



Two years ago, the driver in Charlottesville was a high school student. We can do more.

August 15, 2017

Dear Friends,

Like all of you, I am struggling to make sense of the tragedy in Charlottesville. Merely condemning white supremacists, neo-Nazis, the KKK and racists is not enough. As educators and champions for better schools, we can do more.

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion," wrote Nelson Mandela. That includes James Alex Fields, Jr., the 20-year old who rammed his car into a crowd on Saturday. A 2015 high school graduate, Fields is a member of a new generation of racists. Just two years ago, Fields was one of America's K-12 students.

The press interviewed Fields' former high school teacher, Derek Weimer, who said that after hearing the tragic news, "My first instinct was I failed . . . I feel like I failed and that we all failed." Mr. Weimer went on to say, "Your mission as a teacher is to teach kids valuable fundamentals and skills to be successful in life and to be good citizens. When you see something culminating with James Fields, it's a complete defeat."

According to Mr. Weimer, Fields was a bright kid with friends. ***But he thinks Fields found a community that fostered his pro-Nazi ideas.***

I can't help but to think-what if Fields had found support and nurture ***in a different community***, one committed to exposing the evils of white supremacy, and other forms of intolerance? What if his school had been able to provide him with that community?

I risk simplifying what is no doubt a complex individual and situation. Our society is built on a foundation of white supremacy that predates all of us. Nonetheless, I'm not letting myself off the hook. The second half of Mandela's quote resonates with me. After reminding us that no one is born hating another person, Mandela observes that hatred is learned. He went on, ". . . and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Let's work even harder to teach our young people (and ourselves) to love. At CSS, we will do what we can to channel our hurt and anger from this weekend into acting as even better partners to America's schools, supporting them to become safer and more supportive, engaging, and inspiring places where love flourishes.

With love,

Daniel

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