁴⁵

Additionally, students and faculty protested throughout the University and nearby areas beyond Grounds.

For almost a century, a statue honoring George Rogers Clark, military officer from the American Revolutionary War, stood on UVA property, depicting him as “Conqueror of the Northwest” and violently oppressing Native Americans and driving them from their homes and lands. Students and faculty have long opposed the presence of the statue on Grounds, leading to its eventual removal in 2021.¹⁴⁶ UVA professor Christian McMillen states that the statue was “instrumental in creating and perpetuating the myth of brave white men conquering a supposedly unknown and unclaimed land.”¹⁴⁷

This is not to say that University students have been exempt from perpetuating systems of violence and white supremacy. While many have engaged, especially in recent decades, in anti-racist and anti-violence activism, others, and specifically white students, have participated in creating a hostile culture for Black students at the University. For

¹⁴⁵ Woodson Institute, “In Response to the Brutal Arrest of Martese Johnson.”

¹⁴⁶ Suchak, “Photos.”

¹⁴⁷ McMillen, “UVA and the History of Race.”

example, UVA has a long tradition of blackface. There has been an increased level of scrutiny specifically aimed at UVA's historical yearbook publication *Corks and Curls*¹⁴⁸ since it came to light that both former Virginia Governor Ralph Northam and former Attorney General Mark Herring, an alumnus of UVA, engaged in blackface during their time in higher education. As Ernie Gates notes about *Corks and Curls*, "The rank racism in the yearbook tapers off in the 1940s, though not entirely. Blackface recurs throughout, commonly in the modern era as costumes at parties and dances."¹⁴⁹

The narratives surrounding UVA's history similarly feed into a culture of white supremacy. According to the predominant tale, the University's "noisy" past notably ends in 1842, before the bloody conflict of the American Civil War and the rise of the first Ku Klux Klan in the Reconstruction era, not to mention the constancy of white supremacist systems well into the twenty-first century, both loud and quiet, pervasive and pernicious. It has taken recent actions by members of the UVA community to draw attention to how the University's relationship with the Ku Klux Klan did not end in the 1860s and 1870s, but in fact includes donations from the Klan to the University in the 1900s.¹⁵⁰ The rebirth of the Klan in Charlottesville in 1921 also occurred next to the grave of Thomas Jefferson, where a "fiery cross" was lit.¹⁵¹ It seems neither entirely random nor surprising, therefore, that the Klan demonstrated in Charlottesville in July 2017 during the Summer of Hate,

¹⁴⁸ The title of the yearbook, as historian Rhae Lynn Barnes argues, is directly tied to minstrelsy. See Barnes, "The Troubling History Behind Ralph Northam's Blackface Klan Photo."

¹⁴⁹ Gates, "Beyond Blackface."

¹⁵⁰ See Turnage, "The KKK Once Gave UVa \$1,000."

¹⁵¹ See Schmidt, "Excuse Me, America, Your House Is on Fire."

and that the alt-right chose to make a violent appearance in August 2017 that culminated at a prominent statue of Jefferson at the heart of the University Grounds.

In other words, there is and has been a culture of white supremacy in and around UVA that, in its most recent public form, *resonated with* and *sounded out as* the Summer of Hate in Charlottesville. This is instantiated in the words of former student Zari Taylor, who states that in the year leading up to the Summer of Hate, anti-Black, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim remarks were written in public areas across Grounds. “Those events, extreme manifestations of whiteness and its assumed supremacy over all,” she explains, “shaped my time at the university”:

Though the Unite the Right rally was appalling and terrifying, I was not surprised. My time at UVA had shown me that both Charlottesville and the university not only had histories of discrimination but also continued to exude toxic levels of whiteness.¹⁵²

The echoes of the past are not quiet; they continue to reverberate into the present. Rather, there is a repeated proclivity to choose not to hear, or at best to cherry-pick and thereby distort, the historical reverberations ringing out to be heard. The prevalence and even negligently uninformed reiterations of predominant narratives contribute to a mindset that facilitates the continuation of white supremacy.

This act of covering one’s ears necessarily involves a failure to acknowledge the legacy of white supremacy at the University and its effects on recent history. For its part, the University administration has recently made attempts to show that it is listening to

¹⁵² Taylor, “White Supremacy at Jefferson’s University.”

student and faculty activism and addressing connections between past and present. The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers was completed in June 2020, numerous buildings across Grounds have been changed to reflect the contributions of Black individuals to the University, and reports have been commissioned to investigate the role and history of UVA during the eras of race-based slavery and segregation in America. But for many within the University community, these actions serve as window dressing to cover decades of inaction at the hands of the University administration. UVA's Black Student Alliance, for example, once again demanded in June 2020 that certain conditions be met at the University to address systemic inequalities and racism, echoing their similar demands from decades prior:

For over half a century, Black students at the University of Virginia have worked tirelessly to improve the Black student experience and voice their concerns over lack of support. The constant failure of the University to turn verbal affirmations of its dedication to diversity into genuine efforts to address the history of racial discrimination is more than telling. **It is not enough to solely acknowledge the systemic inequality and racism facing and killing Black Americans.** If the University of Virginia is truly committed to cultivating an inclusive community, it would take immediate action to fulfill numerous demands of students seeking liberation from the past.¹⁵³

These demands include an increase in the number of Black students, faculty, and administration officials; expanding initiatives and curricula committed to combatting racism; and acknowledging and strengthening the local Black community, which the University inherently relies on for labor and support.

The negative effects of historically un-contextualized narratives that invoke the University's past are readily apparent. It is not widely known, for example, that during the

¹⁵³ Di Maro and Kim, "Facing History Head-On." Bolding in original.

sesquicentennial celebrations of 1969 student activists held signs such as “150 years of Racism — What have You got to Celebrate?”¹⁵⁴ Fifty years later, the UVA Bicentennial Launch included a brief, apparently innocuous theatrical segment dedicated to the student activists of the 1960s and 1970s. While this segment was being performed, current student demonstrators blocked one of the jumbotrons with a sign reading, “200 YEARS OF WHITE SUPREMACY.” Ironically, these students were subsequently arrested by the University Police Department.¹⁵⁵ While the University administration displayed a startling lack of self-awareness in its actions toward these students, the students themselves perceptively understood the rhyming nature of UVA’s white supremacist and otherwise oppressive history and the administration’s role in facilitating it.

The inadequacy of University administration officials, and its largely empty gestures of solidarity and advocacy, show that it is willing to tolerate noise only if it can frame it within its own narrative. This construction, one might say distortion, of the past and present — and of the past in relation to the present — as I have shown, is a process that is familiar in the University’s history. These actions not only illustrate a failure to properly reckon with the past, but also serve as the foundation upon which history can destructively repeat itself.

* * *

¹⁵⁴ See Little, “Strike!,” 32.

¹⁵⁵ “Three UVa Students Arrested for Trespassing at Bicentennial Event.”

Throughout the course of my research, I increasingly recognized that I had the ability to change the narrative and put my scholarship into action. As the University's bicentennial was approaching, I offered to write an opinion piece for the school's paper, the *Cavalier Daily*. In this article, available in full in Appendix B, I argue that we within the University have reached a juncture on the eve of an important anniversary:

Our Academical Village is profoundly intertwined with events of local, national, and global significance. And as we heard after Aug. 11 and 12, the world is now profoundly affected by what takes place here on Grounds. If we willingly deafen ourselves to our University's noisy history, we will make the same mistakes over and over again.¹⁵⁶

At this juncture, there are two choices the University community and administration can make. The first involves facilitating the same tradition of misinformed narratives, namely the perpetuation of Jefferson's mythic vision and the willful ignorance of historical realities, which also serves to facilitate and reinforce white supremacy. The second, and correct course, is to look toward the important work of others and examine the full scope of UVA's history with a keen ear and eye toward contextualization, and, above all else, to use this knowledge to fundamentally re-construct UVA as an anti-racist and anti-violence institution. There are so many whose work is worth celebrating and imitating, including Jalane

¹⁵⁶ Chattleton, "The Reverberating Lawn."

Schmidt,¹⁵⁷ Maurie McInnis,¹⁵⁸ Claudrena Harold,¹⁵⁹ Don Gathers,¹⁶⁰ Zyahna Bryant,¹⁶¹ Jordy Yager,¹⁶² and Louis Nelson.¹⁶³ I believe we in the University community must follow their endeavors with concrete, progressive action. This latter route can begin with critically analyzing, rather than blindly glorifying, Jefferson's vision — understanding, for example, how Jefferson's desires for the University were situated in the early 1800s and serve us in the present only to the extent that we recognize how his vision has affected the way UVA has evolved over time. It means challenging the notion that a 'quiet' university was ever a real model for promoting education, and raising the question of whether it was truly adopted as an ethos of student life at the University of Virginia.

Noise can be heard and felt in myriad ways. It can be, for instance, a sign of violent domination, of political upheaval and resistance, of complex cultural dynamics, or of a failure to reconcile the past with the present. If members of the UVA community and

¹⁵⁷ Schmidt has led tours of the downtown area centered on the power of collective memory, and the visible and invisible markers of the city's history of white supremacy and systemic racism.

¹⁵⁸ McInnis has written about the legacy of slavery at the UVA in order to destabilize predominant narratives.

¹⁵⁹ Part of Harold's work involves documenting the history of Black student activism at UVA through her films and the multimedia initiative Black Fire.

¹⁶⁰ In 2016, Gathers served as the chair for the city's Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Memorials and Public Spaces, and through it challenged the community to explore sincerely the local "truths and legacies of slavery, Jim Crow and white supremacy."

¹⁶¹ Bryant consistently uses her platform to advocate and organize for the local Black community, and also kickstarted the local effort to remove the statues of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson in Charlottesville.

¹⁶² Yager has created the "Mapping Cville" project, which maps the transforming inequities in Charlottesville over the centuries.

¹⁶³ Nelson delivers lectures across Grounds that confront the ways in which members of the University community avoid addressing discomforting realities.

administration continue within a cognitive frame that is oblivious to the University's checkered past and present, such behavior will only facilitate an imagined history and the continuation of harmful policies. By recognizing this stark reality and responding by correcting course through concrete action, this Academical Village might make the next century for the University of Virginia a new beginning.

And for this dissertation, the noise of the past has become the foundation upon which so much of recent history rests, and it necessarily pervades what I describe and argue in the following pages.

CHAPTER 2

Tracing a Collective and Lingering Trauma

“We mourn the tragedy of August 11 and 12, we honor Heather Heyer, we uplift our community that has been injured and traumatized by white supremacy. Today, we reflect on our trauma to transform it into growth.”

—A student activist demonstrating at UVA, September 13, 2017

Sensing Recent History

A11/12 is everywhere in Charlottesville. It *feels* omnipresent to many locals, myself included. At times it feels like we are in the immediate wake of that weekend. Local religious leader Phil Woodson tells *HuffPost*, for instance, that “perpetually, for some, every day feels like August 13th. We live in this constant state of fear.”¹⁶⁴ At other times, A11/12 is an experience that cannot be forgotten. I speak with “Paige” during a planned chat at the Oakhurst Inn Café near UVA a few weeks before the first anniversary of “Unite the Right.” Her voice begins to slow and turn monotone as she recounts her experiences from one year ago, interspersing her words with moments of silence. She tells me that she tries not to think about that weekend, but then adds that her memories are hard to ignore.¹⁶⁵

How, exactly, does this moment from the past become a fixture of everyday lived experience for local residents? Part of the answer rests in objects. In my daily routine, I re-

¹⁶⁴ Campbell, “Charlottesville Faces White Supremacist Threats, Robocalls, Doxing after Unite the Right Anniversary.”

¹⁶⁵ I will return to my conversation with Paige below in § Personal Accounts from Charlottesville, and later on in chapter 3 § Noise Against Nazis.



Figure 14. A poster amidst other advertisements.

-gularity took the time to walk to Old Cabell Hall, home of the Music Department at UVA. Just below the door handle of the main entrance rests a small notice declaring, “ALL WEAPONS, INCLUDING CONCEALED FIREARMS, ARE PROHIBITED IN THIS FACILITY.” This is a recent addition, instigated by the local presence of white supremacists during A11/12. A short distance away in Newcomb Hall, that weekend announces itself again in a poster advertising a city-wide installation called “#UnseenCville,” which aims to reinforce that “America is not ‘post-racial,’ and neither is Charlottesville.” The poster, shown in figure 14, covers up an event advertisement for raising awareness of the global refugee crisis and

another announcement for student housing, reminding me of the national issue of affordable housing — both topics have become rallying cries for local activists in the wake of Summer of Hate. While these issues have been part of local discussions prior to A11/12, political life in Charlottesville has become more heavily influenced by these topics in the aftermath. A local church, for example, became a refuge for an asylum seeker from Guatemala; she has been supported by many within the community. City Council elections now often feature candidate platforms that make affordable housing an important campaign issue, and a number of large housing developments, specifically in the downtown area, have been scuttled by the City Council because locals have expressed concern that these projects do not help alleviate Charlottesville's housing crisis. These posters, therefore, remind me not only of both particular issues, but also how, in the words of local civil rights attorney Jeff Fogel, Charlottesville has seen “a blooming and flowering of activism” post-A11/12.¹⁶⁶ For so many in Charlottesville, visual markers like these around the city serve as waypoints for, from, and through A11/12.

Locals can also *hear* the persistent specter of that weekend. Radio announcers share it through subtle reminders into our collective consciousness — “Stay safe out there this weekend, Charlottesville.” A11/12 can also be heard in national and international audible media. On NPR, CNN, and the BBC, for instance, reporters and political commentators have persistently referred to “Charlottesville” as a three-syllable moniker for racial terrorism and the rise of the far-right around the world. Local news broadcasts, as well as Facebook,

¹⁶⁶ Suarez, “Through a Year of Chaos, Charlottesville Has Seen ‘A Blooming and Flowering of Activism.’”

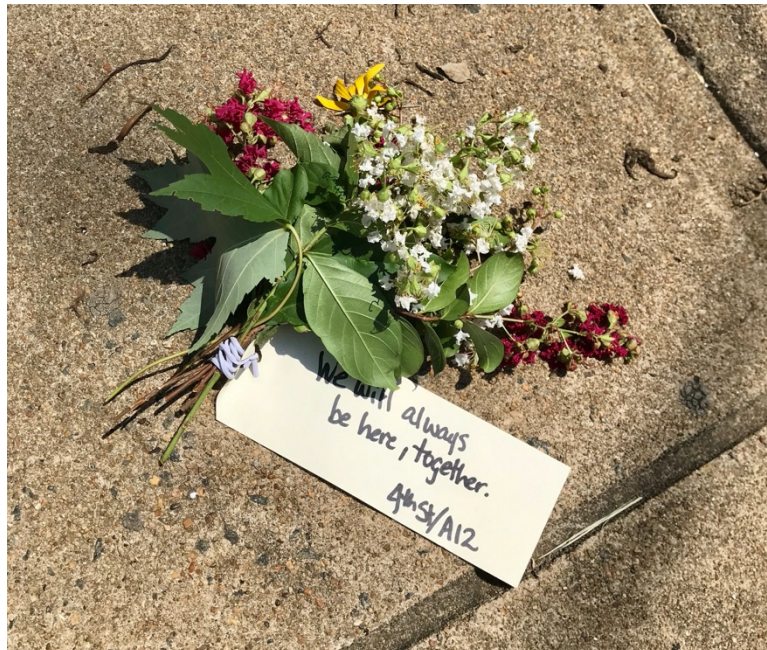


Figure 15. A bouquet of flowers with a message next to Heather Heyer Way.

Twitter, YouTube, and other social media users have shared videos of vocal protests around the city, and specifically in the City Council chamber — reminders of and reactions to A11/12. Near the teddy bears and purple flowers at the end of Heather Heyer Way in downtown Charlottesville, the murder site from August 12, quiet sobs from city residents paying respect accompany messages in chalk announcing, “WE WILL NEVER FORGET,” and a bouquet with a note reading, “We will always be here, together,” as shown in figure 15. I softly cry after taking in this message, adding my own sounds to the mournful tune of this city corner.

A11/12 is also a steadily unfolding miasma of contested meaning defined by emotional and affective characteristics, a reality that, for me, has been a continual source of difficulty to understand throughout my own research in Charlottesville. Affectual webs

that stimulate and characterize local lived experience in the wake of A11/12 frequently bubble to the surface just as much as they subtly inflect my daily experience without me being fully aware of it. I have experienced these webs, for example, during a personal night out with friends many months ago. Over communal drinks and stories of graduate student life, I eventually noticed a nearby car with headlights shining in my direction. As I stared back for a few seconds, or perhaps minutes, I began to realize that I was having a panic attack. Only after I collected myself did I remember the horrific sounds from August 2017 — of metal collapsing, people screaming, and tires screeching — and began to connect the dots and analyze my personal trauma. As an ethnographer, grappling with the affective nature of A11/12, as well as decoding the meaning behind locally lived affective experience, including my own, has been one of the greatest challenges of composing this dissertation.

Yet in spite of these difficulties, I have been continuously drawn to these affects and the named emotions used to describe them. Or, perhaps more accurately, and in line with other scholars of affect like Deborah Gould,¹⁶⁷ I have encountered them in such myriad circumstances that I simply cannot avoid them. Over the course of my research, I came across recurring themes of “trauma,” “anger,” and “empowerment” that were individually and collectively invoked by locals to tell the story of that weekend and what has transpired since. For me, each testimonial became a rich nexus of local discourse, affect, and sound. These themes, however, have not been entirely distinguishable for me — they are not like

¹⁶⁷ Gould specifically writes about her work on the activism of ACT UP during the AIDS epidemic: “What immediately struck me as I poured over all of these primary sources was the emotionally saturated nature of lesbian and gay discourses about AIDS. [...] My growing archive, in short, repeatedly pointed me toward emotion.” Gould, *Moving Politics*, 12–13.

islands spread in the sea, but instead like slightly risen mounds in an atoll, interconnected by and made up of shared networks of sand. These experiences, my own and those conveyed to me by others, are a reminder of Kathleen Stewart's description of affects: how they are "immanent, obtuse, and erratic," and encourage me as an ethnographer not to understand them as fixed, but instead explore "where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance."¹⁶⁸

Through numerous examples, locals in Charlottesville have described these resonances to me as distinct affects, including "trauma." The white supremacists of "Unite the Right" purposefully brought this trauma into existence through their actions on A11/12. These individuals — as is evident from online chat servers and recorded video and audio media — wished to use sound as an actual weapon, as vibrational waves meant to assault. For example, members of the alt-right repeatedly vocalized the Confederate "Rebel Yell," a Civil War battle cry, as they marched through the University of Virginia Grounds, wielding lit torches. They also chanted anti-Semitic and white supremacist phrases in deliberately harsh, threatening, and obstreperous timbres. These individuals intended to cause emotional distress to the local community, and I investigate the sono-affective motivations of the white supremacists in Charlottesville and other consequences of their actions later in chapter 3.

In this chapter, however, I analyze the after-effects of trauma, pervading local lived

¹⁶⁸ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 3.

experience and discourse, that resulted from these actions. I specifically detail and explore the discourses and experiences of “our trauma” in this chapter. For Charlottesville residents, “our trauma” has become both a description of an emotional state that has continuously permeated the town since the Summer of Hate, as well as a refrain that refers to instances where local lived experience has been used by others for purposes that feel exploitative. I investigate examples of both alongside personal accounts that, in part, explain and give voice to this trauma. In addition, I examine the ways in which sound is used by the community as a means of healing or, at the very least, a mechanism through which locals can move forward from the traumatic events of the recent past. The different sounds created for these purposes, as I explain, have been an occasional source of contention within the community, highlighting local disagreements over the appropriateness of certain audible activities.

Personal Accounts from Charlottesville

I first reached out to Paige in May 2018 after speaking with one of her friends. Paige had been involved with a local protest group, “Noise Against Nazis,” and was present for much of A11/12. I was hoping to record an interview about her recent experiences in Charlottesville, and it so happened that we chatted only a week before the one-year anniversary. We met at a local café, the Oakhurst Inn, and spoke over late-morning breakfast and coffee.

After our drinks arrived, we began talking about her time at UVA. Paige had graduated last year, but was back in town on fellowship at the University. Her voice was soft-

spoken — a warm sound over the light din of nearby newspaper shuffling and muffled computer typing. Our conversation moved easily from topic to related topic, including her activism.

Noise Against Nazis began as a response to a planned KKK rally in Charlottesville that took place one month before “Unite the Right.” “Before the [Ku Klux Klan] rally,”¹⁶⁹ she recalled, “[my housemate] broke down his drums and strung them up with what I think were dog leashes as belts to hold up the drums. We brought the xylophone, and... what are those called with little keyboards and the hose that comes out of them?” “A melodica?” “Yes! We brought melodicas. I don’t know, we were just scraping together whatever instruments we could find in our house.”

While the initial goal was to drown out the white supremacists with a menagerie of musical instruments, the group instead found themselves providing entertainment, energy, and a rhythmic foundation for the counter-protesters’ chanting. She continued:

It was almost like a jam, but with a really important purpose driving it. It felt like, with everybody participating and everyone else on the street clapping and joining in with us, it felt like a joyous powerful feeling — we outnumbered [the KKK].

I interjected, laughing, “Yeah, there were only about twelve of them!” “Yeah, there were only twelve of them and we were having fun dancing. That was a really powerful, joyous feeling being a part of that.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ “Paige,” interviewed by Kyle Chattleton at Oakhurst Inn Café, July 31, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ I explore the sono-affective implications of statements and experiences like these by activists, including Paige’s, in chapter 3, part 2.

August 11 and 12, however, were almost the exact opposite for Paige:

I think that everyone knew [that weekend] was going to be a different sort, just because... I mean it wasn't going to be just twelve people... and, I think there was a lot of uncertainty, which was the unsettling part. [... Noise Against Nazis] didn't come out on the eleventh, with drums or anything... that was a different story... yeah, definitely way darker...

A long pause followed her statement, and I asked for clarification: "Wait, you were there [on the night of the eleventh]? Do you mind..." I slowly asked, but before I could finish she began sharing her experience:

The eleventh... we got a text from one of our friends who is very politically active, an organizer... "Can you guys come down here [to the University]? Something's happening and we need people here." [...] We walked down to the Jefferson statue, and we see a couple of our friends and a couple of strangers. All gathered around. [...] We kind of wrapped ourselves around the statue.

Another long pause followed, and by now I was starting to feel eyeballs. The room became quieter as others nearby chose to listen in. She looked around as well, sensing the attention. It wasn't the first time one of my conversations about A11/12 in a public venue captured the notice of those in the area, and the feeling it created was always the same: tense discomfort. It made the air seem electrically charged, as if at any moment a disturbance — a door opening, a cup shattering, someone sneezing — might surprise and jolt us out of our seats. "It was really scary," she continued after a long while, "just because we knew we were outnumbered, we knew they were drunk, we knew they were probably going to be violent. We held hands as best we could around the statue." As she went through the details of her story, pausing during particularly disturbing moments, I and others in the room listened in. It was almost like you could *feel* A11 all over again.

Her personal memories were being woven into the community's memory, just as they were confirming the collective experience of many in town; it was a new story that felt familiar. In moments like these, as well as in the local discourses centering on "our trauma" described below, I increasingly began to notice how communal and public A11/12 was in the area, and, as ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon explains, "when memory is made public and shared it can become community history."¹⁷¹

* * *

The rumors began circulating in the afternoon on August 11, 2017. Through text messages and Facebook conversations, my friends and I slowly realized that something was up in town. We knew that the alt-right was gathering in Charlottesville for their rally the next morning, and whispers were circulating that tonight they would already launch a surprise event. It put us all on edge.

Then, around 10 PM, our fears were confirmed. The alt-right amassed in a long line with lit torches at Nameless Field just west of the Rotunda at the University of Virginia. Someone within the crowd gave an audible signal that the march was about to begin. The torch-bearing mob erupted with yips, yells, and other sonic apparitions of white supremacy — various incarnations of the Civil War Rebel Yell battle cry. And as they marched around Grounds, their voices became harrowingly vicious.

As it was happening, livestreams and clips of the torch-lit march began to circulate online with visual imagery strikingly similar to Nazi-era rallies and Ku Klux Klan cross

¹⁷¹ Titon, *Powerhouse for God*, 9.

burnings. The mob — overwhelmingly made up of white men — marched in time wearing a uniform ensemble of khakis, polo shirts, and sharp haircuts. In the multitude of faces, as I perused these videos, I saw expressions exuding an intimidating combination of anger, joy, stern seriousness, and enmity. Integral to the circulating media were the horrifying sounds: aggressive and harsh vocalizations emitted at low-as-possible pitches — an assertive performed masculinity — and including messages of command,¹⁷² bullying,¹⁷³ and occupation.¹⁷⁴ Video clips were short, uploaded and shared sporadically, and on the whole they created more confusion for those of us who were away from the action. My friends and I felt trapped in our apartments, afraid to go outside, uncertain of what was going on.

By midnight, after it had all ended, I began a long process of coming to understand what had actually taken place. Specifically, I found that the white supremacist collective, with fiery tiki-torches, had amassed on the UVA Grounds, formed a long line, and staged a winding march through the campus. Eventually, these men reached the Rotunda, the physical and symbolic center of UVA life, and surrounded counter-protesters at a nearby statue of Thomas Jefferson. They used their torches as weapons for bludgeoning, and soon beat, maced, pushed, and pulled the counter-protesters.

Someone commented on Facebook that it all looked and sounded “utterly terrifying.” Larry Sabato, a professor who lives on the Lawn at UVA, was notified of the nearby presence of the alt-right and quickly rounded up students who also lived on campus. I

¹⁷² E.g., “GET THE FUCK UP HERE!”; “TIGHTEN IT UP!”

¹⁷³ E.g., “Hey, FUCK Antifa!”; “Fuckin’ Marxist scum, motherfucker!”

¹⁷⁴ E.g., “Whose streets, our streets!”; “Fuck off commies, this is our town now!”

spoke with him a few months later in December about his experience of that evening, and during our conversation he noted that the students he was with that night were frightened. He repeatedly stressed how “chilling” it all was, commenting at one point: “In my forty-seven years of association with UVA, this was by far the worst thing that had ever happened on the Lawn.”¹⁷⁵ As he quickly rounded up the students and brought them to his home, he gave them the option of either staying on the main floor and watching the procession pass by, or to go downstairs into the basement. Everyone went below: “They were very upset. What interested me was that no one stayed up here to watch. They all went to the basement really concerned.” Our conversation veered toward other aspects of the evening and beyond, but toward the very end, he offered one final piece of recollection:

Even after that, I can remember people were really *chilled* by it, especially the people who were right here. We kept talking about when they were gonna come back. And any time I heard a noise, for *weeks* I would go to the front window just to see... it was usually a student streaking or something like that. But it was worth paying attention to because... *who’s gonna know?*

A mood of fear, terror, and anxiety began to descend upon the city of Charlottesville that night and afterward. As one community member expressed online, we experienced:

An armed invasion of our hometown. It was planned to create the maximum amount of terror and fear as possible [...] they are trying to resurrect the state sponsored hatred that ruled during those earlier times.¹⁷⁶

In later conversations I had with people who were present amid the action that evening, they similarly expressed how terrified they were. It seemed to me that both on an individual

¹⁷⁵ Larry Sabato, interviewed by Kyle Chatteleton at Pavilion IV (University of Virginia), December 14, 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Anonymous, Facebook post, August 13, 2017.

and on a collective level, the local community was going through a traumatic experience.

* * *

I met with “Lionel” in March of 2018, to speak with him about his experiences of A12. Without offering too many identifiers, I will simply say that Lionel is a friend of mine. He was among the counter-protesters on A12 and ultimately found himself right next to the scene of the car attack.

As he explained to me, both he and his girlfriend debated whether they should even go to the downtown area that day, but Lionel ultimately believed it was the right thing to do:

We knew there was a chance of violence. [...] I remember one of the things that motivated me [about going] was remembering in 1999 when the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle were happening. [...] One of my housemates was streaming the police scanner from Seattle, [...] and I remember hearing, kinda having that window into what was happening, like, *This is an important moment in my generation and in politics and I should be there*, and I felt disappointed in myself that I wasn’t there.¹⁷⁷

This disappointment fueled his desire to show up for A12, so he and his girlfriend decided that they would meet up with friends who lived near downtown and head to the protests from there.

From my other personal interactions with Lionel, I know him to be an engaged, winsome individual; he regularly has a smile on his face, and conversations with him never feel halfhearted. This disposition was once again on display as he recollected A12. He joked about how all of the counter-protesters were disorganized, including him and the rest of

¹⁷⁷ “Lionel,” interviewed by Kyle Chatteleton at Grit Coffee, March 6, 2018.

the “non-*insane* people.” His group wandered from area to area, sometimes getting caught up in the energy surrounding them: at one point, his friend encouraged him to walk away from a situation that looked like it was heading toward violence. This meandering occurred for a while. “At some point we were hanging out at the park by the [Albemarle County] Courthouse, and there was a group of antifa: ‘We’re going to Friendship Court,’¹⁷⁸ because they need help,’” and so his party made the decision to follow these folks. “That felt nice, ‘ok, now we have our purpose.’” They eventually found themselves heading back toward the downtown area with a group of marchers:

And that was a beautiful moment, where we were chanting ‘Whose streets? Our streets!’ and then this other crowd [was coming down Water Street], [...] and then we all merged. [...] Suddenly it felt like we had a unified significant number of people. [...] I experienced really good vibes at that moment, and a sense that, like... they *were* our streets.

The marchers, including Lionel, made their way to an intersection and turned left onto 4th Street. At this point in Lionel’s retelling his demeanor suddenly shifted: he became quiet, no longer smiled, and his voice started trailing off. “Um... you know, that’s when... you know like, ten seconds later is when the *attack* occurred. And... I remember the sound...” “What was the sound?” I asked after a long pause. More seconds passed by before he responded: “It’s a car that’s designed to have a certain sound, the sound of that muscle car, sports car engine gunning, and then wheels screeching. [...] And then he just gunned it straight into the crowd.” A few more seconds passed before Lionel explained that

¹⁷⁸ Friendship Court is a housing complex located just south of the Downtown Mall in Charlottesville. The community that lives there is predominantly low-income, Black, and was historically displaced by urban renewal efforts by the local government. See Yager, “The Reimagining of Friendship Court.”

he had a fuzzy recollection of what came next:

It was a traumatic experience. My experience from that moment on was super time-dilation: probably what took three minutes to pass felt like fifteen or twenty minutes in my mind... I remember seeing bodies fly in the air, and... [...] I ran after the car, I like, *left* my girlfriend, it was non-conscious.

He eventually stopped in a daze, still on 4th Street. “There was a *phone* on the ground,” he said, bewildered, “so, I picked up this *phone*. [...] It started ringing, so I *answered* it.” It was someone’s mom. “I kind of hung up by accident because I didn’t know what I was doing.” Lionel explained that he felt a sense of “calm” in this moment. “I couldn’t *feel* upset or scared. I didn’t feel anything.” He soon found someone lying on the side of the street who needed serious medical attention. “I tried to *talk* to her, although I could barely talk. And somehow... somehow I felt like she was going to be ok. I guess this is a thing that happens in trauma, like you think everything is ok in some weird way?”

* * *

I went to the movies with my partner near the one-year anniversary of 9/11/12. There were only a few of us in one of the theaters at Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, just outside of the Charlottesville city limits. Spike Lee’s *BlacKkKlansman* was being shown. The film is based on the story of Ron Stallworth, an African American who infiltrated a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado while serving as a police officer. As the lights dimmed, signaling the start of the movie, a warning text appeared on the screen, apparently¹⁷⁹ shared only with audience members in the Charlottesville area: “The final minutes

¹⁷⁹ See “Charlottesville Moviegoers Warned of Real Footage in Spike Lee Film.”

of ‘BlacKkKlansman’ feature a powerful epilogue that could be disturbing or difficult to watch for many viewers in Charlottesville.”

At the end of the film — when scenes of August 11 and 12 accosted us from the screen, and Terence Blanchard’s roaring soundtrack of electric guitar, orchestra, and palpitating drums mixed with distressed screams and wails from the site of terrorism — I seized up. It took so much energy to keep breathing under the weight of my ribcage, and as the lights turned on, I began a steady stream of tears. I slowly realized that I was not the only one crying, as Blanchard’s quieting score began to commingle with the nearby din of ruffled tissues, sobs, and hyperventilating lungs. These final moments were not “difficult” or “disturbing,” as we were warned. They were re-traumatizing.

Public Feelings and Refrains of “Our Trauma”

“Trauma” can be a “public feeling” borne collectively by a community.¹⁸⁰ The local discourse in the wake of A11/12 has been saturated with the term. Specifically, it is often characterized as “our trauma,” and it is understood by city residents to be an enduring and locally felt emotional state. The manner in which this trauma has affectively erupted from

¹⁸⁰ Like Ann Cvetkovich, I recognize that an initial investigation into “public feelings” — specifically those emotions which are often framed in medical terms (she focuses on “depression,” and I hone in on “trauma”), but can also be explored as “cultural and social phenomenon” — can open up further research into the *possibilities* of these collective emotions: “In finding public forums for everyday feelings, including negative feelings that can seem debilitating, so far from hopefulness about the future or activism, the aim is to generate new ways of thinking about agency. [...] The goal is to depathologize negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis” (Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 1–2). In chapter 3, I share how, while Charlottesville’s collective trauma has pervaded everyday local life, it has led to an increased activism that has seen positive results for the community.

and into the local everyday experience has been surprising to me. I have found it in the check-out line at the Harris Teeter grocery store, when the cashier stopped what she was doing for a moment to ask, “Are you doing alright?” I have also heard it in off-topic asides while conversing with neighbors: “I had a nightmare last night about the car crash.” I felt the presence of this trauma in my conversation with Paige and from those who overheard us, as well as during Lionel’s recollection and when my partner and I were at the movie theater.

“Our trauma” has persisted. More than one year after August 2017, I was on the Downtown Mall to see a performance at Live Arts, a theater specializing in presentations by and for the local community. The space is located along Water Street, only a few blocks from the site of the car attack. The production that evening was billed as the first two installments of UVA graduate student Priyanka Shetty’s triptych “exploring America through different lenses.”¹⁸¹

#Charlottesville is the middle play of the triptych, and the play’s text exclusively features verbatim conversations Shetty had with members of the local community. Through these interviews she reconstructed what had taken place in Charlottesville more than a year prior. It was yet another public event that I attended in which the town seemed to be attempting to address its trauma.

Soon after I sat down in my seat, the woman next to me tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and saw a concerned smile. “Will you be ok?,” she asked, nervously. I first thought

¹⁸¹ “Priyanka Shetty’s Double Feature #Charlottesville and the Elephant in the Room to Be Presented at Live Arts and Jefferson School.”

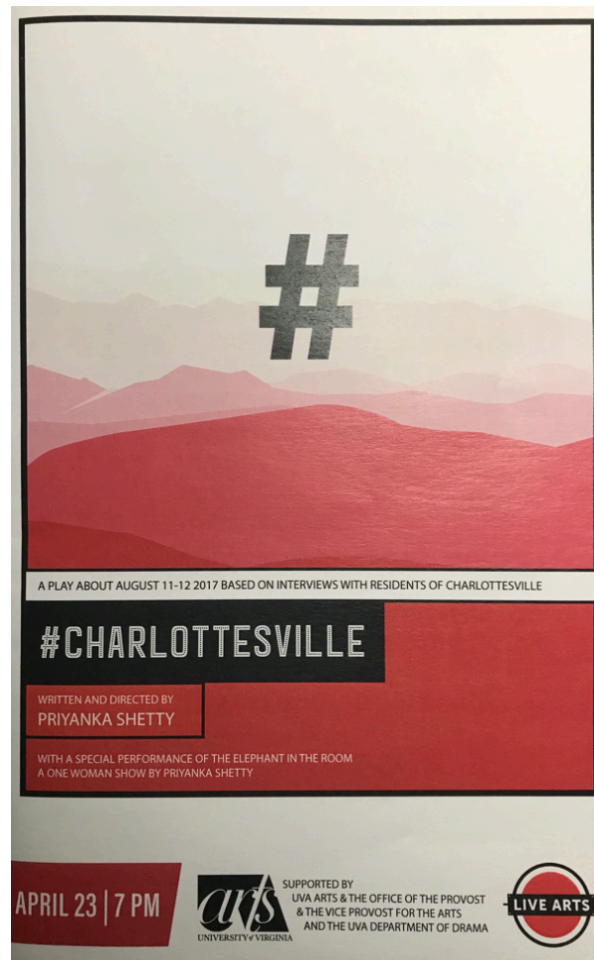


Figure 16. The program for *#Charlottesville*.

she was remarking on my awkward seating arrangement — turned away from her and toward the aisle, perhaps looking distant. “Oh, yeah!” I quickly responded back, hoping not to offend and seem anti-social. She nodded, and then looked away to browse the show program. But soon the lights went down, and it became apparent to me what she had actually meant.

“Attention: *#Charlottesville* is about to begin.” The voiceover explained that there was a “quiet space for reflection” immediately outside the theater doors for anyone who

needed it, as well as a “clinical psychologist.” The voice became silent, and soon the actors shuffled in the dark onto the stage. The lights flashed back on, and the woman next to me began to sob.

#Charlottesville begins with the car attack. The stage lights reveal a frozen tableau of actors contorted into various positions, all meant to simulate the *Daily Progress* Pulitzer Prize-winning photo depicting the immediate moment after impact, in which bodies flew into the air.¹⁸² Someone on stage describes the noise of the attack as “three-dimensional.” The introduction is soon followed by Charlottesville residents from before August talking about how wonderful it is to live in town, a jarring counterpoint to what would eventually occur, and also a negative commentary on some locals’ belief that Charlottesville has been a lovely place to live for everyone.¹⁸³ Scenes are divided by Twitter hashtags, which also serve as themes framing the action.

As the minutes went by, and as the actors on stage recreated the moments leading up to, during, and after August 11 and 12, members of the audience softly cried, rested their heads on those nearby, slouched, and seldom smiled — “our trauma” had become visible, audible, and palpable once more. The actors, too, were emotional. During a recitation of Susan and Kim Bro’s testimonies — the parents who lost their daughter, Heather Heyer, on August 12 — a younger actor visibly wept.

* * *

¹⁸² See “Former Progress Photographer Wins Pulitzer for Aug. 12 Coverage.”

¹⁸³ See chapter 1 § “Unprecedented.”

“Our trauma” has also become a common refrain within the local community. In many instances, the phrase is used to describe potentially ethically troubling, exploitative, or insensitive uses of and references to local lived experience. I have frequently witnessed this refrain on the Internet, and a few examples can illustrate the scope of these invocations.

Several months before the one-year anniversary of A11/12 Pearce Godwin, the Executive Director of an organization called the National Conversation Project, wished to create an event labeled “Listen First Charlottesville” to facilitate dialogue within the community. Many locals took issue with the politically inclusive lineup, with promotional materials that focused on the need for “civility” and “tolerance,” and with the exclusion of activist voices. Solidarity Cville, a local media collective, stated on *Medium*:

Unfortunately, Pearce is yet another outsider following an all-too-familiar pattern of condescension and erasure: telling Charlottesville what it needs rather than following the lead of anti-racist organizers whom the city has repeatedly refused to listen to. Pearce’s refusal to acknowledge the root cause of our major trauma makes him (and his massive conglomerate of 60 partner organizations) ill-equipped to heal us. Worse, it appears that Pearce is a profiteer using our trauma to build his credentials and strengthen his “Listen First” brand.¹⁸⁴

The following year, former Vice President Joe Biden, with the launch of his 2020 presidential election campaign, sought to focus his political message on the moral crisis inflicted upon the country by then-President Donald Trump. He did so by making Charlottesville the focal point of his campaign launch video.¹⁸⁵ Rumors circulated in the local and national

¹⁸⁴ Solidarity Cville, “NOW HEAR THIS.”

¹⁸⁵ See Joe Biden, “Joe Biden for President.”



Figure 17. A tweet from local Weston Gobar.

media¹⁸⁶ that Biden wished to start his campaign in the city, which provoked locals to express their dismay at the idea, such as Weston Gobar (shown in figure 17). When the University of Virginia men's basketball team had won the NCAA "March Madness" tournament a few weeks earlier, some individuals saw the victory as a sign of progress in Charlottesville in the wake of August 2017, which led UVA English professor Lisa Woolfork to write in a CNN op-ed:

Such attempts [to tie the victory to progress] are harmful to our community and to the country. The notion that a sports team can magically erase the pain and anguish inflicted on Charlottesville by white supremacists minimizes the severity of our trauma.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ See "Charlottesville Officials Say Biden Not Launching 2020 Campaign There"; Robillard, "Charlottesville Activists Don't Want Joe Biden to Use City as a Campaign 'Prop.'"

¹⁸⁷ Woolfork, "Virginia's Basketball Champs Are Heroes."



Figure 18. Tweets by local Molly Conger.

And in perhaps the most bizarre example, Ben Rowley, an artist based in New York City, announced¹⁸⁸ that he was planning on making a movie musical that would be a fictional portrayal of counter-protesters from the night of the torch-lit rally on August 11, prompting a similar denouncement from local Molly Conger, seen in figure 18.¹⁸⁹

In each of these examples, “our trauma” is used possessively, exclusively, and accusatorially. But there are also nuances that I have noticed over the course of my ethnographic research. While I have encountered some examples of locals policing one another with “our

¹⁸⁸ See Goot, “Movie Musical About Charlottesville Protests to Film in Glen Falls City Park.”

¹⁸⁹ After local public outcry, Rowley explained that he was rethinking his original plans and was “re-shaping” the movie to eliminate all references to Charlottesville. Goot, “Charlottesville Musical Delayed as Plans Change Amid Blowback.”

trauma,”¹⁹⁰ most conversations involving “our trauma” open it up to all locals. In other words, “our trauma” means “Charlottesville’s trauma.” There are, however, some city residents who notably couch “our trauma” in descriptors highlighting their individual proximity to A11/12 violence: meaning, “our trauma” can be *more* traumatic depending on one’s particular experience. At some City Council meetings, for example, I have witnessed public comments that connect personal physical and mental scars with phrases like “I was there,” or “some of us were there.” So, while the repeated utterance of “our trauma” might imply a sense of local universality, “our trauma” can also be uniquely felt and understood within the community.

The felt trauma of local residents from A11/12, therefore, has become a site of lived experience and discourse. It insistently ruptures the emotional surface of daily life — at the grocery store, at the local café, at the community theater — and also lies dormant in the unconscious, ready to rouse itself at any moment given the proper inducement — which can range from simply looking at a related poster to hearing another report in the local news about A11/12. This trauma proliferates the locally-constituted narrative of A11/12, specifically through discourses of “our trauma.” Further still, “our trauma” is a complex site of ownership, and has been used by locals against “outside” figures.

¹⁹⁰ For me, the most memorable example came from a conversation I had with a UVA colleague. I was speaking with her about the *#Charlottesville* play I attended, and she mentioned how someone in the Drama Department thought Shetty’s play was “exploitative,” and that, because Shetty was not physically present in Charlottesville on A11/12, she had no business making such an art piece.



Figure 19. UVA students at a candlelight vigil on the Lawn. (Photo by Sanjay Suchak, University of Virginia)

“Things That Need to Get Out”

In response to the trauma individually, collectively, and continually experienced, locals have used sound as a means of healing or, at the very least, a mechanism through which they can move forward from the traumatic events of the recent past. On August 13, 2017, following the violence of the previous days, members of the community held a vigil on 4th Street, the site of the car attack. As they gathered together, they sang songs, gave speeches, and stood in silence. UVA students quietly marched with candles a few days later, tracing the same route used by white supremacists on A11. When they finished their journey at the foot of the Rotunda, the students paused their movement and became an impromptu choir, seen in figure 19. One year later, locals congregated at Washington Park in Charlottesville and let out a collective scream — as one person said, the shout was needed, because there were “things that need to get out.”

As I came to find over time following the Summer of Hate, grieving and healing

aren't always scripted. Cultural practices like funerals and wakes can be understood and experienced as mourning *rituals*, and contribute to the idea that devastating moments in life can be marked through order. The local moments for mourning and reflecting — the vigils, the therapy, the anniversaries, the community programming — were in many ways expected and oftentimes planned, but the effects of them were far from preordained: the vigils in August 2017 were, at times, awkward; the scream from the anniversary gathering was surprisingly inspiring and joyful; and the Concert for Charlottesville, a community event detailed later in this chapter, was contentious.

In other words, these soundful, emotional displays were further examples of the dynamic nature of sono-affective lived experience. In this final section I detail a few moments that highlight this reality, specifically as it relates to local community members' attempts to heal from "our trauma" in the wake of the Summer of Hate, as well as moments of disagreement over these attempts.

* * *

On Sunday morning, August 13, 2017, I began texting a few friends: "Is anything going to happen tonight?" *Maybe* was the consistent answer, and, indeed, as the day progressed there were only rumors and digital whispers over Facebook and Twitter that a vigil would be held at 4th Street during sundown. The hesitancy to go public with any definitive plans was partially motivated by the hope that locals could congregate without the national media and any remnant white supremacists intruding on community mourning. But there was also the obvious fact that no one *actually knew* if there was a plan, nor was anyone will-



Figure 20. Community members mourning on 4th Street.

-ing to make anything official.

My partner and I made our way downtown regardless, and when we arrived at 4th Street in the evening it was clear that others had made the same decision. There was a crowd, loosely circled around the middle of the street. A large display of flowers, photos, letters, balloons, and candles lined the nearby crosswalk, shown in figure 20. At first it was mostly quiet, but in time someone began singing “Amazing Grace.” Others joined in, repeating the hymn’s first stanza a few times before their voices faded. Another song started, but before it could get going someone else voiced a different tune; both eventually cancelled out the other. A period of silence followed until someone launched into a speech. He was an outsider, however, made obvious by his reference to this city as “Charlotte.” Some

nearby cut him off and told him to shut up, which he thankfully did. *Who the fuck is this guy?*, I thought to myself. The emotions lurched into each other throughout these moments: somber, hope, confusion, annoyance, hostility.

Was this in any way helpful? Were we healing on this street corner? The news media filmed our grief live as the sun went down, and my mom, watching from California, called me to say that it all looked “beautiful.” But it didn’t feel beautiful. It felt awkward. At the same time, I wasn’t embarrassed that we made this effort to be together in this space — this expression of humanity in the midst of pain was desperately needed.

Perhaps sensing this pain, the artist Dave Matthews sought to create a concert for his hometown to help them heal through music and raise funds for victims and community organizations. The “Concert for Charlottesville” eventually advertised a lineup of Pharrell Williams, Chris Stapleton, the Roots, Ariana Grande, Justin Timberlake, and many others; Stevie Wonder made a surprise appearance at the end alongside the Dave Matthews Band. The concert was billed as an opportunity for “unity,” but not everyone in the city was happy with the event, nor its messaging. Specifically, local activists took issue with city and UVA leadership helping to organize the concert. In a video, they stated, “Community healing shouldn’t be led by those who failed the community,” and at the concert they created a sign: “No Unity Without Justice.”¹⁹¹ They pointed to the devastating consequences of action and inaction by Mayor Mike Signer, UVA President Teresa Sullivan, Chief of Police Al Thomas, and others; created a list of community demands; and noted

¹⁹¹ Solidarity Cville, “No Unity without Justice!”



Figure 21. Mike Signer's tweet.

that it was locals that protected the city and themselves on A11/12, not those who failed in their civic and social duties as ostensible leaders.

As time has worn on, these tensions have continually flared between locals and their leaders over who gets to “officially” mark the Summer of Hate through community events. In other words, many in the city are ambivalent about the idea that some individuals and organizations can represent their greater community and facilitate healing from recent history. Then-Mayor Mike Signer famously posted an image of himself on Twitter a few days after A11/12. In coordination with Virginia Tourism, he declared, “After a hard week, Cville is back on our feet,” captured in figure 21. Community members were deeply upset

by this gesture, perceiving it to be shallow and more a public relations campaign than an accurate reflection of the city's trauma. In their eyes, it was difficult to see how Signer could actually align himself with events like the Concert for Charlottesville and claim that he was helping the community heal.

For the first anniversary of A12, locals instead chose to create their own community programming. A few dozen of us gathered at the foot of a hill in Washington Park, and over the course of an hour those present gave speeches, shared poems, and led the group in song and chant. Throughout, it was repeatedly implied that this event was an opportunity, not a requirement; this gathering was being offered to help prepare and channel the emotions of the day. As one speaker put it:

This is a really big day for many of us here in Charlottesville, and holds a lot of emotions. And I want to recognize that showing up here, showing up in the streets, and stepping into any space, any public space on this day was a risk for all of you and a risk that you took, and I'm really grateful that you're all here.

A “greeting” began the event: “they may lock down our city¹⁹² but they will never lock down our continuous fight for a better society.” The crowd erupted in cheers, claps, and other sounds of solidarity. Soon after we were all led in a chant: “Hey hey, ho ho! White

¹⁹² For the first anniversary of A11/12, city officials planned for a major contingent of police officers — from Charlottesville and beyond — to provide security throughout the weekend. There were also numerous areas around town that were heavily guarded and walled off, including the Downtown Mall and Market Street Park. Similarly, UVA administration regulated any form of demonstration occurring across Grounds, notably a student protest on the anniversary of A11. These policing and regulating activities drew wide-spread criticism from local residents and UVA students, staff, and faculty. This gathering at Washington Park, therefore, was an attempt not only to coordinate outside of civic/university administrations, but also to organize *against* them. See McCoy, “For Charlottesville, a Tense Weekend on Anniversary of Racial Violence at Rally.”

supremacy has got to go!” We were led in songs of resistance from Apartheid-era South Africa and in moments of silence. And at the very end, one of the organizers suggested we all *scream* together, which I captured in audio recording 1:

I thought the last thing we can all do together is do a collective scream. I’m gonna count to three. Sometimes at these kinds of things you hold silence to honor the people that are now our ancestors and to honor the folks going forward, but I think today we have grief, and rage, and things that need to get out. So on the count of three, let’s do a collective scream, then you all go on your way. Stay hydrated. Stay strong. We love you. One, two, three...

It is difficult to adequately describe what came next, but it was loud — a full, deep breath obstreperously let out by everyone. The sound has stuck with me ever since, and profoundly influenced the way I understood my research and the sono-affective actions of community members. A friend who was nearby quipped, “Ooo, that makes it into your diss.!,” and she was right. In this moment, one year later, we had gathered together to acknowledge our trauma and release it through sound. I do not believe there was any way we could have effectively released it all, but in retrospect it was exactly what was needed. There were “things that need[ed] to get out.”

* * *

But what instigated all of this trauma? The answer was much more than simply a weekend in recent city memory. For me, a fuller explanation would involve a long research journey that began soon after 9/11. It took me through online chat servers, hours of YouTube videos, Civil War recollections, a recording of soldiers from the 1930s, and an hour drive north to the grassy fields of Manassas, Virginia. Throughout I would come to recognize an alt-right interest with the emotional, instigative, and violent power of sound.

I also found that this same sonic interest led, for those who wreaked trauma on this city, to unintended consequences, including the empowerment of the Charlottesville community.

CHAPTER 3

Sono-Affective Tactics in Charlottesville

“I’m just saying we could do the most frightening rebel yell in over 100 years if we wanted to.”
—“Commander Davis (TWP)” on Discord server “Charlottesville 2.0,” July 19, 2017

“We’d keep playing, people would stop chanting, but there would still be this cacophonous sound keeping the energy of the whole protest up, which I was very pleased to discover that we served an actual purpose, rather than what I had originally intended — to drown [the KKK] out.”
—An organizer for Noise Against Nazis in an interview with the author, September 5, 2017

As I delved deeper into my research on the sono-affective dimensions of the Summer of Hate, I increasingly realized that they afforded multiple avenues for scholarly exploration. In chapter 1, I analyze the local narratives of and from the past, framed in terms of noise. The inescapable trauma, “our trauma,” which I focus on in chapter 2, became a way to make sense of the aftermath of 9/11. And through my own curiosity and civic participation, I noticed profound shifts in local democracy and various articulations of democratic ideals — awash in practices of and discourses on sound — occurring in the chambers of the City Council, explored in chapter 4.

Some areas of my research, however, were difficult to untangle. Consequently, and for quite a while, I avoided putting them down in writing. Some sounds were metaphorically cacophonous, some affects too indistinct to analyze, even though these experiences were quite visceral. My research forced me to learn to be patient with myself as a writer, a scholar, and as someone who was *himself* traumatized by the Summer of Hate and attempting to more fully understand my own and others’ lived experiences.

I say this by way of introduction to the third chapter of my dissertation, a chapter in which I survey what I found to be both the darkest and the most inspiring aspects of the Summer of Hate. I analyze the tactical use of sound as an affective instrument both by the alt-right and by local counter-protesters.

I divide this chapter into two parts. Part 1 is an examination of the alt-right's purposeful and violent wielding of sound in Charlottesville to promote white supremacy. Members of the alt-right created a significant cache of documents: YouTube videos, Discord conversations, audio recordings. These lay bare the evidence of what they hoped "Unite the Right" would accomplish. In investigating these documents, I found that "Unite the Right" provocateurs argued for and engaged in physical, audible, and emotional violence to accomplish their goals. They specifically sought to use a variety of sounds to viscerally disturb and terrify, while also claiming and channeling a sono-affective history of white supremacy embedded in past American practices of racial terrorism. While I by no means fully capture the breadth and complexity of alt-right culture,¹⁹³ the first part of this chapter is my attempt to understand how Charlottesville became a stage on which white supremacists ventured to move their depraved cause forward by obstreperous means. I argue that the affective world that they construct is much more nuanced than mere hate; it reveals a complex and implicit web of affect strategically used by the alt-right to further a white supremacist agenda.

¹⁹³ For this, I would recommend a host of scholarship, including: Center on Extremism, *New Hate and Old*; Ganesh, "Weaponizing White Thymos"; Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*; Reid and Valasik, *Alt-Right Gangs*; Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*; Woods and Hahner, *Make America Meme Again*.

In part 2, I focus on the local community's direct, soundful forms of protest and counter-protest during the Summer of Hate and after — their attempts to and successes at combatting white supremacy through audible activism. Charlottesville demonstrators perceive a connection between sound and affect, and they hear this connection as useful to their cause. In fact, as a few activists shared with me, specific sound practices led to unexpected results that bolstered their efforts to support fellow anti-racists. Here I look specifically at the efforts of Noise Against Nazis.

Then I introduce Shoshana Felman's helpful theorization of affective "misfires."¹⁹⁴ Alt-right actors intended to bolster their cause of white supremacy through violent and soundful instigation, but were effectively countered by a local community bent on making the alt-right irrelevant, and also renewing their city in ways that were antithetical to "Unite the Right." In fact, as Jeff Fogel has argued, "there's been a blooming and flowering of activism here."¹⁹⁵ It can be seen throughout this dissertation,¹⁹⁶ and it still continues. Through their trauma, uncertainty, rage, and hope, Charlottesville community members came together to combat white supremacists.

¹⁹⁴ Discussed in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, in which Felman draws, from the work of J. L. Austin, her own conceptualization of "misfire": "The act of failing thus opens up the space of referentiality — or of impossible reality — not because *something is missing*, but because *something else is done*, or because something else is said: the term 'misfire' does not refer to an absence, but to the enactment of a difference." Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 57.

¹⁹⁵ Suarez, "Through a Year of Chaos, Charlottesville Has Seen 'A Blooming and Flowering of Activism.'"

¹⁹⁶ See chapter 1 § "Unprecedented," chapter 1 § A New Century, chapter 2 § Sensing Recent History, chapter 2 § "Things That Need to Get Out," and the Timeline appendix.

Part 1: The Sounds of White Supremacy

A Journey Through Alt-Right Soundscapes

In the days, months, and years following A11/12, I found myself challenged by aspects of my research and my own personal experiences, and specifically by moments during the Summer of Hate that, for me, felt ingrained and elemental: images of lit torches on the Lawn, sounds of gnarled metal and harrowing screams on 4th Street, blood-curdling chants of “You will not replace us” by white supremacists, the smell of tear gas. I did my best to avoid these moments in my writing. I was still too disoriented and traumatized by the memories. I wondered to myself, *How can I possibly make sense of all this?* and *Do I want to make sense of it?* knowing the pain that would inevitably resurface.

I came to realize that others also had been challenged by their research. I looked to the writing of Deborah Gould, who acknowledges that her work on ACT UP and the AIDS epidemic was highly emotional. Her experiences were descriptively similar to mine:

I named what I was feeling “grief,” although in retrospect I can see that, while predominant, it was accompanied by feelings of sadness, loss, despondency, longing, disbelief, regret, and surely others that remain unnamed. [...] I would sit in an affect-flooded stupor, transported to a temporally disjunctive state, experiencing, in a way for the first time, the horrors of the recent past that I had lived through but on some affective level had refused.¹⁹⁷

I was drawn to her statement and its connections to what I was feeling: that forays into the world of A11/12 would produce in me similar responses of sadness, fear, and disbelief. It

¹⁹⁷ Gould, *Moving Politics*, 6.

was an “affect-flooded stupor” that brought me back to my memories of “Unite the Right,” and made me vicariously re-experience the violence I witnessed and re-traumatized me.

In time, I learned how to focus my emotions and energies toward positive growth and scholarship — seeing my research as a way to combat the same forces that had created these traumatic experiences. My conversations with local community members, too, helped me realize that my personal difficulties were not dissimilar to others’ realities, and this recognition was its own form of comfort and therapy.

Bit by bit, I delved into the research. On the night of August 11 I had witnessed the events at UVA from a mile away in my apartment and on my computer; it was a specifically digital and virtual experience. I decided to explore the Internet for more evidence from A11 and discovered that members of the alt-right had uploaded dozens of videos of their activities¹⁹⁸: lighting tiki torches, marching through UVA’s central campus, shouting orders to keep rank and stay in line, chanting out white supremacist phrases. I noticed a distinct performative strategy to their chanting: “You will not replace us,” and its anti-Semitic variant “Jews will not replace us,” were far more than lexical messages of paranoia.¹⁹⁹ Melodic contours, strong rhythmic accents, and a deep vocal register marked the

¹⁹⁸ Many of these videos have since been removed from YouTube, but I list some here for reference: Bitcoin Uncensored, “Charlottesville Alt Right March – RAW and UNCUT”; Daniel Shular, “Unite the Right and Counter Protests in Charlottesville, VA August 11-13, 2017”; Dave Reilly Media, “#UniteTheRight Torch March at UVA”; TheBigKK, “🔥 Pre Unite The Right Torch Rally Livestream (8 11 2017) 🔥”; The Last Stand, “Unite The Right Torchlit March Towards Lee Park Through Charlottesville, VA.”

¹⁹⁹ According to the Anti-Defamation League, “the slogan is a reference to a popular white supremacist belief that the white race is in danger of extinction by a rising tide of non-whites who are controlled and manipulated by Jews.” “You Will Not Replace Us.”

delivery of these chants. A heavy emphasis on “yOU!” and “jEWS!” began low and rose, almost like a wave or a rush of air, and echoed into silent space to reverberate, followed by the rest of the message — “WILL-*NOT*! RE-*PLACE*! *US*!” — barked as if performed by a staccato snare drum on the battlefield. These sounds evoke instantaneously in the listener, though not necessarily consciously, the frightening experience of a threatening militaristic march.

I also came to understand that the performative chanting was drawing upon earlier forms of alt-right theatricality. The phrase “You will not replace us,” for example, became a common refrain among white supremacists in 2017 prior to A11/12.²⁰⁰ The chant serves the purpose, in part, of conveying messages understood clearly by the “enemy,” and in fact in so doing it *creates* the “enemy” — “*You* will not replace us” — while also symbolizing more complex references to alt-right culture understood by those chanting the phrase. To this latter point, a few months before “Unite the Right,” Richard Spencer, a leader within the alt-right movement, came to Charlottesville and delivered a speech to fellow white supremacists in which he emphasized the phrase and, in doing so, laid the groundwork for future white supremacist iterations of the phrase in Charlottesville, like during the A11 march through UVA:

Spencer: Ladies and gentlemen, we are here for two reasons: We are here to say, “no.” No. More. Attacks on our heritage, on our identity. No more attacks on us as a people! But we are also here to say, “yes!” YES! This is who we are! Yes, we are on occupied space!

Audience: [*cheers*]

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Spencer: You. Will. Not. Replace. Us. You ***WILL*** not destroy us! You ***CANNOT*** destroy us! We have awoken! We are here! We are never going away! We will ***NEVER*** back down to ***COWARDLY*** attacks on our people and our heritage! ***THIS*** is the beginning.

[...]

Spencer: But the fact is, what brings us together is that: We. Are. ***WHITE!***
We are a people! ***WE WILL NOT BE REPLACED!***

Audience: [*cheers*]²⁰¹

Throughout his speech, Spencer carefully adds shouts, heavy punctuation, and dynamic vocal contours — more evidence of purposeful sonic delivery. Spencer’s speech was circulated and celebrated across the alt-right blogosphere,²⁰² to the extent that the chants of “You will not replace us” in Charlottesville on August 11 came to resonate with Spencer’s alt-right theatricality from the same city three months earlier.

I discovered a YouTube video belonging to another “Unite the Right” participant, the “TheBigKK.” In his livestream²⁰³ broadcast during the A11 march through UVA grounds, he and those around him display various intimidatory sonic tactics. For example, when he and the other nearby marchers spot an outside observer, they begin shouting at them, repeatedly, “Hey, FUCK antifa!” along with “FUCK YOU, KIKE!” and “Fuckin’ Marxist scum, motherfucker!” These shouts, as well as numerous chants by “TheBigKK”

²⁰¹ I transcribed this speech from a now-deleted YouTube video from May 13, 2017: Youtube Kanal, “Richard Spencer and white nationalists protesting against removal of Robert E. Lee statue.”

²⁰² Including the production of a sleek, heavily-edited example of propaganda uploaded by AltRight.com onto YouTube (now removed). AltRight.com, “CHARLOTTESVILLE.”

²⁰³ TheBigKK, “🔥 Pre Unite The Right Torch Rally Livestream (8 11 2017) 🔥,” now deleted.

and others, are characterized by aggressive and harsh inflections. Voices are brought down to an as-low-as-possible register; the contrast between his normal speaking voice and his chanting voice is striking — the latter is marked by a guttural, extreme, obstreperous sound maximized to the point of hoarseness. Barely comprehensible, “TheBigKK” remarks later during the march, “My voice is fucking killing me.”

I combed through dozens of these videos and other online media. I also scoped out Facebook and Twitter and found videos from bystanders and counter-protesters. Some community members offered me footage that they had collected from the weekend. The material was overwhelming in its scope and challenging to observe in the wake of my own traumatic experience.

Over time, I simultaneously began to recognize an alt-right interest in intentional sound practice and their belief in the affective potential of sound to terrorize and cause violence. The most noteworthy example, for me, came in the form of a video capturing part of the A12 downtown riot. It depicts²⁰⁴ disturbing footage of a gun, albeit not the kind that can physically wound and kill. For context, the captured scene is claustrophobic: the cameraman is surrounded by a tight group of volunteer security — militiamen — dressed in olive green army camo and exhibiting firearms of a higher weapons-grade than those gripped by the local and state police nearby.²⁰⁵ Behind them, racing down the sidewalk, is another individual dressed in similar combat attire, but wielding a different kind

²⁰⁴ jake westly anderson, “INSANE NEW FOOTAGE FROM CHARLOTTESVILLE!!!,” starting at 5’47”.

²⁰⁵ See Jacobs, “VA Governor Defends Charlottesville Response.”

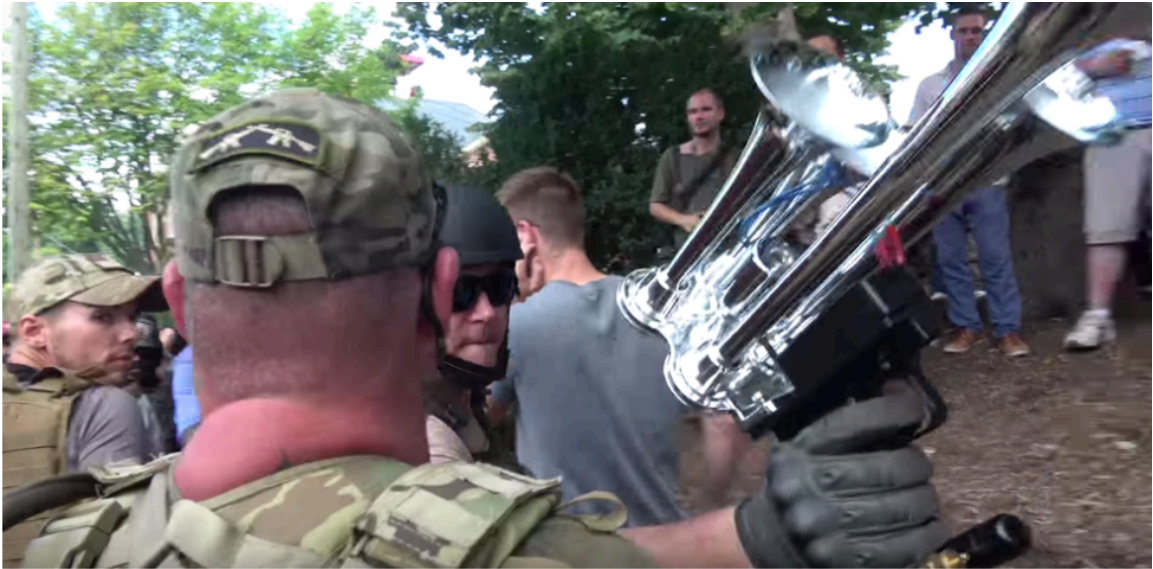


Figure 22. A screenshot from a YouTube video depicting the sound gun.

of weapon. He fires — *click-squeeeAAHHHNNNN* — and fires again, and again. The noise affectively *demand*s attention: all eyes immediately turn to the source of the sound despite the chaos unfolding elsewhere in the area. The weapon is an air horn, with four variously-sized chrome bells, similar to what you might see on an eighteen-wheeler or a large yacht. The grip is black and compact, replete with a firing trigger and a canister for air. I looked it up: a “Deaf Leopard Train Horn Gun,” which allows the wielder to hold “the POWER of a Train in the Palm of Your Hand,” as its makers advertise on their website.²⁰⁶ This “soldier” and his air horn storm by the cameraman, and as I slow the footage I can make out his expression: a determined face made taut through stern lips, shown in figure 22. He halts his stretch down the sidewalk to point and discharge his weapon at a group of counter-demonstrators who are holding up a sign, “Against White Supremacy.”

²⁰⁶ “Deaf Leopard.”

His weapon prompts a response from them: “FUCK YOU, ASSHOLE!” The air horn continues its barrage of noise, and soon some start throwing punches.²⁰⁷

For me, this video became a potent example of the conclusions I was beginning to reach with my research material thus far; critical scholarly and ethnographic evidence for inspired and coordinated sono-affective terrorism that led to the traumatization of city residents. In particular, I understood that the white supremacists of “Unite the Right” had made sonic choices, both collectively and individually, in order to intimidate, frighten, and terrify their perceived enemies and embolden themselves as they worked to violently enforce their racist ideology. I did not yet realize, however, that I had merely scratched the surface when it came to both research material and the implications of that material, especially once I came across a trove of leaked documents released by Unicorn Riot.

The Discord Server

On August 14, 2017, the Twitter account for Unicorn Riot announced that the group had been leaked important communications between “Unite the Right” organizers and participants, shown in figure 23. Unicorn Riot is a left-wing media organization that was formed in 2014. Its members have a history of covering protests and activism across the country including the Tar Sands Blockade, Occupy Wall St., Standing Rock, and Black Lives Mat-

²⁰⁷ This part of my research — including the alt-right’s use of the Rebel Yell and other sonic activities discussed further below — offer another example of how the audible dimension has been repurposed to oppress others through violent means. E.g., Achino-Loeb, ed., *Silence*; Cusick, “You are in a place that is out of the world...”; Daughtry, *Listening to War*; Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*; Hirsch, *Music in American Crime Prevention and Punishment*; Hirsch, “Rap as Threat?”; Radovac, “Muting Dissent.”



Figure 23. A screenshot from Unicorn Riot's Twitter feed.

-ter.²⁰⁸ And the material that they had leaked, and would eventually publish,²⁰⁹ concerned an online chat server that had been used by the alt-right to help prepare for and organize “Unite the Right.” These documents came from an unnamed source and the release generated considerable attention from national journalistic media.²¹⁰ For the community, es-



²⁰⁸ See Brown, “Arrests of Journalists at Standing Rock Test the Boundaries of the First Amendment.”

²⁰⁹ This server and others can now fully be searched online at Unicorn Riot’s website, having been uploaded into a readable text format. See “Charlottesville 2.0.”

²¹⁰ Woods, “How Unicorn Riot Covers the Alt-Right without Giving Them a Platform.”

pecially victims of A11/12, the documents would go a long way in helping them seek justice against the “Unite the Right” perpetrators.²¹¹

The material came from a Discord chat server labeled “Charlottesville 2.0.” Discord is an online platform that hosts audio, text, and visual communications between individuals and groups. The video game community maintains a large presence on the site, but the far-right also has used the platform, in part, because of its emphasis on maintaining the privacy and anonymity of users.²¹² As the title of the server, “Charlottesville 2.0,” implies, alt-right organizers considered “Unite the Right” to be their second foray into the city,²¹³ and through this server they would discreetly lay out their plans and goals for this subsequent event.

For me, these leaked documents would become important research material. What I found within these conversations was a culture of white supremacy, the desire to commit violent acts, and hatred directed towards progressives, Jews, Black people, and women. Many usernames celebrated the Third Reich, including “ Heimdulf – VA h – MI.” In a style similar to the Facebook “like” system,

²¹¹ The Discord leaks became part of a civil lawsuit filed on behalf of A11/12 victims by Integrity First for America. The case, *Sines v. Kessler*, was lodged against numerous individuals and organizations involved with facilitating “Unite the Right,” and led to guilty verdicts on most charges of conspiracy and monetary damages in excess of \$25 million. Hammel, “Jury Hits Rally Organizers with Millions of Dollars in Damages.”

²¹² This feature has led to controversy for Discord, resulting in the subsequent deletion of particular chat servers hosted on the site. See Glaser, “White Supremacists Still Have a Safe Space Online”; Liao, “Discord Shuts Down More Neo-Nazi, Alt-Right Servers.”

²¹³ On May 13, 2017, there were two smaller rallies in Charlottesville held downtown near the statues of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. “Torch-Wielding Protesters Gather at Lee Park.”

there were various emoticons that could be used to display approval of a particular comment. These included a “Facebook hand” re-drawn flat and pointed upward, mimicking a Nazi salute; a Confederate flag; and a “Jude” star. A whole section of the server was dedicated to military tactics and the construction of shields. Users frequently joked about “niggers” and “gassing” individuals.

I came to recognize specific aspects of alt-right culture that I had read about elsewhere. Bharath Ganesh, for instance, argues that the alt-right creates discourses claiming “whiteness as a state of marginalization and oppression,” and does so, in part, through channeling the emotion of rage.²¹⁴ In one example I found from the Discord server, username “SpencerReesh” tells his colleagues:

Well I didn’t sleep well last night, may not be able to sleep tonight. Too angry that my country is complacent in becoming a 3rd world shithole and wiping its ass with the constitution where whites are concerned. Sleep deprivation makes me hate them more.

This is but one statement of many by alt-right members connecting their cause and activities to emotion: user “Fyodor” explains, in relation to potential rain on A11/12, “Nothing wrong with a crowd of hot, wet, angry nazis”; user “yeah dude” argues, “it takes those with passion to fight and value race”; and “Gavius Corvus” makes the situation plain for others:

We’re fighting for the very survival of our race. Everyone needs to ask themselves what they’re willing to suffer for their people, because if your answer isn’t “anything” you need to reevaluate your conviction.

Ganesh states that the alt-right “weaponizes” affect in order to attain their goals, playing

²¹⁴ Ganesh, “Weaponizing White Thymos”: 893-894.

“on personal and collective structures of rage, anger, and indignation to reinscribe audiences as participants in a righteous cultural war to return ‘Western civilization’ to its mythical dominance.”²¹⁵ Ganesh’s own theorization of alt-right affect further clarified the observations and conclusions I was making about the white supremacists of “Unite the Right” — that not only were they wielding affect to terrorize the Charlottesville community, but their actions and desires were drawing, in part, from another affective realm of rage and what they felt was the depreciation of the “white race.”

I also noticed in the Discord server a particular alt-right interest in sound, often associated with the idea of violence. There were conversations, for example, about the need to have amplified music during “Unite the Right.” Username “Dr_Ferguson,” who was planning on attending the event, asked for music suggestions from others:

I would like to bring my megaphone that can play mp3s. I used it when i was in ferguson to harass black lives matter and color the narrative to our favor. Of course i wont be using it while the speakers are speaking, but of course if/when violence errupts and we want to control the atmosphere with music.

This person, in other words, saw potential in having music present during scenes of white supremacist violence, asserting that it would create a favorable “atmosphere” for his colleagues nearby. As I searched through videos from A12, I did come across an individual wearing a backpack with speakers blasting out music. I am not sure if he was “Dr_Ferguson,” but the music he chose to play was in line with the thoughts stated above. One track

²¹⁵ Ibid., 916.

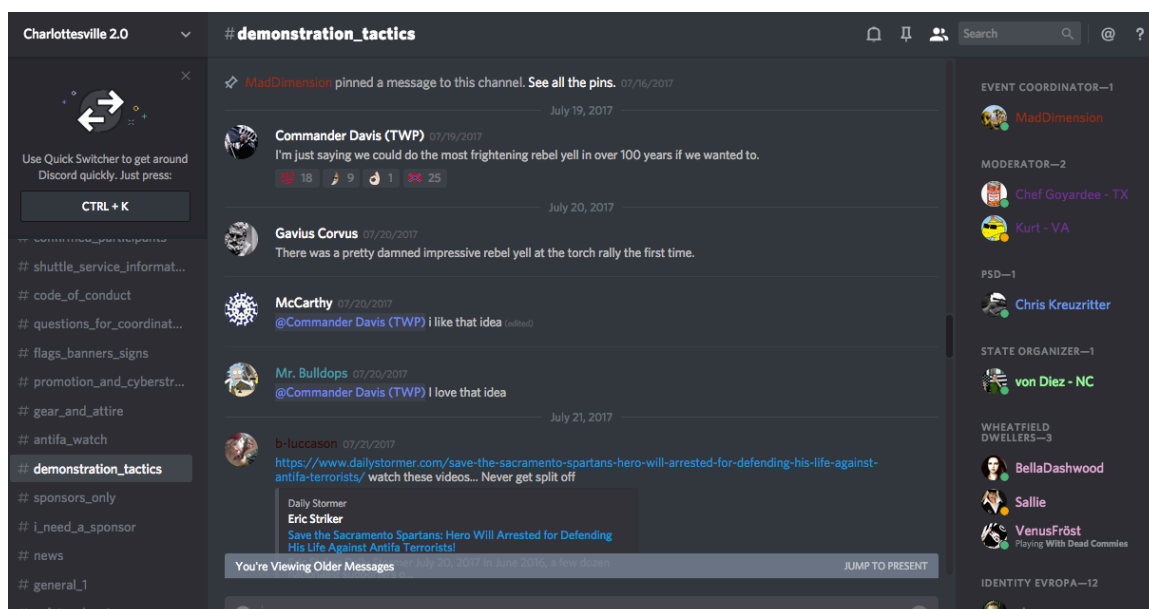


Figure 24. "Commander Davis (TWP)" suggests the Rebel Yell on Discord.

that I was able to identify from the video is titled "Strength of a Thousand Men,"²¹⁶ and features a large and loud choir, strings rushing up and down various scales, intense percussion, and a soaring soprano voice. Put another way, the song is operatic and stirring, perfect for someone hoping to create an "atmosphere" appropriate for "righteous" violence.

I was perplexed, however, when I saw discussion of the "Rebel Yell." In a subsection of the Discord server titled "#demonstration_tactics," the following conversation took place, also captured in figure 24:

Commander Davis (TWP): I'm just saying we could do the most frightening rebel yell in over 100 years if we wanted to.

Gavius Corvus: There was a pretty damned impressive rebel yell at the torch rally the first time.

²¹⁶ Anime Hardstyle, "Strength of a Thousand Men – Two Steps from Hell."

Hand Banana: @Commander Davis (TWP) i like that idea

Mr. Bulldogs: @Commander Davis (TWP) I love that idea

The suggestion from “Commander Davis (TWP)” received a lot of positive support, as exemplified by the number of emoticons the message received. Over the next two weeks, leading up to A11/12, others offered different sonic suggestions, such as singing “Dixie” and Aufidena’s “White Flowers” — songs that celebrate white supremacy. But another user, “Quartermaster’s Ghost,” interjected that the Rebel Yell idea was a good one, and even shared a YouTube example²¹⁷ of the shout. “Sounds like a pack of hyenas, or monkeys,” someone commented. But apparently the Rebel Yell rendition shared by “Quartermaster’s Ghost” was not authentic enough, as “Thomas Morrow” offered up a second YouTube video²¹⁸ and added, “Here’s the real deal...,” captured in figure 25; the video posted by “Thomas Morrow” includes footage, from the Library of Congress, of Confederate Civil War veterans shouting the war cry. Eventually it was agreed that everyone would learn how to do the Rebel Yell, as well as learn the lyrics to “Dixie” and “White Flowers.”

This was all rather curious to me: *what is the Rebel Yell?* It was important to some in the alt-right, it seemed, that this sound be present during A11/12, and that it be a historically authentic rendition. But it was clear to me that I needed to do more research before I could begin to understand.

²¹⁷ farmall51, “How to Do the Real ‘Rebel Yell.’”

²¹⁸ Smithsonian Magazine, “Rare Footage of Civil War Veterans Doing the Rebel Yell.”

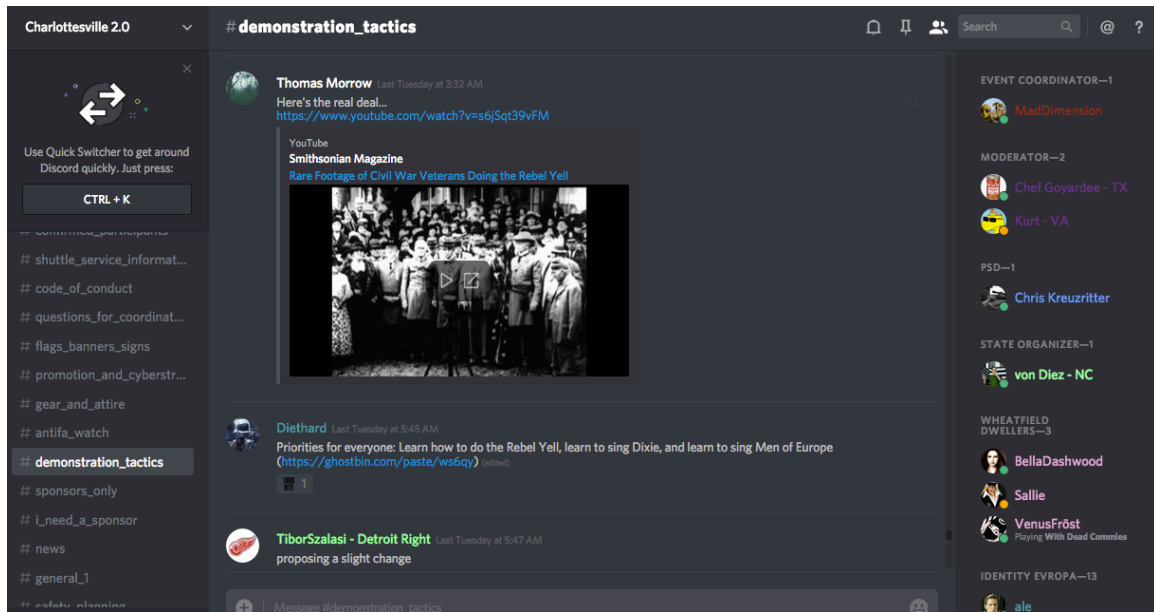


Figure 25. "Thomas Morrow" argues for a more authentic Rebel Yell on Discord.

"Noble Hounds Unleashed"

In November 2017, I visited the site of the First Battle of Bull Run, just north of the city of Manassas in Virginia. A strong breeze charged across the landscape — a series of rolling hills, each crest containing a recreated house, or a statue to a war leader, or lines of artillery. Stonewall Jackson sat proudly upon his bronze horse, gazing over the terrain. The field was a shade of emerald green with hints of pale gray-yellow. The battle site is mostly empty space, but the landscape, and the history buried underneath, are unavoidably present. I met with a tour guide, a National Park Service ranger, who informed me of the “psychological warfare” that began here on this site of the first major battle of the American Civil War; it was on this field that the Rebel Yell became infamous. I was there to learn more about the battle cry, not just from whatever information I could glean from the National

Park Service, but to see if, perhaps, being in this landscape myself could help me more viscerally understand the Rebel Yell and the alt-right's interest in it.

* * *

According to legend, Stonewall Jackson and his troops birthed the Rebel Yell at the First Battle of Bull Run in 1861. Confederate forces found themselves flanked on the left by Union soldiers executing a poorly staged attack. Confederate brigadier general Thomas L. Jackson held the line, earning him the nickname of “Stonewall.” Seizing on a moment of weakness by the Union artillery, Jackson turned to his soldiers and shouted these famous lines: “Reserve your fire until they come within 50 yards! Then fire and give them the bayonet! And when you charge, yell like furies!”²¹⁹ The response by the soldiers, according to Jackson biographer Robert Lewis Dabney, was like “noble hounds unleashed.”²²⁰ British historian G. F. R. Henderson details the scene:

Right well did the hot Virginian blood respond. Suddenly, a long grey line sprang from the ground in their very faces; a rolling volley threw them back in confusion; and then, with their fierce shouts pealing high above the tumult, the 2nd and 4th Virginia, supported by the 5th, charged forward across the hill [... and] in a few minutes not a single Federal soldier, save the dead and dying, was to be seen upon the plateau.²²¹

The Union soldiers fled in disarray, resulting in a victory for the Confederacy.

Craig Warren, in *The Rebel Yell: A Cultural History*, explains that the legendary “birth” of the Rebel Yell at Bull Run was probably not in actuality the first instance of the

²¹⁹ Robertson, *Stonewall Jackson*, 266.

²²⁰ Dabney, *Life and Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen. Thomas J. Jackson*, 233.

²²¹ Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, 151–152.

battle cry.²²² But it was the moment to which the subsequent historical narrative assigns the sono-affective power of the Rebel Yell as striking terror into the Union army. The Rebel Yell was seen by Confederate soldiers as “a fearsome battle cry used on the attack, testing the nerves of Northern troops and at times demoralizing them to the point of breaking ranks.”²²³ As one Southern soldier recalled, his army leadership never saw troops as weaponless, for as long as they had a “rebel yell” they could “intimidate” their foes.²²⁴ Some veterans even remarked on the war cry in poetic terms:

At the sound of the first shots every man in the road who had dismounted, sprang to his saddle, and we heard the well-known yell, that cry known as the ‘Rebel yell,’ and which had struck terror to our enemies on a hundred bloody fields. It is an exultant sound, unshrouded by the form of words, and on our right it rang out on the early morning air from lusty lungs, and in a minute every horse was in full gallop in our road.²²⁵

The descriptions of the Rebel Yell in this account are some of many that surface in the testimonials of Confederate soldiers. Warren explains, however, that the disparate descriptors uniformly point to “inhuman qualities of the shriek,” contextualized not only by the “hellish” scenes of the Civil War, but also by the “frenzied,” “wild,” and “unnatural”

²²² As he writes, “In truth, the Rebel yell had no clear parentage” (Warren, *The Rebel Yell*, 66). Warren adds that some from the period thought that the Rebel Yell had originated, or at the very least was inspired by, the “war whoops” of some Native American nations. In 1863, journalist William Howard Russell, for example, describes the Confederate battle cry as having “a touch of the Indian war-whoop in it,” while FitzGerald Ross one year later writes, “they learnt it from the Indians, I believe.” “By 1864,” Warren argues, “the war-whoop theory of the yell’s origins had taken root.” *Ibid.*, 2–7.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

²²⁵ Cardwell, “A Brilliant Coup,” 151.

behavior of the Confederate soldiers.²²⁶ In other words, while the Rebel Yell was not a singular sonic entity that was copied across the Civil War soundscape, its myriad manifestations were nevertheless united by their disturbingly alien timbre.

Union soldiers did find the Rebel Yell to be terrifying. Moreover, the battle cry was not only heard by these forces, but was also *felt*. As two Northern soldiers recounted in 1909, the Rebel Yell could not be understood until it was lived through viscerally:

And that yell. There is nothing like it this side of the infernal region and the peculiar corkscrew sensation that it sends down your backbone under these circumstances can never be told. You have to feel it, and if you say you did not feel it and hear the yell you have *never* been there.²²⁷

It was precisely because of this interrelationship of sound, violence, and affect that the Confederacy relied so heavily on the Rebel Yell. It brought morale to their lines and could be weaponized against the enemy to great effect.

* * *

With this knowledge in hand, I walked across the battlefield, now dotted only with tourists and the occasional tree. I briefly paused and closed my eyes. It felt cheesy and forced at first, but I wanted to see if I could imagine what this area might have sounded like as Jackson and his men charged across the terrain while yipping and hollering at a terrified Union army. Instead, I heard only the incessant wind around me. I kept listening, however, and after a minute went by, I began to hear something else: one by one, I remembered the YouTube videos I had found online documenting A11. The hellish soundscape

²²⁶ Warren, *The Rebel Yell*, 32–33.

²²⁷ Cheek and Pointon, *History of the Sauk County Riflemen*, 39.



Figure 26. The site of the First Battle of Bull Run.

of that evening rushed into my inner ear, causing the hairs on my arms to stand-on-end. I quickly opened my eyes and tried to think of something else, but I was now deeply unsettled in the middle of this open field.

* * *

I was never made aware of the Rebel Yell — perhaps because of my upbringing in California, many miles away from “the South” — until I saw it referenced in the “Charlottesville 2.0” server. Once I had familiarized myself with the sound through the same video²²⁸ that “Thomas Morrow” had shared on Discord, I then went back to the videos I had looked at from the Summer of Hate. It took me a while, but, surely enough, I found evidence of the alt-right recreating the Rebel Yell in Charlottesville. A number of videos

²²⁸ Smithsonian Magazine, “Rare Footage of Civil War Veterans Doing the Rebel Yell.”

that I used for my research have since been removed from YouTube,²²⁹ but, as of the completion of this dissertation, there are still some sonic examples of the alt-right wielding the Confederate war cry.²³⁰

Importantly, all the examples of the Rebel Yell in Charlottesville that I came across were from August 11. As the alt-right staged their violent torch-lit march through UVA, participants regularly belted out their renditions of the battle cry. In fact, the march began with the Rebel Yell; when the signal was given by Richard Spencer that the march was starting, the crowd erupted with yips, yells, and other sonic apparitions of the Confederacy — ultimately engendering traumatic affect. Each iteration of this scene, each time I press the “play” button on my computer, gives me goosebumps. To me, it encapsulates the beginning of an hour’s worth of performance aimed at intimidating, terrorizing, and traumatizing the city of Charlottesville. The scene is truly terrifying, and this is by design. Throughout the night of A11, the alt-right would use their voices in multiple ways as an intentional affective and sonic strategy.

I cannot help but recognize this contemporary soundscape in a 1905 description of the Confederate battle cry — Rebel Yells, chanting, and shouts of intimidation comparable to the “inhuman qualities” reminiscent of “mad demons,” of “rasping,” of the “maniacal maelstrom of sound”²³¹ — both amidst scenes of fire:

²²⁹ My main example of the Rebel Yell in Charlottesville, for example, came from Bitcoin Uncensored, “Charlottesville Alt Right March – RAW and UNCUT.”

²³⁰ E.g., Daniel Shular, “Unite the Right and Counter Protests in Charlottesville, VA August 11-13, 2017”; Jake Westly Anderson, “INSANE NEW FOOTAGE FROM CHARLOTTESVILLE!!!”

²³¹ Warren, *The Rebel Yell*, 32–33.

Wild, weird and picturesque; the light illuminated the darkness until a hundred or more heaps were roaring and seething in flames... Weird illuminations played fantastic tricks in the foliage above. Amid the roar of the ever-increasing fires could be heard the 'Rebel yell.'²³²

These videos of alt-right behavior and the online communications between “Unite the Right” actors display a desire to viscerally embody and manifest in the world, through sound, a white supremacist history. Just as the Confederacy relied on the Rebel Yell to inspire their fellow soldiers and frighten their enemies, so the alt-right believed that their renditions of the Rebel Yell and other sounds would be “frightening” and “terrifying” to counter-protesters.

They also argued in their online communications, as I have mentioned above, that the Rebel Yell should be as historically accurate as possible in order to be affectively productive — “the most frightening rebel yell in over 100 years,” as “Commander Davis (TWP)” stated. The end result would be an effective representation and embodiment of the violent history of white supremacy, as well as the negative emotional valences — trauma, terror, and fear — that would affect local lived experience.

The Discord conversations and online media display how important the sono-affective is to the strategies of the alt-right, as well as how the intended forms of the sono-affective were explicitly negotiated among individuals prior to A11/12. The sono-affective also operates within an alt-right-constructed framework of terror that intentionally mirrors sonic artifacts from the Civil War, thereby functioning as what was psychological racial

²³² Pascoe, “Confederate Cavalry Around Port Hudson,” 90–91.

warfare and terrorism then, and, by association with the past, perhaps even more so now. The alt-right, therefore, is doing far more than merely constructing an affective world of hate and racism. Indeed, there are levels of nuance here: their conversations and online media reveal a complex and implicit web of affect that purposefully resonates with the past, in which they compromise and strategize to further their white supremacist agenda.

This agenda is multi-faceted. For example, members of the alt-right wish to re-establish violently the United States as a white “ethno-state.” As Richard Spencer explains in his alt-right “manifesto,” published the day of the Rebel Yell-laden march through the University of Virginia:

Nations must secure their existence²³³ and uniqueness and promote their own development and flourishing. The state is an existential entity, and, at its best, a physical manifestation of a people’s being, order, and will to survive. Racially or ethnically defined states are legitimate and necessary.²³⁴

In order to accomplish certain racist goals, like that of an ethno-state, violence should be normalized and utilized. *The Daily Stormer*, a white supremacist online publication site that actively promoted “Unite the Right,” had its style guide leaked.²³⁵ Under the section “Violence,” the following recommendations were made:

It’s illegal to promote violence on the Internet. At the same time, it’s totally important to normalize the acceptance of violence as an eventuality/inevitability.

²³³ Spencer references here the so-called “14 Words,” a well-known slogan amongst white supremacists coined by David Lane: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” See “14 Words.”

²³⁴ Spencer, “What It Means to Be Alt-Right,” since deleted.

²³⁵ The style guide was leaked by an unnamed source to Ashley Feinberg of *HuffPost*. Feinberg, “This Is the Daily Stormer’s Playbook.”

[...]

Whenever someone does something violent, it should be made light of, laughed at.²³⁶

A different form of normalization can be seen in Richard Spencer's public-facing behavior, which advertises an intentionally professional and composed aura of reasonableness, exemplified in his three-piece suit attire²³⁷ and statements such as:

I've never advocated [violent forms of white supremacy] or ever glorified that. I am a dissident intellectual. I am not in charge of the police force or the Army. I'm not ordering the roundup of anyone and throwing them into camps.²³⁸

But this is duplicity. The night of A12 — after Heather Heyer was murdered, dozens physically harmed, and untold numbers traumatized — Spencer gave an emotional speech to his colleagues that made explicit his views on race, society, violence, and the ulterior purpose behind his activism:

We are coming back here like a *fucking* hundred times. I am *so* mad! I am *so fucking mad* at these people! They don't do this to *FUCKING ME!* We are gonna *fucking... ritualistically HUMILIATE them!* I am coming back here every *fucking* weekend if I have to! Like this is *never over! I win! They! Fucking! Lose!* That's how the world *fucking* works!

Little fucking kikes! They get *RULED* by people *like me!* Little *fucking* octoroons... *I FUCKING...* my ancestors *FUCKING ENSLAVED* those *pieces* of *fucking shit! I! RULE! THE FUCKING! WORLD! Those* pieces of *shit* get *ruled* by people like *me! They look up* and see a *face* like *mine*

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ "We have to look good," Spencer once said, explaining that "being part of something that is crazed or ugly or vicious or just stupid, no one is going to want to be a part of it." Fox, "The Hatemonger Next Door."

²³⁸ Wood, "His Kampf."

looking *DOWN* at them! That's how the *fucking* world works! We are going to *destroy* this *fucking town*!²³⁹

Spencer, in other words, believes in the supremacy of the white race and seeks to enforce an inhumane social hierarchy through strategically violent means. His statements further elucidate the meaning behind chanting “You will not replace us” while those nearby cry out a Rebel Yell. Spencer and his “Unite the Right” provocateurs sought to “destroy,” “ritualistically humiliate,” and “rule” Charlottesville and the locals who fought back.

Part 2: Local Anti-Racist Sound Tactics

“A Blooming and Flowering of Activism”

But it was not meant to be. “It was supposed to be their year,” local Jalane Schmidt²⁴⁰ said of the alt-right, “but we denied it.”²⁴¹ While my research on and experiences of A11/12 have been personally troubling, discomforting, and traumatizing, I have been encouraged by the Charlottesville community’s response to recent events. During the Summer of Hate, residents counter-demonstrated against white supremacists. Over time, they increasingly showed up at City Council meetings to advocate for socially just policies. They brought comfort and understanding to one another, intent on repairing the collective trauma so many were bearing. Their activism and civic engagement have taken on many different

²³⁹ Integrity First for America, Exhibit #2489, “Richard Spencer after A12” in “Sines v. Kessler Plaintiff Exhibits.”

²⁴⁰ See chapter 1 § “Unprecedented,” chapter 4 § A Civic Soundscape, and chapter 4 § Silence vs. Noise.

²⁴¹ Suarez, “Through a Year of Chaos, Charlottesville Has Seen ‘A Blooming and Flowering of Activism.’”

forms that are too numerous to list fully — “a blooming and flowering of activism,”²⁴² as local Jeff Fogel has described it.

Community members who engage in this work often use sound to bring positive change to their city. Much like the alt-right, they have discerned that sound has an affective component, and they argue for the transformative potential of audible activism, specifically its ability to arrest attention, instigate action, and to empower individuals, collectives, and the larger community. Throughout my research, I have been struck by the community’s variety of sound practices, the resulting consequences and feelings that these practices engender, and the profound understanding among activists about the affective qualities of their wielding of sound.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore the complex culture of local audible activism in Charlottesville surrounding the Summer of Hate. I begin by sharing my conversations with members of the group Noise Against Nazis and analyzing various characteristics of their activism through a sono-affective lens: their organizing strategies, beliefs and observations about sonic protest, and lived experiences during the Summer of Hate. I then conclude with remarks about affective misfires, and how these misfires not only define the Summer of Hate, but also led to an effective counter-response from local activists.

²⁴² Ibid.

Noise Against Nazis

I first heard about Noise Against Nazis through a mutual friend of the group's lead organizer, "Isaac." Specifically, I was told about a group of people who got together to purposefully bring sound to anti-racist counter-demonstrations. I suspected that I had encountered this group in the past, as I remembered seeing and hearing individuals with various musical instruments throughout the Summer of Hate. In time, I would meet with Isaac and two other members of Noise Against Nazis: "Paige," mentioned earlier in chapter 2,²⁴³ and "Barry." All three are former UVA students who are friends. Through conversations with them at different coffee joints across Charlottesville, they shared with me their thoughts about audible activism, and specifically their belief that it can be a powerful affective tool in the fight against white supremacy.

As a human being, Isaac is many things, but in my chat with him he wanted to emphasize that he is a musician: "Pretty involved in music," he said, "that's my community."²⁴⁴ He knew that I wished to speak with him about his activism, and emphasized upfront that he was not a "political" person, at least not until Donald Trump became a presidential candidate in 2016 and explicit neo-fascism and white supremacy became increasingly prominent in national politics. So, when a North Carolina chapter of the Ku Klux Klan sought to hold a rally in downtown Charlottesville on July 8, 2017, Isaac determined that he was going to do something about it and organize a counter-response.

²⁴³ Chapter 2 § Personal Accounts from Charlottesville.

²⁴⁴ "Isaac," interviewed by Kyle Chattleton at Oakhurst Inn Café, September 5, 2017.

For many in the city, the “Summer of Hate” extends beyond A11/12 into other events. The KKK rally, for example, is often discursively categorized within this period, along with the May 13 and October 7, 2017 torch-lit rallies led by Richard Spencer.²⁴⁵ Over the course of these seemingly discrete events, the community began to *feel* the Summer of Hate as a distinctly unified timeframe, in the sense that it understood itself as in the midst of something awful with no end in sight, or, as Isaac explained to me in his recollection of the May 13 event: “That kind of stirred something in me to the point where I was like, *this is not the end of this [...] they’re coming back.*”

So, when the KKK announced their intention to hold a rally in downtown Charlottesville to protest the planned removal of Confederate statues, Isaac decided that he needed to respond to what was happening in the city, and came up with a plan involving “noise”:

And the KKK thing announced, and I was like, [...] *I feel the compulsion to do something about this.* [...] I think me and my friend were talking about it and saying like, “we should just do something that’s not just the standard ‘go and shout at people angrily,’ [...] Let’s just make a lot of noise and have fun in the face of this terrible, terrible group, and maybe that could make something positive about it.”

Isaac created a social media event page where he invited friends and others to participate in what he called “Noise Against Nazis,” a soundful protest where the collective would drown out the KKK with their musical instruments. In the end, it was “a ragtag assembled group of random people,” Isaac said, a stark contrast to the hyper-masculine, militarized

²⁴⁵ For a more comprehensive look into these and other moments from the Summer of Hate, consult Appendix A: Timeline.

alt-right with their shields, uniforms, and many weapons — sonic and otherwise.

Isaac understands that sound is affective, and he wanted to draw upon this reality in his activism. He did not, however, want to show up at the counter-protest and “angrily” “shout” at the KKK. Instead, he wished to use “noise” as a source of “joy,” and through his and others’ sound-making drown out and affectively displace the KKK with more positive, humanitarian, and anti-racist vibes and sounds.

Paige also participated in Noise Against Nazis. In my conversation with her, she remembered when she, Isaac (who was then her roommate), and a few others decided to get all of their instruments together for the counter-protest:

Paige: A lot of our friends are musicians, and our friends are really creative people. [...] We just have a lot of instruments lying around our house or broken instruments. And I don’t know if it was a joke at first or what, but somebody suggested that we bring, like, all the instruments and everything and, like, make a band out of it or something like that.

[...]

Before the [Ku Klux Klan] rally, [Isaac] broke down his drums and strung them up with what I think were dog leashes as belts to hold up the drums. We brought the xylophone, and... what are those called with little keyboards and the hose that comes out of them?

Kyle: A melodica?

Paige: Yes! We brought melodicas. I don’t know, we were just scraping together whatever instruments we could find in our house.²⁴⁶

And when the day of the KKK rally came, Isaac, Paige, and others loaded the instruments into a car and made their way to the meet-up location. “We’re going to make as much

²⁴⁶ “Paige,” interviewed by Kyle Chattleton at Oakhurst Inn Café, July 31, 2018.

sound as possible,” Isaac recalled to me, “so I had, like, rattles and I had horns and I was, like [to the people he was sharing the instruments with], ‘Here, just take this horn and blow into it. Like, you don’t need to know how to play it.’” Everything was being coordinated and explained on the spot. Once ready, Noise Against Nazis made their way to Court Square Park where the KKK was scheduled to hold their rally.

During my conversation with Isaac, we confirmed that I had indeed seen and heard Noise Against Nazis during the KKK rally, and I asked him if my recollection was similar to his:

Kyle: If I remember this correctly, [...] the rhythms [of the drums] were more kind of serving as kind of a foundation for all the chants [by fellow counter-protesters nearby].

Isaac: That’s what we realized very quickly, which was that, that was our purpose, you know — the rhythm of the chants.

[...]

I feel like people just followed the rhythm we were playing.

Kyle: Yeah.

Isaac: And it was great, because we could keep playing pretty indefinitely, because, well, compared to shouting, it’s not, it’s not quite as draining. So we’d keep playing, people would stop chanting, but there would still be this cacophonous sound keeping the energy of the whole protest up, which I was very pleased to discover that we served an actual purpose, rather than what I had originally intended — to drown [the KKK] out.

This is what I personally felt during the KKK rally, too. Chanting *is* tough: if you’re not careful you can lose your voice, or forget to take in enough oxygen, not to mention that it can feel physically taxing on your throat over time. With loud, energetic percussive

rhythms, however, not only do you have the opportunity to give your voice a rest, but there is also a new element of sound that can, in Isaac's words, keep "the energy of the whole protest up."

Importantly, once Isaac and his group arrived and began playing their instruments, their expectations for Noise Against Nazis — to drown out the KKK — did not meet the sono-affective realities of their performances, as seen in the effect it was having on themselves and those nearby. They "realized" their "purpose," as Isaac explained, which was to support the chanting by other counter-protesters not affiliated with Noise Against Nazis. There was an unexpected embodied element to it, as well. Paige stated that she chose a drum to play, and it created a sense of "power" for her:

I got one of the drums, which was really fun. But it was, like, a really powerful feeling just because I, you can probably tell I have a kind of very soft voice, so, like, being able to play with the drum was really empowering in that sense, because it felt like I was, like, using my whole body to make this noise.

Both Paige's and Isaac's recollections display the dynamic qualities of the sono-affective — the affective's constant "state of potentiality," as Kathleen Stewart explains,²⁴⁷ and the "ambiguity" of sound and listening, as Paul Carter argues.²⁴⁸ On one hand, the uncertainty surrounding the effects of the sounds expresses Stewart's "potentiality," and on the other hand, the affective web of possibilities dwells in Carter's "ambiguity." The activities of Noise Against Nazis did not match reality, in part, because of the sono-affective tools that

²⁴⁷ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 3.

²⁴⁸ Carter, "Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing, and Auditory Space," 44.

they were purposefully wielding. And as Isaac and Paige both expressed, they were delighted by the end results.

Noise Against Nazis also planned to counter-protest “Unite the Right.” From the beginning, however, it was clear that it would be a different sort of engagement. While the KKK rally involved only a dozen or so white supremacists, A12 was openly advertised by its proponents to be violent and attended by considerably more people. In fact, there was some uncertainty over whether Noise Against Nazis *would* show up on A12. Barry, another Noise Against Nazis member whom I conversed with, explained that he reached out to Isaac the night before, concerned about the violence occurring at UVA:

I was texting Isaac that day just to check-in [...] I think I had checked in to make sure he was okay after Friday night, and wanted to make sure that, like, people were still getting together the next day, ‘cause, like, I totally would have understood if he was like, “Okay, this is... you know, this is pretty scary, you know, like, maybe we don’t want to do this.”²⁴⁹

But Isaac was “gung-ho about it.” Advertisements were distributed, like the example shown in figure 27, and he was able to get more people involved for this second counter-protest: “It was kind of ragtag, like mish-mash of people from students, professors, people from the community,” about “fifty-ish” people.

Once Noise Against Nazis got to Market Street Park — where the alt-right were holding their “rally” — in the later morning, Isaac was shocked by what he was experiencing. “It felt like a war zone,” he explained, “as soon as we walked up, we all started coughing” from pepper spray and tear gas fumes in the air. Barry decided that, rather than play

²⁴⁹ “Barry,” interviewed by Kyle Chattleton at Oakhurst Inn Café, June 10, 2018.

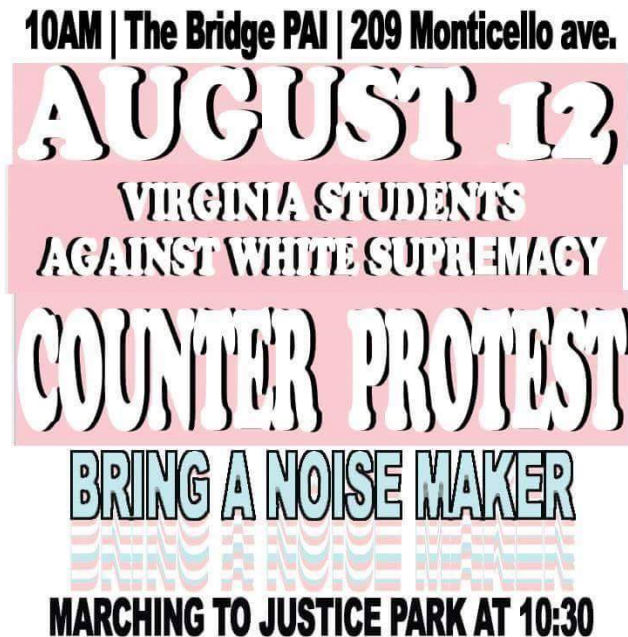


Figure 27. Advertisement for Noise Against Nazis.

a music instrument, he would help protect the group:

There were chants and singing and playing instruments and then, you know, the alt-right... “rally-ers” and whatnot, you know, would push down the stairs or push through the crowd, knock people over, attack them. And so, you know, I’d help pick people back up, and part of what I was specifically focused on doing myself was protecting the musicians. [...] Sometimes I would, like, link arms with people to form a barrier around them.

[...]

At a couple points, [the alt-right] would lash out into the crowd at us and I’d try to get in the way, or, you know, break things up.

And through their collective efforts, they were able to help community members who had showed up to counter-protest the alt-right. As Barry explained:

I think that particularly for the counter-protesters, the community members, I think that even with all the very obvious and direct violence going on, literally feet away, the fact that, like, people were there playing instruments, singing songs, and doing chants... at least gave them some measure of hope: "The community, this is what we're doing."

Noise Against Nazis, in other words, was there to support the community emotionally through sound and by offering "hope" in the midst of racial violence.

I distinctly remember, from my own experience of A12, a moment when tear gas began filling the air. As it so happened, my partner and I were right next to Barry, Paige, Isaac, and the other members of Noise Against Nazis. The tear gas caused us all to rush away from the gas and our position next to the alt-right. The fumes were painful; my partner began to heave, trying to clear his throat and breath. A few moments passed where I was disoriented — just trying to figure out what was going on and what I should be doing. Directly ahead of me was a musician holding a snare drum. He looked at the fellow drummer next to him, exchanged a few words, and then both began hammering out a simple, yet loud rhythm. They started slowly marching back to where we had dispersed from, shouting at those nearby to return to their prior position. For me, it was stirring, an incredibly powerful display of hope and purpose. I followed them back and started a chant matching the beat of the drum: "Black! Lives! Mat-ter! — Black! Lives! Mat-ter!" I will never forget that moment.

While Noise Against Nazis did not organize for any other events, their activism left a lasting impact, and not just on me, but also on each other. When Paige reflected on her counter-protest of the KKK rally, she expressed that:

It was almost like a jam, but with a really important purpose driving it. It felt like, with everybody participating and everyone else on the street clapping and joining in with us, it felt like a joyous powerful feeling. [...] That was a really powerful, joyous feeling being a part of that.

Through their efforts, Paige, Barry, and Isaac inspired those around them and helped fuel the fight against white supremacy in Charlottesville. They shared instruments, organized soundful protest, and countered physical violence with noise. This last example might appear to be a mismatch, but the members of Noise Against Nazis implicitly understood the power of their sono-affective activism. As scholar Deborah Gould explains, “one of the ways in which power operates is affectively: power is exercised through and reproduced in our feelings, and it is forceful and effective precisely because of that.”²⁵⁰ Noise Against Nazis reinforced a community desire to affectively define and defend our community as a welcoming place that nurtures joy and hope, set directly against the premeditated violent and oppressive soundings of the alt-right — both sides of this sono-affective battle steeped in historical resonance.

Misfires and Their Consequences

Around noon on August 12, 2017, the police forced the alt-right out of Market Street Park and into the nearby street where counter-protesters, like me and my partner, were stationed. I felt anxious about the inevitable confrontations the police were facilitating. In

²⁵⁰ Gould, *Moving Politics*, 39

fact, it was around this moment that Richard Wilson Preston fired his gun at local activists.²⁵¹ The scene was tense, and I wondered whether my partner and I — surrounded by countless rifles, shields, and bats — should leave what might become a mass-murder event.

But we, alongside many other community members, stood our ground and started to heckle at the alt-right: “Get the fuck out of here!,” “Go back home!,” “Fuck off!” Perhaps we stayed because we were enraged by their behavior, or maybe we felt emboldened by the looks of defeat sported on the faces of the white supremacists, who now started to head west toward McIntire Park to regroup. Positioned on the nearby sidewalk, I made an effort to make eye contact with as many people walking by as I could, and when their eyes met mine, I shouted: “HEY YOU, GO FUCK YOURSELF!” It was not normally in my character to act this way, but, in retrospect, I can see how the particular mixture of emotions — anxiety, rage, empowerment — and the stressful circumstances might provoke me to be so confrontational.

A group of three white men — perhaps in their twenties or thirties — walked by, and one of them did not appreciate my actions. He wore a blue metal helmet and wielded a pole (perhaps made out of plastic, I cannot remember fully). “Hey you, four eyes!,” he yelled at me, reaching back to a third-grade taunt about my glasses. I reacted incredulously, taking them off and asking, “You mean my *glasses*?” He got closer and swiped them out of my hand. They were cheap, plastic glasses from Wal-Mart, so they survived the fall. But

²⁵¹ Shapira, “Ku Klux Klan Leader Found Guilty for Firing Gun at Charlottesville Rally.”

upon seeing Mr. Blue Helmet's nearby friend — who was wearing an evidently more expensive ensemble of designer sunglasses, tan suit, slacks, and boat shoes — I loudly laughed and mocked his buddy's appearance: "*My glasses? Look at you!*" The look of embarrassment on both their faces was unmistakable. They had nothing more to say afterward, and rejoined the group heading to McIntire Park.

In other words, they misfired. Their intention was to put me in my place, but instead they left the situation feeling flustered. Crucially, there was, once again, a sonaffective dimension at work, and the sounds of the moment — namely my laughter and rebukes — were evidence of this affective misfire on the part of this group of white supremacists.

My understanding of such affective misfires is based on the work of Shoshana Felman. In *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, Felman expounds, building on the work of J. L. Austin, a framework for "misfires."²⁵² She argues that the failure to achieve an intentional act does not mean there are no results:

The act of failing thus opens up the space of referentiality — or of impossible reality — not because *something is missing*, but because *something else is done*, or because something else is said: the term 'misfire' does not refer to an absence, but to the enactment of a difference.²⁵³

²⁵² Felman's book has proved profoundly influential in linguistics and philosophy, as it dwells on the power of speech acts. Judith Butler, in her "Afterword" to the English translation, emphasizes how Felman captures the truly embodied nature of speech acts, including misfires. While I do not fully deploy Felman's theorization of misfire here, in that I am not expressly analyzing speech acts, I do note that there is an affective, sensorial connection between our approaches.

²⁵³ Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 57. Italics in original.

This concept of misfire, I believe, is invaluable for understanding the Summer of Hate. As I have stated earlier, affect and sound are important aspects of alt-right strategies. Many “Unite the Right” participants expressed a desire to traumatize and frighten counter-protesters in Charlottesville with their renditions of the Rebel Yell, for example, and video and audio recordings from A11/12 are evidence of their intentionally violent performances of white supremacy. In many ways, the alt-right succeeded in traumatizing, injuring, and, in one case, murdering members of the local community. But while countless actions undertaken by the alt-right led to these outcomes, there were also innumerable examples of other possibilities, the “enactment of difference,” as Felman states.

Put another way, their actions have led to dire consequences for themselves and their violent activism. Jason Kessler, for example, no longer calls Charlottesville home thanks to the activism of local residents (including a September 2017 sticker campaign, shown in figure 28, that was posted throughout the city), and has since moved elsewhere.²⁵⁴ Richard Spencer began a speaking tour of universities throughout the United States, but had to cut it short due to the counter-demonstrations he encountered at each stop, counter-demonstrations that were *fueled* by his actions in Charlottesville²⁵⁵; as a result, Spencer declared that he was not having “fun” anymore on his college tour, and that anti-racist activists were “winning.”²⁵⁶ Infighting has recently plagued white supremacist circles, due in part to the negative attention their organizations and causes have received post-“Unite

²⁵⁴ Yager, “Living Next Door to a White Supremacist.”

²⁵⁵ Lenz, “Richard Spencer Cancels Speaking Tour of College Campuses after Speech in Michigan.”

²⁵⁶ Lennard, “Is Antifa Counterproductive?”



Figure 28. A local sticker campaign in Charlottesville. (Photo by Aldona Dye)

the Right.”²⁵⁷ Charlottesville has seen a “blooming and flowering of activism”²⁵⁸ aimed at addressing city issues, including systemic racism, affordable housing, and the election of progressive political candidates to local government. And community members are continually finding new ways to repair and pivot from the trauma of the Summer of Hate and to counter the message and violence of that event. These can all be considered examples of

²⁵⁷ Hayden, “Is the Alt-right Dying?”

²⁵⁸ Suarez, “Through a Year of Chaos, Charlottesville Has Seen ‘A Blooming and Flowering of Activism.’”

“affective misfires” on the part of white supremacists that have come about as a result of A11/12.²⁵⁹

This does not mean, however, that white supremacist violence has been eliminated, nor that the racist individuals and organizations affiliated with the Summer of Hate have been fully countered. The fact that there is still so much work to be done in Charlottesville, let alone areas beyond this Central Virginia city, attests to this reality. But it would be incorrect to state that “Unite the Right” was a success for Richard Spencer et al., as the misfires from their “rally” demonstrate.

* * *

During my conversation with Paige, she recounted her first-hand experience of August 11 at the University of Virginia. During that terrible evening, she and some friends gathered around the statue of Thomas Jefferson just north of the Rotunda along with several others — holding signs, singing songs, and waiting for the alt-right inevitably to surround them in that space. As she shared with me her memories of that night, she often paused, sometimes for long periods, between her statements. Her details captured what sounded like a truly terrifying scene. But in the midst of her harrowing story, I could audibly glean a powerful testimony of resilience and hope. Her memories marked affective states that were initiated by the very individuals who were seeking to belittle and traumatize her:

²⁵⁹ But can also, in certain instances, be seen as the result of locals’ hope. See Epilogue.

And then they finally came up around us... And then they were spitting at us, they were screaming at us, jabbing their flamesssssss... and then we were surrounded. They were very drunk. But then there was, I don't know if it was adrenaline or what, but I thought they looked kind of pathetic. I could feel everybody's energy start to go up. Our chants became way more unified, for a second I felt, our group felt powerful — we weren't going anywhere.

Then a fight broke out, they were throwing pepper spray at us, people were getting hit, people were crying, and screaming. I just remember one of my friend's faces all broken and swollen, she was screaming, "Chemicals! Chemicals!" They broke our group, then overtook the statue, surrounding each of us. I couldn't see any of my friends.

There were these three big guys circling around me with their torches... I remember this one guy, I'll never forget him, he says..., "Bet you feel so strong now! Bet you feel *so fucking* strong!" After I'm all alone. He was just screaming, and screaming, and screaming at me. Just circling around me like a shark. I mean... I don't know, I never felt so powerless in my life, sitting in my flip-flops, this dude twice my size screaming at me. I just kind of looked him in the eye, and I think he was waiting for me to respond, like he was waiting for me to say something. I was just looking at him silently. And then when he had a second to catch his breath... honestly it made that whole night worth it, because he ran out of words, I could just see it in his eyes for a second that he was... like, harassing a young girl half his size. And then he walked away, and the three of them left.

Throughout the course of my research on the Summer of Hate, I have experienced an ethnographic journey of trauma, history, and activism. It is clear to me, in so many ways, that locals wrested control from those who sought to inflict physical and emotional pain on them. I see, hear, and feel it through stories such as Paige's, which teem with emotions of empowerment, and through other experiences that add rich complexity to Charlottesville's recent history.

But for many, the work taking place in the wake of "Unite the Right" is still ongoing. It occurs in numerous venues, and one of the most dynamic, I have found, is the City

Council chambers, where local residents agitate for positive policies for the community while also arguing over what, exactly, their local democracy should sound and feel like.

CHAPTER 4

Performing, Debating, and Feeling Democracy

“When people are hurting, they are going to express themselves in the way in which they feel will get your attention, because the way they’ve been going about it before has been ignored.”

—Councilor Wes Bellamy at a City Council meeting, January 2, 2018

“There has been a lot of very strong emotion expressed in our chambers by people who are deeply traumatized. How do you have that happen when you also need to do the public’s business?”

—Councilor Mike Signer to NPR, March 20, 2019

“Let’s face it, democracy is a messy thing, it’s a messy, messy thing. It doesn’t happen in a vacuum, and it’s not perfect and it can’t be scripted.”

—UVA Professor Walt Heinecke at a City Council meeting, February 5, 2018

A Civic Soundscape

Charlottesville’s local politics have significantly transformed in the months leading up to and the years following the Summer of Hate. Evidence of this evolution can be explored via the sono-affective dimension of Charlottesville City Council meetings. In previous years the Council was known by many local residents as a politically anemic forum for inconsequential bureaucratic minutiae. But Council meetings have since become political events featuring frequent disruptions with chants, boos, hisses, cackles, speeches, pop music, finger snaps, and other sonic markers of an invigorated citizenry. In this chapter, I argue that these audible activities, and attempts to police them, enact competing conceptions and feelings about what living in a democracy should or might be in the wake of re-



Figure 29. The Charlottesville City Council chamber, looking toward the dais.

-cent history. I specifically focus on local politics and City Council meetings surrounding the Summer of Hate, from 2016–2019.

These forms of activism coincide with city-wide discussions centering on the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of the recent City Council soundscape. Community discourse frequently draws attention to how citizens are affected, or are choosing to affect, the City Council chamber — for example, how individuals are “angry” because they “feel they are not being listened to,” or how an “angry mob” is “scaring” concerned citizens into silence. Some locals argue that a polite decorum of “quiet” is necessary for democratic government to function properly (an echo of Thomas Jefferson’s conception of the Academical Village), while others view noisy disruptions as a strategy to balance power between

citizens and their representatives. In response to these collective developments, members of the City Council have struggled either to control audible activism or to adjust Council procedures to the ever-evolving civic soundscape.

The sonic dimensions of these government proceedings are not anomalous in contemporary American political activism. In 2011, when Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker proposed a budget that would impact collective bargaining rights for unions, pro-union activists occupied the State Capitol armed with a “raucous drum circle” and chanting.²⁶⁰ Abortion rights advocates effectively stopped the passage of the 2013 Texas Senate Bill 5 by wielding disruptive noise from the State Capitol Senate gallery; that sonic intervention prevented the enactment of additional abortion regulations for the state and earned it the nickname “the People’s Filibuster.”²⁶¹ During the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, participants used chants,²⁶² percussive performances,²⁶³ and songs²⁶⁴ to articulate the demand that politicians “HEAR [THEIR] VOICE,” the motto of the event, as shown in figure 30. Citizens have used sonic methods in recent history to protest government officials from Donald Trump²⁶⁵ to Barack Obama²⁶⁶ to Karl Rove.²⁶⁷ The audible activism at

²⁶⁰ See Simmons, “Anatomy of a Protest.”

²⁶¹ See Zirin, “It Was Like a Wall of Sound.”

²⁶² See Manabe, “Chants from the Women’s March NYC, January 21, 2017.”

²⁶³ See Kinney, “The Beating Heart of the Women’s March.”

²⁶⁴ See Tom Bolles, “Chants & Cheers of the Women’s March – Short Documentary.”

²⁶⁵ See Epstein, “‘New York Hates You.’”

²⁶⁶ See Liptak, “Obama Shuts Down White House Heckler.”

²⁶⁷ See Garofoli, “Occupy ‘Mic Checks’ During Karl Rove Speech.”



Figure 30. The official poster for the Women's March, designed by Liza Donovan.

this juncture in America's history calls for a nuanced and critical scholarship. It requires that attention be paid to the sonic dimensions of protest and its related affects within a democratic society. My research on the Charlottesville City Council reveals that residents understand sound as being a critical aspect of the local democratic process, and that sound has tremendous affective capabilities — specifically as a tool to steer local government to make certain political and policy decisions. However, there is a much-discussed divide among city residents. This described schism can be represented by former and current

members of the Council, such as Kathy Galvin, Mike Signer, and Wes Bellamy, who differed on the question of whether sound impedes or rehabilitates local city governance.²⁶⁸

While these viewpoints are instructional, they are only two sides of a particular debate — the former Mayor, Nikuyah Walker, for example, has engaged in a position between these two opinions²⁶⁹ — and they fall short of representing a more complex and multifaceted reality. My ethnographic research from these meetings captures the messiness of Charlottesville’s politics as sounded out during City Council proceedings. Sonic subterfuge — heckling, chanting, coughing — from local activists has demonstrated the capacity to unpredictably sway government policy. Decisions by Councilors to either enforce or put aside rules of decorum are variously motivated by the emotions of apprehension, anxiety, despondency, and hope. The silence of an audience represents its cooperation and support just as frequently as it does their deep resentment of the speaker and/or the issues being addressed. Precarious rumors in the local papers become arresting facts once uttered from the dais. As a whole, the sono-affective dimension of City Council meetings evokes a tense battle among citizens and government officials, each attempting to affectively move the city in their conception of a positive direction.

I offer this chapter, in part, as evidence of a “performed democracy” taking place in the midst of Charlottesville’s City Council meetings. I draw upon ethnomusicologist Donna Buchanan’s definition of the concept:

²⁶⁸ See Elliott, “Hear Me by Any Means Necessary.”

²⁶⁹ See below, § Interrogating the Debate.

Evidence of continual sociomusical change and adaptation, embedded with all of the processes, contradictions, ironies, dreams, and expectations of the political transition and the mythologies of democracy it signified [, ...] how these musicians performed and are performing democracy.²⁷⁰

Buchanan uses the term to describe a transitional period in Bulgaria's history during the 1980s and 90s, from socialism to democracy, and how musicians sounded-out the transformations of this process on a national level. My project is different in that I expand the framework from music to sound, and additionally include emotions and affects which mark and cultivate a localized democracy. Or, to put it differently, I am interested in how local democracy can be both heard and felt as it is performed.

The democratic performances I detail in this chapter are rooted in a fundamental desire to achieve differing visions of local governance in Charlottesville. For example, activists are not only engaged with the City Council soundscape through snaps, chanting, singing, contrived coughing, and other intentional sounds designed to influence political outcomes, but they also consider this sonic activity essential for democratic equity; they believe this to be the proper role of an active and politically aware citizenry. Conversely, several participants routinely attempt to return the soundscape to what has been described as “normal,” or, in other words, return it to a quieter and more orderly setting. This is shown in Councilors' and audience members' attempts to maintain rules and procedures, to deliver recurring speeches on the need for “civility,” and their promotion of a “civility” discourse in other forums such as Facebook, local newspapers, and everyday conversation.

²⁷⁰ Buchanan, *Performing Democracy*, xix.

City residents acutely recognize the affective potential of these performances. Jalane Schmidt²⁷¹ has stated:

I have no energy for this talk of civility. It masks a very uncivil situation that has persisted for centuries. [...] You all are complaining about the fire alarm [the “noise” of City Council meetings], and we’re complaining about the smoke and flames that are engulfing us [e.g., racism, housing inequality, police tactics] and have been for a long time.²⁷²

Schmidt, in other words, hears the transformed City Council soundscape as evidence of city-wide issues and the severity of those issues, which have been left unaddressed by local government. Conversely, Jim Hingeley, known by some as “Mr. Civility,” disagrees, viewing the percolating soundscape as “intimidation by an angry mob,” causing city residents to think twice about addressing the City Council with their important concerns.²⁷³ In other words, disruptions that have pervaded recent meetings result in important city-wide issues festering and being left unaddressed by the City Council. The stakes for local governance and community, therefore, are high. Each act of sonic disruption, each act to temper noise, each act to bolster one vision or the other for the City Council is an attempt to gain control of local politics. The contested soundscape is evidence of, in the words of Judith Butler:

²⁷¹ Whose activism is discussed earlier in chapter 1 § “Unprecedented.”

²⁷² Wren, “Incivility at Council Meetings Defended.”

²⁷³ Ibid.

Moments in which the utterance forces a blurring between the two [the imposter and the real authority], where the utterance calls into question the established grounds of legitimacy, where the utterance, in fact, performatively produces a shift in the terms of legitimacy as an *effect* of the utterance itself.²⁷⁴

A salient statement easily adaptable to Charlottesville, some Councilors and citizens frequently argue over the “true” or “ideal” form of local democracy. I understand this battle over legitimacy — of what democracy should *sound* like — as audible, and that the sounds are not only evidence of the contestation, but also the tools with which the battle is actively contested, “the *effect* of the utterance itself.”

Lastly, there is a crucial emotional dimension to these discussions and to the experience of democratic contestation in the City Council chamber. In conversations I have had with local residents, democracy often connotes feelings. Moving further from or closer to an “ideal” democratic environment can evoke apprehension and anxiety to some in the chamber, or joy and uplift to others. Government itself “should be exciting,” as one resident told me. “I wish City Council was boring again,” said another. Democracy, in other words, can both create and require particular affects and emotions according to Charlottesville locals.

I divide this chapter into two parts. The first deals with the sono-affective dimension of the City Council: how sound is performed and contests democracy as envisioned and experienced. I then follow with a section detailing more fully the city-wide discourse

²⁷⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 146–147.

concerning the audible character of the Council chamber and its resulting emotional consequences. Throughout, I draw upon dozens of hours of participant observation during City Council meetings,²⁷⁵ conversations with audience members, and local texts.

Part 1: Hearing an Affecting Democracy

Timed Participation

I first became aware of Charlottesville's City Council on August 21, 2017. It was the day of the initial meeting following the violence of August 11 and 12. During the proceedings, and for weeks after the fact, local discourse became fixated on the spectacle of the meeting. I distinctly remember first seeing the unfurled sign held behind the dais by activists, with big block letters and smeared red handprints conveying an explicit message: "BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS"; figure 31 captures this moment. The live online feed of the proceedings was cacophonous, and, when subsequently watching this feed, while I had difficulty making out most individual statements during the furor, I found it noteworthy that "You didn't listen!" was consistently repeated by the citizens attending. Mayor Mike Signer was unable to control the activity despite his continual yelling into the microphone, blaring out instructions to all present: "I'M GONNA START EXPELLING ANYBODY [...] MA'AM YOU'VE BEEN CALLED TO ORDER [...] I'M GONNA ASK THE OFFIC-

²⁷⁵ City officials have uploaded videos of numerous meeting proceedings online at Charlottesville.gov, although the audio techniques employed during these recordings tend to diminish the sounds coming from the audience. The audio recordings I have included below, as well as video recording 1, more fully detail the sounds of the City Council chamber during official proceedings, at least from the perspective of someone attending from the audience seats.



Figure 31. A scene from the August 21, 2017 City Council meeting.

-ERS TO IDENTIFY ANYBODY WHO SPEAKS OUT!” As tensions continued to escalate, police officers escorted the Councilors from the room, and a yell from the crowd made clear what was taking place: “IF WE DON’T GET IT, SHUT IT DOWN!”

It was the talk of the town, to say the least. Almost everyone I spoke with in the following days had heard about what took place at that City Council meeting. As Chris Suarez of the *Daily Progress* described the proceedings, the meeting was “overwhelmed by anger.”²⁷⁶ National media, from CNN²⁷⁷ to the *New York Times*,²⁷⁸ wrote articles about

²⁷⁶ Suarez, “Three Arrested as Councilors Vote to Shroud Confederate Statues at Meeting Overwhelmed by Anger.”

²⁷⁷ See Boyette, Park, and Simon, “Tensions Flare at Charlottesville City Council Meeting.”

²⁷⁸ See Robles, “Chaos Breaks Out at Charlottesville City Council Meeting.”

the fracas. My friends and I talked about how we wanted to attend the next meeting to see what would happen.

I should clarify that the August 21 meeting was not understood locally as merely a headline or the latest town chatter. The fact that activists took over a City Council meeting felt symbolic, evidence of where the city was now, emotionally, in the wake of August 11 and 12. Many city residents, including myself, were traumatized by what had taken place in Charlottesville and furious at how city officials had failed to adequately protect us from violence. In many ways, the activities in the Council chamber confirmed the outrage we were collectively feeling.

I sensed both the possibility for ethnographic research and a venue in which I could become more involved as a city resident. So on September 5, 2017 I went to my first Charlottesville City Council meeting. The chamber was full of activists carrying signs, multiple police officers, and a discernible “charged” feeling wafting over the space. Cameras were shuttering. Neighbors were murmuring with one another. The din of engaged citizens continued even as the meeting began with remarks by Mayor Signer. The occasional “shh” eventually led to a level of “quiet” that seemed to calm some, including myself.

In an audible sign of shifting politics, the Council proceedings were now altered so that a “Matters by the Public” section began earlier in the meeting than it had before. This was done in part to address concerns voiced at previous meetings about the need to prioritize the thoughts and complaints of citizens before all other City Council business. This earlier public forum section would, over the course of many future meetings, become a

space where local residents could *collectively* voice their opinions. If a speaker advocated for social justice policies, for example, the audience could respond back with snapping, cheers, applause, and encouraging phrases. On the other hand, if a speech highlighting the need for civility was given, the audience might laugh at the speaker, shout “You’re wrong!,” or begin to converse with one another — an audible performance of dissent. No longer a forum for lone persons to address their representatives, “Matters by the Public” became a soundscape in which the public could address their government or one another, as individual hecklers or as a chanting group.

Councilor Kristin Szakos began to preside over this section of the meeting, another audible sign of shifting politics. The absence of Signer’s voice directing the proceedings was remarkable, since the Mayor normally presides over all aspects of the meeting. Many, myself included, understood this to be a sign that the Councilors were not pleased with Signer’s recent alleged actions in response to August 11 and 12. Specifically, his silencing in front of the public was seen as evidence that information critical of Chief of Police Al Thomas and City Manager Maurice Jones had been leaked by him to the press.²⁷⁹ I heard whispers nearby mocking the fact that Signer had been de-platformed, and a few chuckles. It was but one of many moments where I was surprised to witness behind-the-scenes politicking laid bare for all to see, and in this case also to hear the reactions to it.

The first speaker was local Dave Ghamandi. In time, I would come to recognize his addressing the Council, and the participation from the audience, as exemplary of a

²⁷⁹ See Suarez, “Signer’s Role as Mayor to Be Diminished Following Grilling by Councilors Behind Closed Doors.”

changing City Council meeting culture that was teeming with sono-affective qualities. But as an ethnographer attending my first City Council meeting, I was initially surprised by what I experienced in this moment. Ghamandi began cordially: “Good evening, Councilors. I just said my name is Dave Ghamandi, I live just outside the city limits.”²⁸⁰ The light upward inflection he added to “city limits” felt to me that he was being friendly to the Councilors, but the remarks that followed would imply otherwise. “We find the Council’s response to be woefully inadequate.” The first smattering of snaps from the audience began; his comments would frequently be complemented by this audible engagement from the audience. He said he was additionally disappointed by the fact that Signer had not resigned, and he pointed out that an independent review of the city’s handling of the Summer of Hate, ordered by the City Council, would be led by a lawyer who had donated to Signer’s election campaign. The snaps and occasional claps from the attending public seemed to indicate that they too felt disappointed with their government leaders. As he continued, he used his remarks to add an edge to his overall message: the “evil” inherent in capitalism, the focus on profits more than the city’s well-being, how “appalled” everyone was at the “propaganda” from local businesses. I could hear the emotion in his words rippling through the audience.²⁸¹ “How can you all say you stand for ‘love’ when you have

²⁸⁰ See audio recording 2.

²⁸¹ Reminiscent of Susanna Paasonen’s theorization of affective “resonance”: “Resonance implies connectivity and contact between objects, ideas and people as they affect one another; it is a dynamic of sensory relation with varying intensities and speeds where the affective and the emotional stick and cohere” (Paasonen, “Grains of Resonance”: 352). Ethnomusicologists Katie J. Graber and Matthew Sumera also argue that there is the vibrational, sonic *resonance* at work, too: “Resonance as a vibrational force — separate from or in addition to the structures and sounds of music — is an essential concept

proven to us you don't have a spine?"²⁸² A long pause followed, and then the emotional connection was made with those nearby: "Mmmmmmm." "MMM!" "MmmMMMmmm." My neighbors in the audience immediately hummed-out this sound of affirmation into the chamber. At the conclusion of his speech, a loud series of laughs, cheers, and rapturous applause from the audience communicated joy and solidarity with Ghamandi.

While I would slowly come to realize that Ghamandi and audience members' sono-affective interplay were emblematic and constitutive of local democratic performances, there was another facet at work, one which would symbolize a growing debate taking place within the city: what should local democracy sound like? The performance by Ghamandi and his audible supporters insisted on a more untidy, spontaneous, and audience-focused rendition.

But Councilor Szakos, through her words and actions, would argue for something different. Earlier in the meeting, she reiterated the rules for the public forum: that there were to be no interruptions, cussing, or speaking out of turn, and that speakers should pay attention to the timer.²⁸³ The timer itself is divided into two physical parts. The first is a

for music scholars to examine, as it opens up a range of sonic affectivities. [...] The resonance of sound and affect in a way that takes seriously the contagiousness and connectedness of each" (Graber and Sumera, "Interpretation, Resonance, Embodiment": 10). With Ghamandi's speech, there is much at work to note — the symbolism *and* acoustics of speaking within the City Council chambers, the semantics *and* timbre of his speech. In the chambers, I frequently noticed the presence and dynamic of this entanglement, and Ghamandi was a figure who seemed to channel them most effectively, at least when it came to delivering a *rousing* and *infectious* speech.

²⁸² A reference to Signer's infamous tweet, shown in figure 21.

²⁸³ See audio recording 3.

small black box in the middle of the dais with three lights — green, yellow, and red. When an individual begins addressing the Council, the green light turns on, and a digital display in the back of the room — the second part — counts down from three minutes. The yellow light signals that fifteen seconds are left, and the red light means that the speaker’s time is up. For added emphasis, a musical descending third also chimes at “0:00.”

This timer caused some anxiety for me and others during this and many following meetings. It was a source of tension symbolizing for many of us that the city was imposing boundaries on the ability of city residents to address their government officials. Speeches would begin, signaled by the green light on the dais. But as soon as the light turned yellow, I would wonder, *Will this speech end “on time?” Will Szakos give a few more seconds to let the speaker finish? If not, will she ask the police to intervene?* While the descending third and the red light marked when a speech was “supposed” to be over, it did not indicate if a speech was actually going to end.

At the September 5, 2017 meeting, I felt this anxiety during the third speech of the public forum. Resident Jim Baker used his time to chastise members of Council, the City Manager, and the Chief of Police.²⁸⁴ With the seconds approaching zero on the timer, Baker made no effort to show that he was concluding his thoughts:

Baker: As for the Mayor and Council, the Mayor knows what to do, he really does...

Audience member: Resign.

²⁸⁴ See audio recording 4.

Baker: [*sigh*] It seems a lack of sense of shame, hubris, the valuation of personal ambition over public good if corrupt or [unintelligible] once with good intentions.

[*timer goes off*]

Szakos: Thank you.

Baker: Please resign.

Audience: [*claps*]

Baker: You stand in the way of community's healing.

Audience: [*claps, cheers*]

Szakos: Don Gathers [is next to speak].

Baker: I know that...

Szakos: Sir, that, that, sorry you're done...

Baker: ...personal relationships stand in the way.

Szakos: That's your one warning.

Baker: Please let it go. [*returns to seat*]

Szakos' interjections were quick and concise at first, in order to mark when she believed the speech should end, but when Baker made no effort to move away from the dais, Szakos called Don Gathers as the next speaker. As soon as Baker continued with his delivery, Szakos interrupted and made it fully clear that the speech was "supposed" to be over. Throughout I felt a mix of emotions: solidarity with his statements, anxiety with the stand-off, and concern over whether the police in the room might get involved.

As Baker and many other speakers would argue through their vocalizations in the meetings ahead, the speech did not have to be over. Being audible beyond the threshold of the timer became a sonic intervention that allowed for the possibility of the public, rather than the City Council, to dictate the proceedings of the meeting. The timer would continue to be ignored over and over again at that September 5 meeting, and in each instance there was a level of palpable contestation. I nervously laughed when Dr. M. Rick Turner — former head of the Albemarle-Charlottesville chapter of the NAACP — spoke, not because of what he had to say, but because of the way in which he and Szakos seemingly performed a vocal duet in their desire to reach the end of Turner's speech, albeit through different means:²⁸⁵

[*timer goes off*]

Szakos: Thank you, Dr. Turner.

Turner: In the coming weeks...

Szakos: Thank you.

Turner: ...and months, at the protests of the police among us... the NAACP will ask these and other...

Szakos: Dr. Turner...

Turner: ...hard questions of city officials, state police officials, and the governor.

Szakos: Dr. Turner...

Turner: ...as we carry out our...

²⁸⁵ See audio recording 5.

Szakos: Dr. Turner, your three minutes are up, thank you.

Turner: ...NAACP members and all citizens...

Szakos: Your three minutes are up, thank...

Turner: ...Commonwealth of Virginia.

Szakos: Thanks, appreciate it.

Turner: Thank you.

With each interruption, whether from Szakos or from whomever else was speaking to the Council, an audible and performative contest was taking place either to reestablish or to challenge the democratic status quo. In the wake of A11/12 and the August 21 meeting, the possibility of Councilors losing *their* control over the proceedings was easily discernible. Many of the individuals present had lost respect for their city representatives. It was perceived by some within the chamber, therefore, that Szakos' ability to maintain the regulatory power of the timer was an important issue moving forward.

Judith Butler explores the transformative potential of sonic acts in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Butler explains that "utterances" have the ability to challenge the "codes of legitimacy":

Moments in which the utterance forces a blurring between the two [the imposter and the real authority], where the utterance calls into question the established grounds of legitimacy, where the utterance, in fact, performatively produces a shift in the terms of legitimacy as an *effect* of the utterance itself.

[...]

By understanding the false or wrong invocations as *reiterations*, we see how the form of social institutions undergoes change and alteration and how an invocation that has no prior legitimacy can have the effect of challenging existing forms of legitimacy, breaking open the possibility of future forms.²⁸⁶

I hear Butler's "utterances" as the sonic disruptions that challenge the limitations of the timer, and thereby also challenge the authority of the City Council. The process by which the speakers and Szakos continually acted to regulate the other through sound was authority transforming in real time. Indeed, whereas past confrontations prior to the August 21 meeting were decidedly in favor of the City Council, the presence of a hostile audience post-A11/12 and a series of willfully loquacious speakers signified a "reiterated" contestation. In the audible tension caused by the timer, "future forms" could be prophesized, including the negation of the timer altogether, or, as it would eventually happen, alterations to how the timer was utilized.

At these meetings I frequently heard, both in passing conversation and in direct addresses to the Councilors, that the timer was negatively affecting the proceedings. Szakos would repeatedly be confronted with lengthy speeches that called into question the ability of the timer to regulate the City Council soundscape. Some instances would result in chants of "Let her speak!," referring to the public comment speaker, or threats of removal from the chamber by police officers. It became increasingly apparent that the tension was not going to be ameliorated under the present rules and procedures.

²⁸⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 146–147.

As such, City Councilors began a series of policy discussions, with consultation from the public, concerning new regulations for the meetings. On February 5, 2018, the Council voted in favor of these proposals, a move that was widely praised by city residents. However, as exemplified by comments made by Walt Heinecke, a professor at the University of Virginia, to the Council, these changes were only a piece of the puzzle:

Heinecke: So, we're kinda moving in the right direction, but I've said this before here and I just want to remind you that, you know, the civility in this room and the way things go are partially rule-bound, but there's a direct inverse relationship with your ability to be empathetic with the problems of people in this community, especially low-income people in this community.

Audience: [*snaps, claps*]

Heinecke: So, I'm hoping that when you're focusing on those rules you're still thinking about the culture of, you know, responding to people and listening to people and acting on people's concerns in this community [...] Because let's face it, democracy is a messy thing, it's a messy, messy thing. It doesn't happen in a vacuum, and it's not perfect and it can't be scripted.

In other words, the desire for order enforced by the timer and other regulations would not stifle dissent from the citizenry, nor would merely any positive alterations to those institutions. Regulations governing Council procedures were widely perceived as part of a larger problem in which the City Council was failing to listen to the local population. Only a sincere effort to address the issues of racism, affordable housing, police practices, and related progressive causes could relieve the tension between government and citizens.

“I’m Loud and I’m Black”

White-dominated Charlottesville has historically and systemically dehumanized the local Black community. The University of Virginia, for example, was built by enslaved laborers²⁸⁷ and city officials heavily resisted desegregation;²⁸⁸ the K–12 public education system is still segregated.²⁸⁹ Vinegar Hill, once a thriving community of Black families and businesses, was torn down in the 1960s and replaced with a Staples, McDonald’s, and empty parking lots.²⁹⁰ UVA became a leader in the eugenics movement during the first half of the 1900s.²⁹¹ Gentrification,²⁹² racial terrorism,²⁹³ and the lack of affordable housing²⁹⁴ has led to a steady decline in the Black population. Local activists have organized for a Police Civilian Review Board to address racial disparities in Charlottesville Police practices.²⁹⁵ And as I have addressed earlier,²⁹⁶ these facts are only the tip of the iceberg.

The weekend of August 11 and 12 became a symbolic microcosm of these realities. That event sounded-out and performed white supremacist ideologies — on August 11 at

²⁸⁷ See Nelson and Zehmer, “Slavery and Construction,” in *Educated in Tyranny*.

²⁸⁸ See Railton, “Segregated Cville.”

²⁸⁹ See Green and Waldman, “You Are Still Black.”

²⁹⁰ See Saunders and Shackelford, *Urban Renewal and the End of Black Culture in Charlottesville, Virginia*.

²⁹¹ See Reynolds, “Eugenics at the University of Virginia and Its Legacy in Health Disparities,” in *Charlottesville 2017*.

²⁹² See Griesedieck, Hassler, and Clifton, “Gentrification in Charlottesville.”

²⁹³ See Schmidt, “Charlottesville’s Courthouse Confederate Soldier Statue.”

²⁹⁴ See Paschall, “Report.”

²⁹⁵ See Woods and Robinson, “Charlottesville Civilian Review Board Finds Its Footing.”

²⁹⁶ See chapter 1 § “Unprecedented”; chapter 1 § (Re)Constructing the Narrative.

a statue to the city's most famous citizen, Thomas Jefferson, and on August 12 only a few blocks from the former site of Vinegar Hill, near the Lee and Jackson statues that were homages to the Jim Crow "Lost Cause" movement. Citizens gave voice to these embodied metaphors of city politics and history during a special session called by the City Council for the presentation of the "Heaphy Report." Tim Heaphy, of Hunton & Williams LLP, was tasked by the Council to lead an independent review of the city's actions surrounding "Unite the Right," as well as the earlier Ku Klux Klan rally that took place in July 2017.

On December 4, 2017, Heaphy presented his findings to the City Council, and I was there for this more-than-seven-hour meeting. The public comment section following his remarks was long, emotional, clamorous, and noisy. For example, Dave Ghamandi, mentioned previously, delivered a speech near the beginning of the forum, and his statements were punctuated by audience participation:

Ghamandi: So this is what a world class city looks like?

Audience: "Mmmmm," "Yep!," "Ha ha!"

Ghamandi: Right now you all couldn't run a PTA.

Audience: [*laughter, claps, and snaps*]

Ghamandi: This so-called independent review is not gonna wash the blood off your hands.

Audience: [*claps*]

Ghamandi: The review is full of errors and omissions and is an insult to the dead, the wounded, and the community. Accountability is long overdue, and as I said earlier [City Manager] Jones, [Chief of Police] Thomas, and the majors must go. We need to defund the police department...

Audience: [*claps, screams*]

Ghamandi: ...we need to *unarm* the police department.

Audience: [*claps, screams*]

Ghamandi: That's C'Ville police, UVA police, Albemarle and state police.
Racism is in their DNA.

Audience: Yes! [*claps, screams*]

By now, I had heard Ghamandi speak on a number of occasions since I was first introduced to him in September, and each time his name was announced for the upcoming public forum section I grew anxious and excited, anticipating a confrontational speech. Others present would exude happiness, cheering him on as he made his way to the dais, applauding him for choosing to speak, and sending good thoughts and 'Go get 'em's. Ghamandi had a certain knack for rousing the audience and performing an exhilarating oration replete with accusations — aimed at city officials — of racism, elite mentality, and being downright out-of-touch with city residents. He additionally never shied away from direct confrontation with the Councilors, oftentimes looking them straight in the eye as he was speaking about them. His remarks during this meeting were just another example of what I had come to expect from Ghamandi.

It was a different performance strategy from Dr. Turner, also mentioned previously, who was now next to speak. Rather than pause for the audience to respond to his phrases, and thus become part of his speech, Turner added weight to his thoughts by emphasizing, through contrasting loudness, certain words:

You know, after reviewing the report I knew that I had to be here this evening, because if I wasn't, perhaps, what I have to say wouldn't be said. I agree with the report, that the city and state police were unprepared to deal with the CHAOTIC events that occurred in July and August. ONE OF MY COLLEAGUES... commented that there's plenty of blame to go around. Some of the chaos occurred because of the historic RACISM in this city, AND I DOUBT THAT Chief Thomas, City Manager Maurice Jones or the City Councilors ANTICIPATED that RACISM would raise its ugly head to the extent that it did. Our city officials, like so many of us, tend to avoid issues of race. The problem of racism in the Charlottesville police department is an OLD one.

Ghamandi and Turner's messages were focused on racism in Charlottesville, but each had his own method of sonic performance. I heard strategic pauses in Ghamandi's delivery, with the aim of allowing and encouraging responses from the audience. Turner recited his prepared remarks almost musically, and accented phrases and terms that emphasized the meaning of his statement. There was another layer behind his delivery, however: Turner's status as a leader of the local Black community afforded his words additional symbolic value. Turner did not appreciate how the two most prominent Black city officials, Thomas and Jones, were receiving the brunt of blame for August 11 and 12. He felt his voice was necessary, because if he was not present, "perhaps, what I [had] to say wouldn't be said."

Race and racism continued to dominate the public comment section. The next two speakers each wore "Black Lives Matter" t-shirts. Local leader Don Gathers followed by deriding Heaphy for ignoring the main motivation behind "Unite the Right": "racism." Some speakers questioned the original cover image for the report, shown in figure 32, of a Black Charlottesville police officer flanked by Ku Klux Klan members.

HUNTON &
WILLIAMS



Figure 32. The original cover page of the “Heaphy report.”

Nearly seven hours after the meeting began, the proceedings started to wrap up. Earlier, Mayor Signer had made a statement reminding the Councilors and audience members still present that, while he recognized the prevalence of racism, the Jewish community of Charlottesville was also terrorized by “Unite the Right.” City resident Andrea Massey felt compelled to address this matter to the Council during the final public comment section of the meeting. Specifically, she had a message for Signer:

Massey: I sat in my seat and I shrunk, Mike Signer. I’m Jewish. As you tried to explain your Jewishness in relation to Black Americans in this city...

Audience: [*snaps*]

Massey: I sat and I shrank... it was so embarrassing as a Jewish person to listen to that. I...

Her words drifted into silence, and she paused for almost two minutes until she could speak again. Her anger, her sadness, and her statement echoed the predominant message from citizens throughout this meeting: that the city government failed, and still fails, to see how racism has led to so much suffering in Charlottesville.

* * *

Heinecke's earlier comment is helpful in unpacking the dichotomy that some in Charlottesville perceive between local government and residents. While new regulations for Council procedures were welcomed as an attempt to reconcile the strife made audible in the chamber's soundscape, the overarching problem was one of empathy and action — that is, whether city representatives recognized the issues pervading the town and were making efforts to rectify those issues. The local elections in November 2017 highlighted a continuing sense that the City Council had not moved into these critical directions, especially when it came to issues of race.

Nikuyah Walker, a Charlottesville activist who frequented the City Council meetings, ran as an independent for the 2017 November City Council elections. Her platform focused on “unmask[ing] the illusion of Charlottesville as a World Class City where everyone is thriving,” and enumerated several policies aimed at addressing this reality.²⁹⁷ It

²⁹⁷ Dupuy, “After Nazi Rally, Charlottesville Council Votes for a Black Woman as Its Mayor.”

was, in addition, not lost on many that her candidacy, if successful, would result in Charlottesville's first Black woman councilor.

Shortly before the election, the *Daily Progress* published an article detailing Walker's history of sending emails to City Councilors. Headlined "Walker's Style of Communication Unabashedly Aggressive," the piece went on to state, "A source in City Hall, who wished to remain anonymous, called attention to her emails, voicing concerns about her ability to work collaboratively with city officials."²⁹⁸ Many in the city perceived that Signer was the source, and argued that the article was a form of racism, portraying Walker as the pervasive "angry Black woman" trope.²⁹⁹

This collective opinion was vocalized at the November 6, 2017 meeting, which took place a day before the election. Again, I was present for this event, and once more race became a topic of discussion. Heinecke spoke at this meeting, and announced his anger at the racism by alleged members of the Council:

Heinecke: This is nothing but Reconstruction era white supremacy in action.

Audience: [*cheers*]

Heinecke: That's exactly what this is, and you know it! [...] You're polluting our democracy. If it was a city official who did it in the city hall, that's

²⁹⁸ Suarez, "Walker's Style of Communication Unabashedly Aggressive."

²⁹⁹ "This so-called 'Angry Black Woman' is the physical embodiment of some of the worst stereotypes of Black women — she is out of control, disagreeable, overly aggressive, physically threatening, loud (even when she speaks softly), and to be feared. She will not stay in her 'place.' She is not human. Importantly, the 'Angry ... Woman' label is assigned almost exclusively to Black women. The salience of this trope comes from the combination of blackness and non-conforming femininity. How many times has the reader heard of the Angry White woman? The Angry Asian Woman? The Angry Latina Woman?" Jones and Norwood, "Aggressive Encounters & White Fragility": 2049–2050.

a fire-able offense from what I understand. Are you going to do an investigation? Are you going to fire them?

Audience: No!

Heinecke: Lastly, think about the impact of what just happened. If those two Democratic candidates win and are elected tomorrow, there will be NO TRUST in this city.

Audience: None!

Heinecke: No trust in those two people and this city council. And the DISORDER that you have

[*timer goes off*]

Heinecke: THE DISORDER that you have seen in the last six to eight months is gonna get worse.

Giving evidence of this reality, local activist Tanesha Hudson walked up to the dais. The public comment section had “officially” concluded with Heinecke’s speech, but Hudson was going to address the Council whether they wanted her to or not:

Szakos: And, and that is the end of public comment because there is no one else on the list... she’s not on the list.

Hudson: Anyway...

Szakos: Please, this is the end...

Hudson: No, [addressing the audience] can somebody share their time...

Szakos: There is no one else...

Hudson: Well, I’m gonna go ahead and speak anyway!

[*back and forth yelling between Szakos and Hudson*]

Audience: Let her speak! Let her speak! Let her speak!

Szakos: ...and I'm going to call a recess.

[*chanting continues*]

[...]

Hudson: ... Y'ALL ARE RESPONSIBLE JUST AS MUCH AS HE IS...

Szakos: The microphones are off...

Hudson: I DON'T CARE, I DON'T CARE, I'M LOUD AND I'M BLACK!

Hudson was speaking directly to the Council, as a Black woman, and wanted to inform them about the anger festering in the city from Signer's alleged behavior and the City Council's overall actions.

In my conversations with local residents, race is often seen as invisible to the City Council. They point to examples like the "Heaphy Report," Signer's behavior, and articles in the *Daily Progress*, among many others. It is therefore incumbent upon citizens, these individuals argue, to give voice to the Black experience and the needs of the Black community in Charlottesville. It can be heard in Turner's remarks, for example, delivered because he was not sure if "what [he had] to say wouldn't be said."

More critically, many locals see the City Council as an important venue where these problems can be partially addressed and rectified through their audible and emotional performances of local democracy. They do so while they combat the hindrances they perceive — the rules, the timer, and the Council itself. But while these performances take place within the City Council chamber, debates occur throughout the city about these new and arresting civic sounds.

Part 2: Narratives of Democracy

Silence vs. Noise

In the winter of 2018, I arrived at a planned City Council meeting and found a seat near the front of the chamber. A woman sat next to me and I struck up a conversation with her. She told me that she occasionally addresses the City Council to update them about a program, in which she is involved, that the city helps to fund. I asked about her thoughts concerning the recent City Council meetings and she paused before answering: “You know... a lot has happened in this town. But there’s a lot of anger in this room, and I just want us to be able to move forward.” “You think the meetings have become too hostile?,” I inquired for clarification. “Yes... I’ll admit I’m a little nervous about speaking.”

Her statements neatly align with arguments made by a specific faction of Charlottesville residents who hear recent City Council meetings as “uncivil.” Jim Hingeley has been a leader of this contingent. Known as “Mr. Civility,” Hingeley has frequented the Council chamber to deliver speeches that argue for a return to orderliness. The consequences of the new noisiness, Hingeley has argued, leads to individuals becoming hesitant about addressing the City Council — that they feel “intimidated” by an “angry mob.”³⁰⁰ His argument, therefore, rests in part on the emotional consequences of sonic activity in the Council chamber. My above conversation seemed to reflect this reality, and I myself have occasionally refrained from speaking on certain matters because I was afraid I might cause offense or “say something stupid.”

³⁰⁰ Wren, “Incivility at Council Meetings Defended.”

Hingeley further believes that the disruptions inhibit the city from proper governance. The lengths to which he goes to express this opinion are notable. At the February 5, 2018 Council meeting, for example, he spoke about Gregory Swanson, the first Black student enrolled at the University of Virginia, and the trial that led to his ability to join the then-all-white school. He concluded by stating:

My point is that... among other things, the proceeding in front of the court was a proceeding that was not disruptive, the people, the lawyers on both sides, stayed within their time limits, and they, the court was able to decide the case.

For some in the audience that evening, myself included, the ending remark seemed dissociated from the white supremacy inherent in Gregory Swanson's struggle to attend UVA, as well as being completely removed from the thrust of Hingeley's speech. "Are you kidding me?," someone whispered behind me. I mumbled, "unbelievable." At the same time, however, there was no discernible animosity directed at him; his speech, all in all, merely had an ending that was characteristically "Mr. Civility."

Hingeley's speech, however, is evidence that he believes the problems facing the city, such as racial disparity, can be solved, in part, through decorous proceedings. He said as much at the January 2, 2018 meeting:

Hi, my name is Jim Hingeley, and I'm a city resident, and I think maybe I'm known as "Mr. Civility." Tonight I come to you again for a plea to have civility in Council meetings. A quote I have tonight for you is, "There is honor in compromise and civility, to pull together as a people and to get things done." This is a quote from somebody who knows how to take down white supremacists. This is a quote from Doug Jones [prosecutor of the 1963 Birmingham, AL church bombings].

Hingeley's past comments, taken as a whole, reflect a desire to return the City Council soundscape to its previous quiet and orderly manifestation. Such a return would allow the city to function properly, as he argues, and give citizens equal access to their government about their issues and concerns.

Hingeley is not alone in his beliefs. The January 2, 2018 meeting was also notable for its election of City Council Mayor. Councilor Kathy Galvin was competing for the position against newly-elected Councilor Nikuyah Walker, and Galvin's supporters took turns addressing the Council during the introductory public forum of the meeting. Their comments alluded to the fact that Galvin could lead the Council proceedings back to "normal." Genevieve Keller, for example, mixed her negative views on "abusive situations" at the meetings with her belief that Galvin could steer the Council through "chaos":

Keller: I generally attend Council meetings or I watch at home because I care deeply about this place that is my hometown, not just by birth but also by choice. I have lived through many social changes in our city as we continue to confront racial, gender, socioeconomic, and even religious discrimination and prejudice. We are all striving to be a better and more equitable community. Still, I am alarmed by the abusive situations that often occur in this room. They are not healthy or conducive to effective governance.

Audience: [*hisses*]

[...]

Keller: I encourage you [the Council] to set new standards for your own meetings, perhaps not Robert's Rules, maybe "Charlotte's Rules," that govern how you govern, and how and when we come here, and how we treat each other. I also ask that you support your senior Councilor, Kathy Galvin, as the one most equipped at this time to be mayor.

Audience: [*hisses*]

Keller: As Councilor, Kathy has been a calm voice in the midst of chaos.

Keller's statements reflect the concerns offered by Hingeley, specifically the inability of the City Council to properly govern in the face of the new soundscape. She also notes the possibility of progressive social change becoming negated by the "abuse" of some audience members. What is needed, according to Keller, is a "calm voice," in spite of, and to fix "chaos."

There are local residents who disagree. The perceived noisy incivility is, according to Jalane Schmidt, actually an audible marker of deep concern over city issues:

I have no energy for this talk of civility. It masks a very uncivil situation that has persisted for centuries... You all are complaining about the fire alarm [the "noise" of City Council meetings], and we're complaining about the smoke and flames that are engulfing us [e.g., racism, housing inequality, police tactics] and have been for a long time.³⁰¹

The Charlottesville chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice, an anti-racist organization, similarly argued in a tweet that the desire by some, such as Hingeley, to return the Council soundscape to its quieter manifestations facilitates the continuation of violence — that remaining silent allows systemic issues to continue unaddressed; this tweet is captured in figure 33. Noise, therefore, has the ability to proactively work against systems of oppression, such as racism, and the presence of noise in the City Council chamber is evidence of positive citizen action within a democratic system.

From my experiences in the chamber, "uncivil" sounds are also evidence of a desire by some to play a more direct role in the democratic process altogether. In other words,

³⁰¹ Ibid.

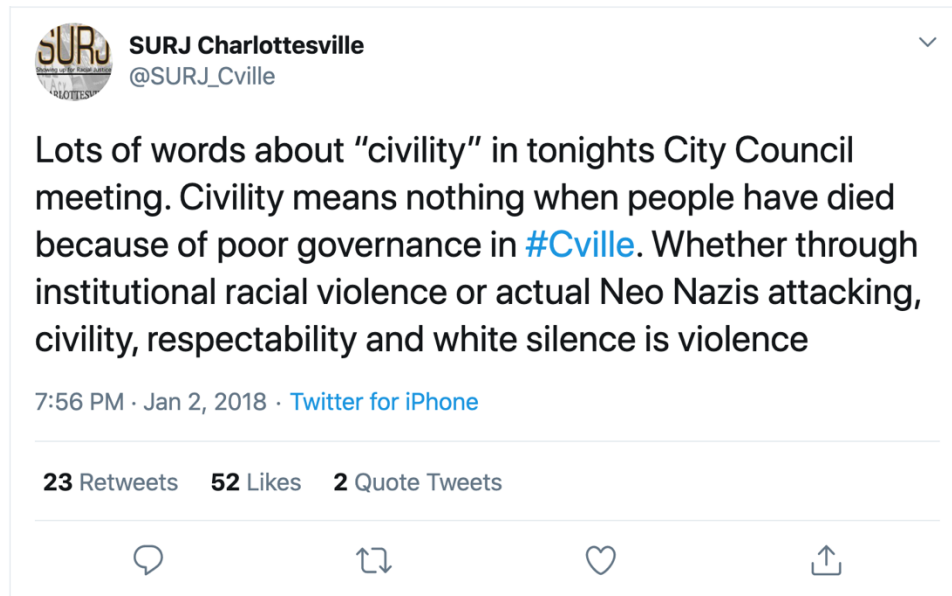


Figure 33. A tweet from the SURJ Charlottesville Twitter account.

while there are certainly concerning issues that might need a “noisy” intervention from the audience, meeting attendees also see themselves as an instrumental part of the way City Council runs its business. Complaints about meeting procedures have, for example, focused on the limited time allowed for individual public comments and the segmented structure of debates that force Councilors and audience members alike to speak past one another instead of with each other. Some of the rule changes described earlier in this chapter address these concerns: new procedures encourage Councilors to interact with speakers during public forums, for example. The City Council, therefore, has made attempts to make the chamber a more welcoming environment for the public’s sonic interventions.

But while these nuances are apparent to me and some in the chamber, the wider discourses taking place throughout the city instead emphasize a seeming battle between “civility” and “incivility” that often ignores the motivations and feelings of relevant parties.

Articles and “Letters to the Editor” in the local papers, for example, repeat the same arguments for either position,³⁰² so much so that the dichotomy is reproduced by national entities like NPR.³⁰³ From an outside perspective, it might seem like there is no complexity to the debate and that there are no other possibilities. Further still, the debate over what local democracy should feel and sound like has become symbolic of a “warring” and “divided” city.³⁰⁴

Interrogating the Debate

Throughout this debate, I have been unable to avoid drawing connections to related arguments that I have come across in my time at UVA. Some come from literature I read for qualifying exams,³⁰⁵ others from conversations between me and my husband about the

³⁰² E.g., Forbes, “Opinion/Letter”; Weinschenk, “Opinion/Letter”; Wren, “Incivility at Council Meetings Defended.”

³⁰³ See Elliott, “Hear Me by Any Means Necessary.”

³⁰⁴ See Beckett, “Charlottesville, a Year On”; Loeffler, “The Struggle for Charlottesville”; Stockman, “Year after White Nationalist Rally, Charlottesville Is in Tug of War over Its Soul.”

³⁰⁵ For one of my exams, I read multiple narratives that tout the positive effects of calm and silence: e.g., Schafer, *The Soundscape*; Garret, *The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Want*; Jaworski, *The Power of Silence*; Prochnik, *In Pursuit of Silence*; Sim, *Manifesto for Silence*. At times, the authors of these texts find common kinship with the words of Hingeley and Keller. Sim, for example, states, “the ability to think, to reflect and to create are all to a significant degree dependent on our being able to access silence. [...] This book] constitutes a manifesto for silence, arguing that we need more rather than less of it in our lives; in other words, that silence matters and that the human race will suffer if significant space is not made for it.” Sim, *Manifesto for Silence*, 2.

I note, however, that the authors of these texts are often addressing silence from the perspective that technology has negatively encroached upon our lives with its noise (also noticed by Steve Goodman), and not with democratic systems in mind. See Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, 191–192.

Ancient Greeks,³⁰⁶ a topic that he is well-versed in. But the most significant connection, I find, is the one between the debates occurring over City Council and the narratives of noise found in the histories of the University of Virginia, discussed in chapter 1. Throughout UVA's history, there has been a repeated proclivity toward stubborn and unreflective assumption as opposed to reasoned nuance and introspection. The assumption that the University *used to be* a noisy place and has since been replaced with "honorable" student behavior often eclipses the possibility of pausing to consider what noise means and sounds like within historical contexts. As I have argued earlier, the latter action can lead to a better understanding of how the past and present are intertwined, and allows me, as a scholar, to see how noise can act both for and against oppressive systems.

The current level of debate over silence and noise, relatedly, does not allow for more complex realities: quieting behavior, for example, might work to silence anti-racist activists *as well as* white supremacists; noisy participation might cause progressive policies to be stymied; a muted City Council chamber might represent the politically noisiest moment of government proceedings. I have personally witnessed this more complex reality taking

³⁰⁶ For example, Thucydides, while seemingly celebrating Pericles' rule, saw the silence of the masses as more characteristic of a monarchy or an oligarchic government, and by contrast a loud citizenry as a hallmark of democracy: "[Pericles], deriving authority from his capacity and acknowledged worth, being also a man of transparent integrity, was able to control the multitude in a free spirit; he led them rather than was led by them. [...] When he saw them unseasonably elated and arrogant, his words humbled and awed them. [...] Thus Athens, though still in name a democracy, was in fact ruled by her greatest citizen." Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.65.8–9.

This description aligns neatly with the viewpoint, shared within Charlottesville, that the City Council maintains procedures that undermine the voices of most citizens while promoting the opinions of those on Council, and that sonic interventions by city residents help to democratize city governance. Heinecke, for example, recognizes democracy as "messy" and "unscripted," and has echoed sentiments widely shared in the Council chamber that the local democratic process *requires* audible participation from city residents.

audible shape in the chamber. The transformed soundscape is neither evidence of a wholly intimidating environment, nor an unquestionable sign of positive democratic potential. While both viewpoints have their merits, as explained above, there are other possibilities left conspicuously out of the discourse.

In particular, the City Council soundscape highlights brief and unexpected alliances, improvisatory policy discussions, and collaborative efforts between Councilors and citizens to reform the nature of the City Council. New rules governing Council procedures allow for direct engagement between officials and audience members, and this development has resulted in highly personal interactions. Some might argue that the end result is a more hostile and antagonistic soundscape, where policy decisions become bullying sessions.³⁰⁷ But, in fact, the intimacy I perceive to be growing between Councilors and city residents has also allowed some space for mutual understanding.

To illustrate, I focus on developments as they occurred at the March 5, 2018 meeting, specifically during a public comment section featuring “Unite the Right” organizer and local resident, Jason Kessler. I came to that event hearing rumors that Kessler had been granted a spot during the public comments section, and I arrived ready to document the proceedings.

Kessler was eventually called to the dais by Mayor Nikuyah Walker around seven o’clock. I immediately took out my phone and began recording; the footage can be seen in video recording 1. Members of the audience reacted negatively, arguing that a “murderer”

³⁰⁷ Mike Signer, for example, has put forward this argument. See Stout, “Signer.”

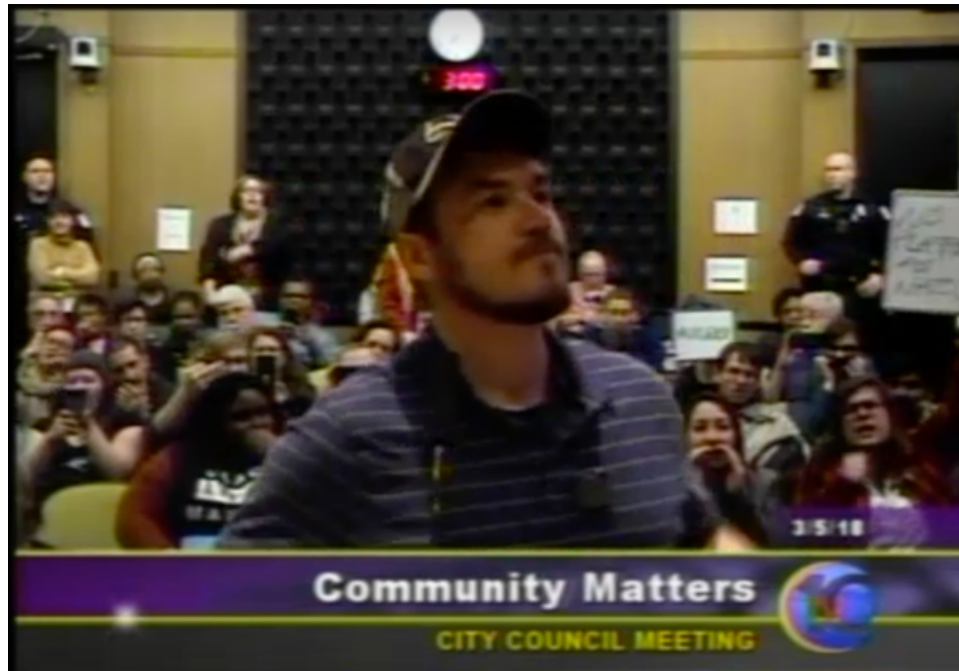


Figure 34. Jason Kessler being shouted down by the audience.

and “white supremacist” should not receive a platform for his ideologies. The crowd loudly began to chant “Go home, Jason!,” over which Kessler attempted to be heard by yelling into the microphone; the chanting, however, was deafening. Walker interjected, “Can I speak?” Immediately the noise subsided, people “shh”d one another, and Walker explained that Kessler had three minutes to address the Council. “So, if we... he has three minutes... right? So, if we, I understand..., but he has three minutes,” she added. Initially, some individuals argued back, stating that Kessler should be denied the opportunity to speak. But Walker swayed some in the room to adjust their sound-making:

Walker: So, one thing to consider is the energy that you give out... ok? And whether people are deserving of that energy...

Audience: She’s right! She’s right!

Walker: ...and the best thing to do if this is something that is completely difficult for you is to attempt to enter a state that's way beyond any place...

Audience: [*snaps*]

Walker: ...that a person that you, and how you feel about that person in front of you, could arrive at.

The timer was reset, and a new sonic strategy was implemented as soon as Kessler began speaking again — aggressive coughing, shuffling plastic bags, and fake sneezes. A few seconds of this clatter went by before Kessler demanded that he receive his time back for being disrupted. The audience began to argue back before Walker intervened once more:

Audience: “No one cares what you have to say!” “She stopped the timer for you!”

Kessler: I'm gonna wait until I get my time back!

Audience: “Booooo!” “No! No!”

Kessler: ... need some decorum in this chamber so that I can...

[*audience continues, but growing louder*]

Walker: Excuse me, excuse me, this is unpleasant for me, so I would like him to get through his three minutes, so that we can move on to something that's more productive and beneficial to the community that we are trying to build [...] I appreciate it, and thank you.

Heads nodded up and down, and silence gripped the chamber. I personally felt tense, unsure of what would come next. Walker looked toward the Council Clerk to signal that the timer should be reset. Kessler began, for the third time, with remarks centering on the perceived incivility of the City Council chamber. Individuals in the audience heckled, and

were quieted down by others present. But Kessler demanded that he be given his three minutes back in full, and Walker disagreed: “You have your time!”

Mike Signer, no stranger to a hostile audience, added his voice to the mix: “We heard everything you said.” Kessler responded by asking Signer to repeat what Kessler had just said. “It’s not my responsibility to recite it,” Signer retorted, resulting in laughter from the audience, and then continued: “Madame Mayor, if I may... he, he spoke for about thirty seconds. I think this is a disorderly speaker...” The crowd erupted in snaps, cheers, and a loud “MIKE SIGNER!!!” The Council, led by Walker and Signer, then agreed to let the timer continue running, over the objections of Kessler. Silence dominated the room until Kessler’s time ran up. As the timer’s light turned red, the audience erupted in a boisterous “BYEEEEEEEEEE!” Kessler refused to leave, and Walker called nearby police officers to remove Kessler from the chamber. After this eleven-minute display, many, including myself, shouted toward the Council: “Thank you, Nikuyah!” “City Council!!!” “MIKE SIGNER!!!” It was a brief moment of euphoria in a chamber that normally housed negative emotions. The praise directed at Signer, in particular, was profoundly different from the usual animosity he received from audience members.

While some may argue that the recent iterations of the City Council soundscape are evidence of chaos, incivility, and the lack of an orderly process, and others might interpret them as an idealized version of democracy through active, sonic participation, I hear a mix of the two. Specifically, the example above shows how the key players in the City

Council process, citizen participants and Councilors alike, are messily performing a constantly transforming rendition of democracy. The most dramatic moments of this reality can be heard in Walker's ability to silence and empathize with a noisy crowd, audience members discovering in real time the best way to protest and, therefore, democratically participate, the perception of the timer as a positive tool by most present, and Signer's transformation from a widely despised local official into a champion of the audience over the course of a few minutes.

But, I should add, these moments are far from the norm. City Council meetings continue to be a challenging environment, for both citizens and government officials. In 2021, Walker decided she would not seek re-election, arguing, in part, that as a Black woman in politics:

It's an interesting landscape that you find yourself in. If you're really a change agent, then that's going to be very frustrating because you spend all of your time attempting to break down those walls that people are putting around you.

You end up learning that you have daily battles that you have to fight, and you can't really get any of your work done.³⁰⁸

Shortly after the positive episode involving Kessler, citizens in attendance found cause to view Signer in a negative light once again due to his support for an agenda item. In that immediate moment, I was upset that there was only a short interval before returning to the

³⁰⁸ Rayasam, "Why Charlottesville's Mayor Has Had Enough."

mood of hostility, tension, and distrust. But over time, I recognized that what I was observing and experiencing with City Council was a fundamental aspect of democracy: its messiness.

There are still a great many challenges for Charlottesville residents. Heinecke said it best, I believe, when he noted that the disorder prevalent in the Council chamber is a reflection of Councilors not empathizing with the concerns of city members. The audible shift that has taken place, however, and the disagreements over this apparent shift, are signs that locals are emotionally engaged with their local democracy. It also signals the possibility that Charlottesville, the community, is moving hopefully forward.

EPILOGUE

A Prisoner of Hope

Then the crowd made noise that gathered and grew
until it was loud and was loud as the sea.

What it meant or would mean was not yet fixed
nor could be, though human beings ever tilt toward *we*.
—Elizabeth Alexander, “Rally”

Yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
—Psalm 19

On the evening of September 8, 2017, almost one month after the horrific events of 9/11, I made my way to Old Cabell Hall on the Grounds of the University of Virginia for an event: the eminent philosopher and public intellectual Cornel West had been invited to campus to share a talk, entitled “The Profound Desire for Justice.” I was lucky enough to get a seat; tickets for the speech quickly sold out after being released.

In fact, I was able to get a ticket because I was performing that evening. The UVA African Music and Dance Ensemble was invited to perform before the talk began, and while I was not a current member of the ensemble at that time, I reached out to Michelle Kisliuk, the ensemble’s director and my dissertation advisor, to see if I could participate. I had, after all, been an ensemble member in the past, and was eager to see West that evening. She said yes, and so I showed up on the UVA Lawn just outside the hall, ready to perform *Gahu*, an Ewe drum/dance, as best I could.

West arrived in advance of his talk during our performance. He was conversing with colleagues as he made his way to Old Cabell, but once he got closer, he made a beeline to our ensemble. Sure enough, he began to dance alongside the students in the ensemble. I drummed away, ecstatic that this moment was happening — that a few short weeks after the white supremacist violence in the city, here was West and our group loudly and joyfully celebrating the artistry of West African culture. It was a profound rejection, I felt, of the hatred so many of us had experienced in August.

Indeed, West was making a repeat visit to Charlottesville. During the A11 torch-lit march at UVA, he and other religious leaders and local community members met in the basement of the nearby St. Paul's Memorial Church to prepare for whatever the next day would bring. Many were planning to counter-demonstrate at "Unite the Right," and West would lock arms against the alt-right with pastors, priests, and rabbis on A12.

Now West was back in the city to speak about the "spiritual blackout" of the then-present moment.³⁰⁹ As he wove together a multiplicity of thoughts — carrying the audience, preacher-like, from one truth to the next with his dynamic speaking voice — he made clear the dire situation the nation and world found itself in:

But *alllll* the absurdity coming at us. *Alll* of the menDAcity and criminalITY, BOMBARDING US EVERY DAY, WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO STRAIGHTEN UP OUR *SPINES* AND TRY TO BE TRUTH TELLERS AND WITNESS BEARERS, SO THAT *WE* COULD PASS ON GREAT TRADITIONS TO THOSE WHO COME AFTER IN THIS MOMENT OF *MULTIPLE CATASTROPHES*...

[...]

³⁰⁹ His speech has been uploaded onto YouTube. See UVA Engineering, "Dr. Cornel West."

[It] takes us to the most fundamental and terrifying questions of: What does it *mean* to be *human*? What kind of human beings are we? What kinds of persons are we? WHAT are we willing to give up? What cost are we willing to pay? How much courage, and not just courage, but fortitude are we willing to *exemplify* and embody before we pass it on to the next generation?

I come from a people who have been *chronically hated* for four hundred years, that's why the neo-*fascist* brothers and sisters who were trying to crush us like cockroaches [in August] DON'T SURPRISE ME. [*mocking voice*] *Oh my God, this is the end of America. The neo-Nazis are on the march.* PUH-LEASE.

The audience, myself included, erupted in laughter and applause at this last line. In fact, as West continued with his speech, it felt like a form of therapy to me, like I was bearing witness to *his* bearing witness, that I was in the presence of a much-needed homily.

But what, exactly, did he want us to do about the problems of this world? I found myself wondering. The answer came toward the end of his remarks. His voice started out quietly, so quiet that his mic made him barely audible, but eventually became a roar:

This present moment is a moment of *bleakness*. Let's be honest about it. But there's *always* tradition of prophetic fight-back. That's what I wanna leave you all here tonight.

[...]

I'm an adult, Black man, I have NO reasons to be OPTImistic, not just in *this* city, in this *nation*, and in the WORLD, THERE'S TOO MUCH SUFFERING in the WORLD, there's already MILLIONS OF BODIES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE ATLANTIC OCEAN WE CAN NEVER RECOVER because of the slave trade, HOW can we talk about optimism, I'm a prisoner of HOPE. I'm NOT an optimist.

It was the “prophetic fight-back” that would come to influence so much of my research and how I understood it. The answer was hope, although it would take me awhile to fully

understand what West meant by it.

In the first place, there wasn't much to be hopeful about. Charlottesville, for example, was and is still reeling from its recent past and its longer history. Local government has become a joke to some community members, who see the city as ungovernable. Since, subsequent to A11/12, the city has gone through six different City Managers, numerous bureaucratic positions have gone unfilled, and City Councilors are regularly hostile toward one another and staff members, they have good reason to feel this way. And this institutional conflict and fragmentation, I believe, mirrors the disunity among many community members themselves. Part of the disunity is due to continued racial division and racism in the city, and these realities are oftentimes on full display, such as when Nikuyah Walker refused to run again for City Council.³¹⁰

Nationally, the country appears to be on the edge of a cliff. Facts about the past have been called into question by those who seek to weaponize lies for political gain. The former president, Donald Trump, regularly offers up the most egregious example, specifically challenging America's fragile democracy³¹¹ by repeatedly lying that his loss during the 2020 election was actually a victory. As a consequence, a mob of his supporters staged a violent insurrection at the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021³¹² — a day that made Charlottesville's A11/12 look like a rehearsal in so many ways, including sono-affectively.

³¹⁰ See Rayasam, "Why Charlottesville's Mayor Has Had Enough."

³¹¹ See Klarman, "Foreword."

³¹² See Snyder, "The American Abyss."

Fascistic violence has become more widespread across the globe. Currently, President Vladimir Putin of Russia is staging a war in Ukraine meant to obliterate its democratically elected government, murder civilians, and seize that country's sovereign territory. It is a blatant attempt — through bloodshed and destruction — to bolster authoritarianism on the world stage. As of this writing, I helplessly wonder how much further Putin is willing to go to reach his goals.

But West was clear that “hope” is not another word for “optimism.” It is, instead, a mindset and a form of practice, or as activist Mariame Kaba frequently describes it, “a discipline.”³¹³ Hope is a yearning, a desiring, a demanding. It is the fertile soil for and of action. Optimism on its own is the expectation of better days. Hope allows for those better days to be made a reality.

Over time, I saw my research as focusing on the hope that so many community members have and practice in the city, and the sono-affective became a window into this hope. The philosopher Brian Massumi even sees affect itself as another word for this hope: “‘where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do’ in every present situation.”³¹⁴ Locals that I spoke with described their activism as envisioning positive possibilities, offering another path for the community to move through tragedy and violence. As Barry from Noise Against Nazis shared with me:

³¹³ “Hope is a Discipline.”

³¹⁴ Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 3.

I think that particularly for the counter-protesters, the community members, I think that even with all the very obvious and direct violence going on, literally feet away, the fact that, like, people were there playing instruments, singing songs, and doing chants... at least gave them some measure of hope: "The community, this is what we're doing."³¹⁵

In fact, his group created joy in the midst of hate, energetically galvanized local counter-protesters, and powerfully affected those nearby (and themselves) in a positive way. These results were made possible, however, only through the initial yearning for another reality that existed outside the one the alt-right was intending for Charlottesville; Barry and his friends envisioned and allowed for a better future, even in a small way.

* * *

On July 10, 2021, the statues of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson were finally severed from their pedestals in Charlottesville (see figures 35–37). It had taken more than five years since city residents, chief among them Zyahna Bryant, had called for their removal. I showed up that morning to capture the moment, and came across a somber crowd of locals. There was not much talking, but when the statues were slowly driven away from the downtown area, most began to clap and some even cheered. It was, however, a seeming anti-climax to everything the city had been put through during the Summer of Hate and since. When they were finally taken from the city, they left almost like a whisper. Yet on A12, these statues and the ideologies they represented provoked unfathomable trauma and violence. These bronze icons to the Confederacy and white supremacy in many ways symbolized so much of what Charlottesville was and, unfortunately, still is.

³¹⁵ "Barry," interviewed by Kyle Chattleton at Oakhurst Inn Café, June 10, 2018.



Figure 35. The Stonewall Jackson statue being removed.



Figure 36. The Robert E. Lee statue about to be transported out of the city.



Figure 37. The remaining pedestal for Lee's statue.

The following month, however, I noticed that some flowers had been planted where the statues and pedestals used to be. Hope was also being planted elsewhere: a coalition of local organizations, led by the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, announced a new project, “Swords into Plowshares,” at the end of the year — a plan to raise funds to have the Lee statue melted down so that it can be recreated as a new form of public art. Hope, therefore, is both literally and figuratively taking root in the city, hope which might sprout new possibilities for the community. At the same time, I would not classify any of these initiatives as necessarily “optimistic.” As the project page for Swords into Plowshares states:

The Lee statue has been a singular source of harm to the Charlottesville community. We believe that racist symbols are not immutable parts of our cultural heritage. “Swords into Plowshares” offers Charlottesville — and the nation — the chance to transform our trauma into renewal through art.³¹⁶

It is, therefore, an activism of hope. This community is entwined in a messy, affective fabric of audible mementos of its trauma that direct us forward to who knows where. But amidst this sono-affective-scape, locals have planted seeds of hope. May they grow, and grow, and grow.

³¹⁶ “Swords into Plowshares.”

APPENDIX A

Timeline

March 2016

Zyahna Bryant, a local organizer and high school student, starts an online petition and pens an op-ed in the *Daily Progress* calling upon the Charlottesville City Council to remove the statue of Robert E. Lee in the city's downtown Lee Park, now Market Street Park. She additionally asks for the park's name to be changed. The petition is signed by over seven hundred individuals and draws the attention of Vice-Mayor Wes Bellamy, who holds a press conference on March 22, next to the Lee statue, demanding its removal and the renaming of the park by City Council. While many in the city are supportive of these efforts, the press conference is protested by individuals bearing Confederate imagery, who refer to Bellamy and others supporting the removal of the statue as terrorists and communists.

May 2, 2016

The City Council unanimously approves a resolution forming the Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Monuments and Public Spaces. The commission is tasked with providing the Council with "options for telling the full story of Charlottesville's history of race relations and for changing the City's narrative through our public spaces."

June 2016

Presidential candidate Donald Trump criticizes Gonzalo P. Curiel, a judge overseeing two cases involving Trump's business practices, by insinuating the judge cannot offer a fair trial due to his Mexican heritage. In the coming days, political leaders within Trump's Re-

publican Party offer differing reactions. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, for example, states that Trump is not a racist, while Speaker of the House Paul Ryan calls the comments the “textbook definition” of racism.

July 18, 2016

Activists block Interstate 95 in Richmond while chanting “Black Lives Matter” and “No justice, no peace, no racist police.” The state police arrest thirteen, including five from Charlottesville.

July 28, 2016

During the Democratic National Convention, Charlottesville resident Khizr Khan delivers a speech rebuking Trump’s rhetoric and proposal to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Khan is the father of Humayun Khan, a captain in the US Army and University of Virginia alumnus, who was killed while fighting in the Iraq War. He is additionally joined by his wife Ghazala Khan on the stage. In his speech, Khan challenges Trump to read the Constitution and to visit Arlington National Cemetery, where his son is buried: “Go look at the graves of brave patriots who died defending the United States of America. You will see all faiths, genders, and ethnicities. You have sacrificed nothing, and no one.” The remarks become a fixture in national and local discourse.

July 31 & August 1, 2016

Trump appears on the ABC program *This Week*. He insinuates that Ghazala Khan did not speak at the convention because her husband kept her from doing so, a reference to gender roles in some Islamic communities. The following day, Trump tweets that Khizr Khan “viciously attacked” him, and adds that “this story is not about Mr. Khan [...] but rather RADICAL ISLAMIC TERRORISM.” His comments are widely condemned in the national media.

October 4, 2016

Responding to a Facebook post, Charlottesville businessman Douglas Muir compares the Black Lives Matter movement to the Ku Klux Klan. He subsequently “takes leave” of his lecture position at UVA due to community outcry over his remarks, and his restaurant, Bella’s, is protested by locals.

November 9, 2016

Donald Trump is declared the winner of the 2016 US Presidential Election. He ran a campaign focusing on nativism and isolationism, and frequently made racist remarks.

November 24, 2016

Jason Kessler, a Charlottesville resident, publishes past tweets by Vice-Mayor Wes Bellamy on his blog that he claims are “anti-white.” He also begins a petition to have Bellamy removed from City Council.

December 5, 2016

Kessler attends the evening’s City Council meeting and obtains a speaking slot during the “Matters by the Public” segment. When called to speak, he walks to the dais with his own soundtrack music (“I Won’t Back Down” by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers) and delivers a provocative speech calling on Bellamy to resign for his past tweets. Members of the audience frequently interject, and Mayor Mike Signer makes a number of attempts to control the proceedings. Before ending his remarks, Kessler accuses Bellamy of being a “black supremacist and a rape fetishist.”

December 19, 2016

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Monuments and Public Spaces publishes its over-three-hundred-page

report. In it, the commission offers a number of recommendations to the City Council, but does not come to a definitive conclusion over whether the Lee statue or other statues should be removed. The commission additionally argues for memorialization and contextualization of important historic sites in the city, including Vinegar Hill, a predominantly Black community that was razed in the 1960s, and the location of the downtown slave auction block: “Few institutions and communities in the United States, if any, have ever fully explored the truths and legacies of slavery, Jim Crow and white supremacy. Charlottesville is no exception.”

January 27–29, 2017

Donald Trump signs Executive Order 13769, also known as the “Travel Ban,” which effectively bars individuals traveling from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States. The number of refugees and immigrants allowed in the country is also restricted, including those holding visas and green cards. Activists stage protests nationally throughout the weekend, including a January 29 rally on the University of Virginia Lawn organized by students.

January 31, 2017

Mayor Mike Signer declares in a speech on the Downtown Mall that Charlottesville is the “Capital of the Resistance” against the Trump Administration. The announcement draws mixed reactions from community members and attention from far-right circles.

February 6, 2017

City Council officially receives the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission, and votes to remove the Robert E. Lee statue and begin the process of renaming both Jackson and Lee Parks.

February 11, 2017

Corey Stewart, a Republican gubernatorial candidate for Virginia, holds a rally in Lee Park to defend the Lee statue. Local activists confront him and shout him down with chants.

February 16, 2017

Stewart attends an event in Charlottesville hosted by Unity & Security for America, a group with the stated mission of “defending Western Civilization.” Jason Kessler is also invited, and uses the event, with Stewart by his side, to deliver a petition to the courthouse demanding the removal of Wes Bellamy from City Council. During his remarks, Kessler declares that Bellamy “and his ilk have targeted [...] leaders of our glorious Western civilization for abuse and smears,” adding that the statue to Robert E. Lee is of “ethnic significance to Southern white people.”

March 3, 2017

The Jefferson School African American Heritage Center and University of Virginia host events commemorating the one-hundred-and-fifty-second anniversary of the Union Army’s liberation of Charlottesville during the American Civil War and the emancipation of the area’s enslaved African American community. The day is recognized by the city as “Liberation and Freedom Day.”

March 14, 2017

Local activist Nikuyah Walker launches a bid for City Council, running as an independent. The theme of her campaign is “unmasking the illusion” of Charlottesville as a progressive, post-racial city.

March 20, 2017

A lawsuit, *Payne v. City of Charlottesville*, is filed in Charlottesville Circuit Court to prevent the removal of both the Jackson and Lee statues.

April 8, 2017

Jason Kessler and Richard Spencer meet in-person for the first time at a Washington, DC protest decrying the recent US military strikes against Syria. The two discuss Spencer's plan for a rally to take place in Charlottesville next month.

May 13 & 14, 2017

Members of the alt-right, led by Kessler and Spencer, conduct a daytime march on May 13 from Charlottesville's McGuffey Park to Jackson Park. Many carry flags celebrating white supremacy and the Confederacy. At Jackson Park, Spencer gives a speech in which he declares, "What brings us together is that we are white! We are a people! We will not be replaced!" A torch-lit rally is held later in the evening at Lee Park, featuring the chants "Blood and Soil" and "You will not replace us." Both events are disrupted by Charlottesville activists.

On the following day, locals hold a candle-lit vigil at Lee Park to counter the alt-right messages from the previous day.

May 30, 2017

Kessler files a permit for an event to be held at Lee Park on August 12, 2017. Over the course of the next few months, the event will gain a wide audience across the far-right community, and will be collectively known as the "Unite the Right Rally."

June 5, 2017

Kessler addresses City Council, and his remarks are frequently disrupted by members of the audience, prompting Mayor Signer to suspend the meeting.

After the meeting resumes, City Council votes to rename Lee Park to Emancipation Park, and Jackson Park to Justice Park. There is a lack of significant public support for either name change, with surveyed residents instead preferring Market Street Park and Court Square Park, respectively.

June 13, 2017

Gubernatorial candidate Ed Gillespie narrowly defeats Corey Stewart in the Virginia Republican primary. He will face Democratic candidate Ralph Northam in November. His campaign, while not an explicit endorsement of President Trump's policies, nevertheless focuses on white supremacist issues, such as Confederate monument removal and immigration.

July 8, 2017

The Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, from North Carolina, hold a rally in Charlottesville's Justice Park. A few dozen Klansmen and supporters are counter-protested by an estimated one thousand people. The confrontation is mostly peaceful, but loud. Soon after the rally concludes, police launch tear gas to disperse counter-protesters. City officials and community members later criticize these police tactics.

July 14, 2017

Virginia State Police deliver intelligence to the Charlottesville Police Department detailing a planned alt-right event to take place the day before the publicly scheduled August 12 "Unite the Right" rally.

July 17, 2017

Members of the public speak at the City Council meeting about the earlier KKK rally and the upcoming August 12 rally. They express outrage over recent police tactics and the militarization of policing in Charlottesville, as well as fear of impending violence in August. Local activist Emily Gorcenski specifically shares online posts by planned “Unite the Right” attendees, including one which reads, “I can assure you, there will be beatings at the August event.”

Early August, 2017

Virginia State Police, Charlottesville Police, and University Police all share and discuss evidence of a planned alt-right rally to take place on August 11. The exact location is not known, but UVA is understood by all parties to be a potential site. Internally, University Police are told to “think ahead and plan.

August 11, 2017

University officials are informed by 4 PM of an impending alt-right march to take place on Grounds. Despite warnings from colleagues and community members, as well as offers of assistance from VSP, UPD Chief Michael Gibson creates no contingency plans for violence, instead “consider[ing] Kessler’s march like any other political event on grounds.”

Kessler and other alt-right leaders meet at McIntire Park at 5 PM to discuss plans for the evening. An individual present places a call to UPD Patrol Lieutenant Angela Tabler to notify them about a planned march through the UVA Grounds. The local community will not be informed or warned about any planned activities for the evening.

An interfaith service is underway across the street from UVA at St. Paul’s Memorial Church. Attendees discover

that a member of the alt-right has tweeted a photo from inside the main hall where the event is taking place. An anonymous call is sent to 911, threatening to infiltrate the service and open fire with an AK-47. The church is locked down.

During the nine o'clock hour, white supremacists begin showing up at UVA's Nameless Field, and distribute and light torches. A march begins and is directed through the UVA Grounds. Marchers chant various phrases, such as "Blood and Soil," "You will not replace us," and "Whose streets? Our streets," and threaten violence to observers nearby.

A little after 10 PM, the marchers reach the statue of Thomas Jefferson just north of the UVA Rotunda. They confront a group of nearby counter-protesters, and soon pummel them with torches. The nearby police initially refuse to intervene and only respond after the violence ends. In a later interview, UPD Chief Gibson downplays what took place, "noting that it lasted for less than an hour and did not result in any serious injuries."

Footage of the violence spreads throughout the community and eventually reaches a national audience. A local resident later posts on Facebook, "It was planned to create the maximum amount of terror and fear as possible [...] they are trying to resurrect the state sponsored hatred that ruled during those earlier times."

August 12, 2017

At six in the morning, a service is held at First Baptist Church in Downtown Charlottesville. Cornel West is among those in attendance, and he declares, "This is not a time for [sunshine] protesters. This is a time for love warriors." Participants will eventually hold a silent march through the city.

By 9 AM, outside militia have lined along the perimeter of Emancipation Park to “defend the First Amendment.” Some religious demonstrators lock arms across the way and sing.

The alt-right, anti-fascists, clergy, militia, locals, police, and media have all converged on Emancipation Park by the ten o’clock hour. “Noise Against Nazis” arrives with numerous musical instruments to both support anti-racist demonstrators and drown out white supremacists.

Alt-right individuals, armed with bats and shields, group up in testudo formation along the stairs to Emancipation Park. They repeatedly stage violent attacks into the nearby crowd of counter-protesters. Police stationed nearby do not intervene.

Throughout the pre-noon hours, pepper spray, urine-filled water bottles, tasers, rocks, and tear gas are variously used by those present. Fighting takes place around the area. Ku Klux Klan leader Richard Wilson Preston fires a gun into the crowd.

At 11:28 AM, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe receives a request from police to declare a state of emergency. The police first announce an unlawful assembly to those nearby at 11:37 AM. By the end of the hour, riot police have successfully cleared Emancipation Park by forcing the white supremacists into the nearby crowd of counter-protesters.

Governor McAuliffe declares a state of emergency at 12:06 PM.

Some members of the alt-right head over to the Market Street parking garage. They encounter Black resident DeAndre Harris and bludgeon him with a wooden barricade.

Local activists stage numerous interventions across the downtown area to protect communities and confront white supremacists.

Most “Unite the Right” participants march away from the downtown area toward McIntire Park.

Around 1:37 PM, counter-protesters converge downtown on Water Street and begin marching east. They chant, “Whose streets? Our streets” and “No Trump, no KKK, no fascist USA.”

At 1:40 PM, the marchers turn left onto 4th Street. Up the road is James Alex Fields, Jr. in a Dodge Challenger. He accelerates into the crowd, injuring dozens and killing Heather Heyer. 4th Street is chaotic. Fields reverses and flees the scene, but is apprehended five minutes later by police.

Around 1:50 PM, former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke delivers a speech at McIntire Park. He declares, “This is the first step in taking America back.”

President Donald Trump holds a brief press conference, stating, “We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides, on many sides.” Before leaving, he mentions that he has a winery in Charlottesville. In a later press conference he will relatedly comment, “you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides.” These similar statements will be strongly condemned by national media figures and politicians, and be called one of the lowest moments of his presidency.

At 6 PM, Governor McAuliffe and Mayor Mike Signer hold a joint press conference, and McAuliffe tells “Unite the Right” rioters to “go home.”

August 13, 2017

In the morning hours, Governor McAuliffe and other state and local politicians attend two church services in Charlottesville. He addresses both congregations about recent events.

Jason Kessler holds a press conference at 2 PM. His remarks are drowned out by nearby demonstrators, who chant “Shame on you.” He is eventually swarmed by locals. Police escort him away toward safety.

An impromptu memorial is created throughout the day at 4th Street. Community members spread word that an unofficial vigil will be held at the site later in the evening.

Locals quietly sing songs on 4th Street as the sun begins to set. Some light candles and lay flowers. The event is broadcasted nationally and internationally.

August 16, 2017

C-Ville Weekly publishes their latest print edition, which includes a comprehensive, minute-by-minute account of the past weekend. The timeline ends by referencing one of Heather Heyer’s favorite sayings: “If you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention.”

A memorial to Heyer is held in the afternoon at the Paramount Theater. Many in the audience wear purple, her favorite color. Her mother, Susan Bro, speaks at the memorial, and states, “They tried to kill my child to shut her up. Well, guess what? You just magnified her.”

Two shrouds are placed over the downtown statues of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson to mark a period of mourning.

After nightfall, a candlelight vigil takes place on the UVA Grounds, following the same path taken by white supremacists on August 11. The crowd converges on the

Lawn and begins singing. The candles, as well as posters and flowers, are later laid at the foot of the Jefferson statue at the conclusion of the vigil.

August 18, 2017

Jason Kessler tweets, then deletes, a post calling Heather Heyer a “fat, disgusting Communist,” adding that her death “looks like it was payback.” He eventually takes down his Twitter account.

August 20, 2017

UVA President Teresa Sullivan is confronted by a student about her leadership. When asked why the University did not adequately protect its students from the white supremacists on August 11, Sullivan responds that the University “didn’t know they were coming.” The student counters that a group of students were aware of what would take place, and Sullivan responds by blaming those students for not notifying the University. This interaction would be shared across local and social media. Reports would later indicate that the University did indeed have prior knowledge.

August 21, 2017

The first City Council meeting following August 11 & 12 quickly veers off schedule after Councilor Bob Fenwick implies that the weekend’s events could not have been predicted. A banner is unfurled by activists behind the dais stating, “BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS.” The agenda is suspended, and Vice-Mayor Wes Bellamy proceeds to oversee a nearly four-hour public comment period in which local residents chastise city officials for their handling of “Unite the Right.”

August 25 & 26, 2017

An internal government memo is leaked to the *Daily Progress* detailing the City Council's concerns over City Manager Maurice Jones' preparations for and handling of August 12. The memo is widely believed to have been released by Mayor Mike Signer, and other Councilors express disapproval over its leak to the media. On the following day, Jones counters by releasing his own memo. The City Council would later restrict Signer's abilities as mayor in response.

August 27, 2017

Reverend Jesse Jackson delivers a speech at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church in Charlottesville. He argues for the removal of the Lost Cause statues, and compares Heather Heyer to Rosa Parks.

August 28, 2017

Community members begin a ten-day "March to Confront White Supremacy" from Charlottesville to Washington, DC. Along the way, participants will chant and sing phrases such as, "We are here, standing strong. We are solid as a rock; we are rooted like a tree."

September 12, 2017

Around one hundred UVA students and faculty, as well as local residents, attend a demonstration near the Rotunda and shroud the statue of Thomas Jefferson with a black tarp. They criticize the University's response to last month's violence, and demand UVA officials take concrete steps toward making the University more welcoming for all students. President Sullivan will later state that these protesters "desecrated" the Jefferson statue.

September 15, 2017

James Ryan is elected by the Board of Visitors to serve as UVA's next President. He will take office on August 1, 2018.

September 24, 2017

"A Concert for Charlottesville" takes place at UVA's Scott Stadium with an all-star line-up organized by musician Dave Matthews. There is controversy over the ticket allocation, as well as the appropriateness of such an event. Activists display a sign outside the event stating, "NO UNITY WITHOUT JUSTICE," and distribute flyers with the same message.

October 2, 2017

Jason Kessler and members of the League of the South, a white supremacist organization that had been present on August 11 and 12, are spotted around Charlottesville's downtown area. Activists respond through confrontation and stalking cars. These actions stop Kessler and others from addressing the City Council during the evening's City Council meeting. Audience members present applaud these actions by locals and chant at the City Council until the proceedings are halted.

October 6, 2017

UVA inaugurates its two-hundredth birthday with the Bicentennial Launch Celebration, which occurs on the Lawn. The event features a multi-media presentation displayed on the face of the Rotunda, detailing the history of the University. In one section, student activists from the 1960s & 70s are celebrated. Halfway down the Lawn and in the present, student activists are arrested by UVA Police after the protesters display a banner stating, "200 Years of White Supremacy."

October 7, 2017

UVA alum Richard Spencer leads a small group wielding lit tiki-torches to the downtown statue of Robert E. Lee. They chant, “You will not replace us” and “The South will rise again.” The rally lasts ten minutes, quickly dispersing before counter-protesters could arrive.

October 9, 2017

DeAndre Harris, who was brutally assaulted in a parking garage by white supremacists on August 12, is himself charged with the unlawful wounding of Harold Ray Crews, a member of the League of the South. Locals decry the charge, as well as national figure Shaun King: “I am disgusted that the justice system bent over backwards to issue a warrant for one of the primary victims of that day, when I and others had to fight like to hell to get the same justice system to prosecute people who were vicious in their attacks against Harris and others.”

October 10, 2017

The Charlottesville Planning Commission is disrupted by local activists demanding “JUSTICE 4 DEANDRE.”

October 11, 2017

Local news station NBC29 airs an interview between Spencer and anchor Henry Graff. Community members express outrage that the station would offer Spencer a platform to air his views.

November 3, 2017

The *Daily Progress* publishes an article detailing City Council candidate Nikuyah Walker’s “unabashedly aggressive” communication style, citing emails from her to city officials. An unnamed “City Hall” source shares and speaks with the newspaper about these documents and expresses concern. There is local outcry about the article

and the unnamed source, who many believe is Mayor Mike Signer.

November 6, 2017

Monday's City Council meeting is contentious due in part to the *Daily Progress* article about Walker. One local resident, after lambasting Signer and the *Daily Progress*, leads the audience in a chant: "We have nothing to lose but our chains." Later on, the Council loses control of the proceedings and calls a twenty-minute recess.

November 7, 2017

Heather Hill and Nikuyah Walker are elected to Charlottesville City Council, replacing Bob Fenwick and Kristin Szakos.

Democrats sweep the major Virginia government offices, and Republicans hold the House of Delegates by one seat. The election is seen nationally as a repudiation of the Trump Administration.

November 20, 2017

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* publishes an article detailing UVA's response to "Unite the Right." The insights come from over three thousand documents shared with the *Chronicle*. The author, Jack Stripling, concludes that the events of August 11 "might not have turned violent if warnings had been heeded."

December 4, 2017

In a marathon two-part, seven-hour meeting, the City Council receives a commissioned independent report by attorney Tim Heaphy. The over-two-hundred-page document analyzes the city's planning for the KKK rally in July, as well as "Unite the Right" in August. The report concludes that, on the whole, the city made error after

error in August and failed to protect its citizens. The meeting is emotional and tense.

December 18, 2017

Jason Kessler attends the City Council meeting to make a statement, but is repeatedly shouted down by audience members during his remarks. Shortly before Kessler speaks, Jim Hingeley offers his own comments, specifically decrying what he sees as a lack of “civility” during City Council proceedings. “Let’s call it what it is: intimidation by an angry mob,” he states.

After continued criticism from residents aimed at local police practices which disproportionately affect the Black community, the Council approves the creation of a Civilian Review Board to oversee the Charlottesville Police Department. An initial group will be formed, tasked with writing a recommended set of CRB by-laws for the Council to vote on in the future.

Chief of Police Al Thomas abruptly resigns.

December 20, 2017

4th Street SE in Charlottesville, the site of the deadly car attack, is renamed “Heather Heyer Way.”

December 27, 2017

The latest edition of *C-Ville Weekly* is dedicated to the community’s response to August 11 and 12. The front page reads, “A summer of violence and hate didn’t just make our city a hashtag — it brought together a community intent on healing.”

January 2, 2018

After a tense and, at times, confrontational meeting, the City Council elects Nikuyah Walker to serve as Mayor,

and Heather Hill to serve as Vice-Mayor. The vote takes place during a public session in a significant departure from precedent.

January 11, 2018

As reported by members of the press, Donald Trump complains to members of his Cabinet about immigrants from “shithole countries,” referring to Haiti and African nations, traveling to the United States. He additionally makes the case for allowing immigrants from countries like “Norway.”

January 12, 2018

An image is taken in front of a library in downtown Charlottesville of what appears to be two nooses dangling from a tree. The photo quickly spreads across social media and local news outlets. Police investigate and confirm that the objects are not nooses, and are instead ropes used to hang banners for local events.

February 5, 2018

City Council approves new rules governing public meetings. Some of the changes include prohibiting members of the public from giving up their allotted speaking time to others, allowing speakers to address City Council more than once, and forcing City Council proceedings to be broadcast even when disruptions are taking place.

February 27, 2018

Judge Richard Moore orders the city to remove the shrouds covering the downtown statues of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. A rally is held outside the courthouse, with activists demanding the statues be taken down.

February 28–March 7, 2018

“I CAN’T BREATHE,” a political slogan used within the Black Lives Matter movement, is written at numerous downtown locations.

Cars in the Charlottesville Belmont neighborhood are painted with swastikas and racist slurs.

Stickers stating “EXILE KESSLER” begin appearing in public spaces around Charlottesville.

March 11, 2018

In response to anti-fascist tactics, Richard Spencer announces that he is ending his speaking tour across the country at college campuses, stating his rallies are no longer “fun,” and that leftist activists are “winning.”

March 13, 2018

Community members hold a rally at the Charlottesville General District Court building demanding “Justice for DeAndre [Harris].”

March 16, 2018

Harris is found not guilty at trial. After the proceedings, locals march to the downtown Lee statue. Along the way, they chant and wield signs proclaiming the importance of supporting community defenders against white supremacy and fascism.

March 25, 2018

Two Black activists are told by Judge Richard Moore to remove their “Black Lives Matter” t-shirts in court or else face charges and jail time. He explains that their shirts might sway opinions during trial proceedings.

March 31, 2018

A group called Virginia Flaggers raises a thirty-by-fifty foot Confederate flag along Interstate 64 outside of Charlottesville. They explain on their Facebook page, “the same spirit of defiance that drove our ancestors to take up arms in 1776 and 1861 is alive and well in us today and will not allow us to remain silent or sit idly by as our ancestors are the subjects of false narratives and lies by those who, driven by ignorance and hate, seek to destroy our history and heritage.”

April 17, 2018

Fliers reading “It’s okay to be white” appear in the north downtown area of Charlottesville. The phrase is often used by white supremacists for recruitment purposes and spreading their ideology.

April 18 & 19, 2018

Jason Kessler occupies the University of Virginia Law School library, allegedly preparing for cases in which he is involved. His presence upsets a number of students, and some silently protest nearby by filming him and holding up signs, such as “BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS.”

A town hall is held the next day between student group leaders, faculty, and administration officials to discuss what to do next. Many present argue that Kessler should be banned from the UVA Grounds.

April 20–22, 2018

The Listen First Project comes to Charlottesville. The organizer, Pearce Godwin, explains that the event is meant to support “healing and reconciliation” in the city, as well as “bridging divides” in America. The event is condemned by local activists, who see it as ignoring community needs and voices, profiting from local

trauma, and promoting a harmful “civility” discourse.

April 25 & 27, 2018

Kessler again occupies the UVA Law School library and is offered a room protected by three police officers.

Two days later, students organize a rally at the Rotunda to protest Kessler’s presence and demand the University ban him from campus. Before the rally takes place, University officials issue a no-trespass order against Kessler.

May 1, 2018

A local delegation travels to Winneba, Ghana, a Charlottesville sister-city. The participants, including Mayor Nikuyah Walker, embark on the trip to learn about the transatlantic slave trade and meet with Winneba city leaders.

May 1 & 3, 2018

In two separate trials, Jacob Goodwin and Alex Ramos are found guilty for the malicious wounding of DeAndre Harris on August 12, 2017.

May 13, 2018

On the anniversary of “Charlottesville 1.0,” locals hold a demonstration next to the statue of Stonewall Jackson. In a statement, the organizers declare that the attempts of white supremacists “to intimidate Charlottesville, [and] to use Charlottesville as a platform to defend ‘whiteness,’ have failed.”

May 21, 2018

City Manager Maurice Jones announces the appointment of Dr. RaShall Brackney as the next Charlottesville Police Chief.

June 16, 2018

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation opens six new exhibits and restored spaces to the public at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's former plantation and home, including the "Life of Sally Hemings" and the "Getting Word" oral history project. Both aim to tell the stories of Monticello's enslaved communities and their descendants.

July 7, 2018

Local residents hold a funeral for John Henry James at the site where he was lynched by a mob on July 12, 1898. They collect soil from the site, which a delegation will take to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.

July 12, 2018

On the one-hundred-and-twenty-first anniversary of his death, a historical marker is raised at the downtown courthouse to memorialize the life and lynching of John Henry James.

July 15, 2018

Following a public petition to change the names of Emancipation and Justice Parks, led by local Mary Carey, City Council votes to rename the parks to Market Street and Court Square, respectively.

August 2018

Robocalls are reported throughout the Charlottesville area. They all feature the same message, which includes appeals for ethnic cleansing and the repealing of the Fourteenth Amendment.

August 6, 2018

The City Council discusses preparations for the upcoming anniversary of “Unite the Right.” Locals express concern and frustration, and Councilor Wes Bellamy notes that there is still anger and distrust among city residents with their local government.

August 7, 2018

A panel of local activists is held at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center. Participants express the importance of “showing up” and “being present” during the fight against white supremacy, and specifically encourage locals to get involved for the upcoming anniversary. At the same time, some panelists emphasize the importance of knowing emotional and physical limitations, and to not put yourself into any re-traumatizing situations.

August 8, 2018

Hundreds of police cars and officers begin entering the city to participate in local and state preparations for the upcoming A11/12 anniversary. Locals express dismay at the heavy police presence. Barricades will additionally be set up in the downtown area to facilitate a perimeter for bag searches.

August 10, 2018

Spike Lee’s *BlacKkKlansmen* is released in theaters. The film tells the true story of police officer Ron Stallworth, who infiltrated the local Colorado Springs chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in 1979. Footage from August 11 and 12, 2017 in Charlottesville is depicted at the conclusion of the movie. Theaters broadcasting the film in Charlottesville include a warning in the opening: “The final minutes of ‘BlacKkKlansman’ feature a powerful epilogue that could be disturbing or difficult to watch for many viewers in Charlottesville.”

August 11, 2018

Early in the day, the University of Virginia holds an event at Old Cabell Hall to mark the one-year anniversary of “Unite the Right.” Titled “The Hope that Summons Us: A Morning of Reflection and Renewal,” the occasion features remarks by UVA President James E. Ryan and Hon. John Charles Thomas, as well as musical performances.

“A Service for Repair” is held at Charlottesville’s First Presbyterian Church, which includes “poetry, music, dance, contemplation and communal ritual.” The event is organized by members of Congregate Charlottesville, a local group focused on “faith-rooted action and justice-oriented education.”

Student activists hold a rally near the Jefferson Statue north of the Rotunda at UVA. The event space is heavily cordoned by police, and the activists at first hold the event in this area, but then lead participants to an un-walled-off area nearby to continue the rally. Police put on riot gear in response, which prompts local residents to create a shield between the students and the police. Eventually, the activists lead a march through the city streets. The march ends in Charlottesville’s downtown area.

August 12, 2018

Locals attend an event at Booker T. Washington Park to mark the one-year anniversary of “Unite the Right.” There are planned speakers, as well as moments for learning songs and chants. At the end of the event, everyone contributes to a “collective scream” to allow for all of the “grief, rage, and things that need to get out” within the community.

Hundreds of locals attend the “C’ville Sing Out” at the Mt. Zion First African Baptist Church in Charlottesville. The occasion features communal singing, and organizers

express that the purpose of the event is not “political,” but rather to “bring Charlottesville together in a beautiful way.”

August 14, 2018

The City Council holds a “Listening Session” at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center. Members of the public voice their anger at the recent heavy police presence, as well as the way city and University of Virginia officials addressed local activism during the prior weekend.

August 17, 2018

A bus draped in Confederate imagery and pro-Trump signage is parked in front of First United Methodist Church in Charlottesville, directly across the street from Market Street Park and the Robert E. Lee statue. The church pastor, Rev. Phil Woodson, tweets a photo of the bus and adds a message: “Just a reminder that August 12th was neither the beginning nor the end of overt white supremacy in Charlottesville. For those of us who live here, any day could be August 12th.” When approached by *HuffPost* for additional comment, he explains, “perpetually, for some, every day feels like August 13th.”

August 21, 2018

Through a GoFundMe site, local activists demand that Spike Lee donate \$219,113 to the community — the amount that Lee apparently received from the New York Police Department for collaborating on a 2016 ad campaign. The activists add, “You fabricated a fiction where black peoples’ aims for liberation, safety and self-determination from the forces of white supremacy are shared with the police.”

September 30, 2018

María Chavalan Sut, a Guatemalan asylum seeker, takes public sanctuary in Charlottesville's Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church after being threatened with deportation by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement federal agency. A press release by the church states, "The congregation and the community have come together to lift up María and support her fight for safety and freedom."

November 26, 2018

Jury selection begins in the Charlottesville Circuit Court trial of James Fields, Jr., the individual who drove his car through a group of counter-protesters on August 12, 2017.

November 27, 2018

More robocalls are heard in the Charlottesville area, this time blaming the death of Heather Heyer on the city's "Jew Mayor" and "Pet Negro Police Chief."

December 7, 2018

Fields is found guilty of first-degree murder and nine other charges in Charlottesville Circuit Court.

December 12, 2018

A banner is left at the Pine Hill Baptist Church in nearby Nelson County, stating "JAMES FIELDS DID NOTHING WRONG." Victims of August 11 & 12 were known to attend the church.

January 17, 2019

The Beta Bridge along Rugby Road in Charlottesville — a crossing which has been historically vandalized by UVA students to share messages within the University

community — is marked with the white supremacist slogan “It’s OK to be white.” The phrase intentionally covers up a message celebrating the anniversary of the national founding of Zeta Phi Beta, a historically-Black sorority.

February 2019

On February 1, an image of a man in blackface standing next to someone in a Klansman costume begins to circulate online. The photo comes from a 1984 Eastern Virginia Medical School yearbook, and Virginia Governor Ralph Northam is believed to be the individual in blackface. At first, he acknowledges his appearance in the photo, but later recants and states he does not believe he is present in the image. Another yearbook, from the Virginia Military Institute, lists Northam as “Coonman.”

A few days later, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring admits that he wore blackface in 1980 while a student at the University of Virginia.

Additionally, sexual assault allegations against Virginia Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax resurface. A second woman comes forward stating that she had been raped by Fairfax.

March 20, 2019

National Public Radio produces a radio piece detailing the debates over “civility” taking place in Charlottesville local government: “As once-marginalized voices amp up calls for change, the [city] council continues to wrestle with the question of just what public discourse should look like after the [August 2017] tragedy.”

March 27, 2019

James Fields, Jr. enters twenty-nine guilty pleas in federal court in a deal with prosecutors to avoid the death penalty.

April 26, 2019

Asked to comment on his earlier “both sides” statements following A11/12, President Trump explains that his comments were put “perfectly,” and that he “was talking about people who went because they felt very strongly about the monument to Robert E. Lee, a great general. Whether you like it or not, he was one of the great generals.”

April 30, 2019

Judge Richard E. Moore rules that the downtown statues to Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson are war monuments protected by state law, and therefore the city cannot remove them. Local activist Don Gathers comments on the ruling, stating, “Just because something is legal doesn’t mean it’s right or it’s moral. I’m fearful what this has done is given the vile evilness that descended upon us in August of 2017 to come back.”

May 13, 2019

In an article published in *The Atlantic*, Richard Spencer explains that President Trump was critical to A11/12: “There is no question that Charlottesville wouldn’t have occurred without Trump. [...] The alt-right found something in Trump. He changed the paradigm and made this kind of public presence of the alt-right possible.”

June 28, 2019

Fields receives a prison life sentence in federal court for hate crime charges.

July 1, 2019

In two separate votes, the City Council creates Liberation and Freedom Day, and removes Thomas Jefferson's birthday, as official city holidays.

July 15, 2019

Fields receives a second life sentence, as well as a fine and four hundred and nineteen years in prison in Charlottesville Circuit Court for charges including first-degree murder.

Early August, 2019

The Charlottesville and UVA communities, as well as the city government commemorate the anniversaries of A11/12 with numerous dialogue events, programmed music, interfaith services, and outdoor activities. In response to local complaints from last year, the police presence is notably reduced.

August 14, 2019

A series of articles collectively titled the "1619 Project" are published in the *New York Times Magazine*. The initiative "aims to reframe the [United States'] history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of our national narrative." The publication sparks a debate in the country over the nature of American history, and how this history is predominantly told.

September–October, 2019

The *Washington Post*, BBC, and NPR all publish articles describing controversies surrounding tours of southern plantations, including Monticello. They note that some visitors are "upset" by the fact that slavery is discussed at certain sites. Others argue that some plantation tours do not adequately address slavery.

November 5, 2019

Virginia state and local elections take place, and, for the first time since 1994, both state legislatures are controlled by the Democratic Party. Sena Magill, Michael Payne, and Lloyd Snook are elected to the Charlottesville City Council, replacing Wes Bellamy, Kathy Galvin, and Mike Signer.

December 27 & 28, 2019

Health and government officials in China are notified of the presence of a novel coronavirus, later named COVID-19. The virus will spread internationally, leading to a global pandemic and untold health and economic devastation. As of the publication of this dissertation, over twenty-seven thousand cases of the disease have been documented in Albemarle County and Charlottesville, in addition to two hundred and thirty-six deaths. Nationally, the numbers are over eighty-one million cases and nearly one million deaths.

December 30, 2019

Members of the Monumental Justice Virginia Campaign hold a rally on the Downtown Mall demanding that newly elected Virginia legislators grant the city the ability to control local monuments and determine the futures of these objects. House Delegate-elect Sally Hudson, who plans on introducing related legislation in the upcoming session, attends the event and states, “We wouldn’t be here today without the activists and artists and educators and all of the elected leaders who have elevated this issue.”

APPENDIX B***Cavalier Daily Op-Ed*****“CHATTLETON: The Reverberating Lawn”**

October 4, 2017

While serving as a Kenan Fellow of the Academical Village this past summer, I researched the sonic history of the University. I discovered a common narrative of our University’s past — an early period dominated by “noise,” riots and protest, followed by a “quiet” era which continues into the present. This is a fanciful narrative which unfortunately predominates today. It troubles our own ideas both of what the meaning of “noise” is and of how political the University has always been. With the University’s Bicentennial upon us, it is important that we recognize the breadth of this noisy past, and listen to what it has to teach us as we enter a new chapter in our University’s history.

On May 6, 1810, Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to Trustees of the East Tennessee College, describing his thoughts on the ideal learning environment. He envisioned a university with lodges for both students and professors — “the whole of these arranged around an open square of grass & trees would make it, what it would be in fact, an academical village, instead of a large & common den of noise, of filth, & of fetid air. it would afford that quiet retirement so friendly to study.”

This letter went largely unnoticed until a professor at Vanderbilt University sent it to President Edwin Alderman in 1923 — it has since become part of the lore of the University's founding. However, in spite of Jefferson's vision, student displays of disorderly, riotous and noisy behavior almost jeopardized the future of the University. In an infamous letter from 1825, for example, George Pierson describes the University as a "nursery of bad principles," and relays a story of students leading an ox to the top floor of the Rotunda, where it was "left to amuse the students ... By its noisy bellowings." The subsequent period of bad behavior, as the usual story goes, culminated with the shooting of Prof. John A. G. Davis in 1840, a turning point in the University's history that led to a more disciplined student body and the institution of the Honor System.

Yet, my research shows that this narrative is not borne out by the evidence. Moreover, it clouds our understanding of recent events and their supposedly "unprecedented" character. The "Unite the Right" Rally was not the first time the University and the larger Charlottesville community was terrorized by a group of white supremacists. Philena Carkin, a teacher of the Charlottesville freedmen during Reconstruction, writes of the "Calithump," a kind of noisy parade — "Woe to the unfortunate individual ... Who in any way gained the ill will of one of these students. With faces masked, and torches made of brooms dipped in tar and lighted they would march to his house to the music of tin horns, and surrounding the building make night hideous as only yelling demons can."

These University students, according to Carlin, often terrorized her and the local black community, leaving behind Ku Klux Klan symbols and breaking window panes. When we hear of recent events in Charlottesville as being “unprecedented,” we should instead see how familiar they are to the neighborhood, how familiar the history of white supremacy is to the University and the nation at large.

The noise and violence of Aug. 11 and 12 also showed a University administration repeating its own past without recognizing it, ultimately failing to acknowledge and respond appropriately to its political environment. Following the Kent State shootings in May 1970, University students occupied Maury Hall, surrounded Carr’s Hill and blocked the intersection at University Avenue and Rugby Road. Their demands were for an end to the war in Vietnam and Cambodia, for a living wage for staff, for a more diverse and representative student body and faculty and for a more engaged and politically aware University administration — demands strikingly similar to more recent demands from the student body. These events were also described as “unprecedented” by the University administration, which found itself unprepared because of an “It can’t happen here” attitude.

What all of these and many more events tell us is that the University has always been saturated with noisy protests, violence and unrest. Noise can be a sign of political upheaval, of cultural dynamics and of a failure to reconcile the past with the present. It is odd that

Jefferson believed in the noise of revolution and democracy, and yet envisioned his University as a quiet and detached utopia. We must dispel this myth and recognize the truly political nature of the University. Our Academical Village is profoundly intertwined with events of local, national and global significance. And as we heard after Aug. 11 and 12, the world is now profoundly affected by what takes place here on Grounds. If we willingly deafen ourselves to our University's noisy history, we will make the same mistakes over and over again, and will fail not only our community, but ourselves as well. Only after addressing this reality can we confidently enter a new century for the University.

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YOUTUBE VIDEOS

Note: Throughout my research, I came across numerous YouTube videos documenting A11/12. Some of them have since been removed from YouTube, presumably due in part to changes in YouTube policies.³¹⁷ Nevertheless, I have cited original YouTube links below for clarity and posterity, in addition to other videos used for dissertation research.

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