



Rejecting Bigotry, Demanding Action

Communications to Direct our Outrage Toward Concrete, Lasting Change

Shouting racist and anti-Semitic slurs, white supremacists brought hatred and violence to Charlottesville, VA, this weekend, including James Alex Fields Jr.’s killing of Heather D. Heyer, an activist for inclusion. The hatred and attacks drew outrage, activism, and condemnation. But President Trump, incredibly, refused to name or condemn white supremacists, and blamed hatred, bigotry, and violence “on many sides”—a phrase he repeated twice. His statement two days later was vague, full of platitudes, and failed to call Ms. Heyer’s killing terrorism.

Protests, condemnations, and mourning must continue. Alongside these actions, it is important to call for leadership and concrete lasting change that includes, but goes far beyond, addressing this recent and terrible resurgence of white supremacist violence. We can’t remain caught in this moment of anger and disbelief. We have to continue our work to tell the story about what “America” really means.

Together with UnidosUS, The Opportunity Agenda completed public opinion and messaging research with this goal in mind: to tell a story of American diversity that reflects our values and our aspirations as a country stronger because of our myriad backgrounds, ethnicities, races, experiences – because of the parts of us that may make us different, but ultimately also make us stronger. This research provides guidance for those using their platforms to reject bigotry while demand action.

Lead with Values.

Leading with shared values helps to persuade the disengaged and undecided while mobilizing the base of people who support equity, rights, and inclusion. Particularly important values here include **Dignity**, **Respect for Human Rights**, **Equal Justice**, and **Diversity** as one of our nation’s greatest **Strengths**.

Link diversity to problem solving, strength, and healthy communities rather than economic competition. Talk about how we need to take advantage of our source of strength in diversity. Be inspirational, positive, and talk about embracing our differences. And explicitly talk about those differences—e.g., “no matter what race someone is, where they come from, their religion, or whom they love.”

Consider these examples:

“Our country’s strength stems from its diversity and the contributions made by men and women of different faiths, races, sexual orientations and political beliefs. America’s leaders must honor our fundamental values by clearly rejecting expressions of hatred, bigotry and group supremacy, which run counter to the American ideal that all people are created equal.”

— *Kenneth C. Frazier, chairman and CEO, Merck*

“Mr. President - we must call evil by its name. These were white supremacists and this was domestic terrorism.”

— *U.S. Senator Corey Gardner (CO)*

“Our nation is defined by the march of progress. Our strength lies in our diversity. We must reject hate.”

— *U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA)*

Name White Supremacy, Bigotry, Hate, and Terrorism.

It's important to accurately call out white supremacy and supremacists, racists and racism, Nazis and Nazism, bigotry, and hate where they exist. Terms like “nationalism” and “alt-right” do not carry the power or accuracy of these more specific terms. Similarly, we should name “terrorism” wherever it occurs, and whoever the alleged perpetrators. For example:

“White supremacist violence is an unconscionable part of our nation’s history, but we cannot allow it to poison our future. Our nation’s leadership, on both sides of the aisle, must not only forcefully condemn it, but work actively and affirmatively to stop it.”

— *NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund*

“What happened in Charlottesville is an act of terrorism pure and simple. This is one all too familiar to our country’s history. We’re standing with the peaceful protesters in Charlottesville, with our 1 million members across the country and with everyone tonight heartbroken like us. Let’s work together to ensure that tomorrow we don’t continue to replicate the horrors of the past.”

— *Color of Change*

Call out the history and spectrum of systemic racism in this administration and beyond.

While the events in Charlottesville were terrible and dramatic, bigotry, white supremacy and bias are imbedded in our political and other institutions in ways that must be called out and explicitly linked. They include:

- Documented white supremacists in positions of power in the Trump Administration, including White House advisors Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka; Kris Kobach, vice chair of Trump’s election commission, who has [documented](#) connections to hate groups and a history of anti-immigrant and voter suppression activism, and Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who has spent his career undermining civil rights, and according to [congressional testimony](#) “used the n-word and joked about the Ku Klux Klan, saying he thought they were ‘okay, until he learned that they smoked marijuana.’”

- Donald Trump's long and well-documented history of racism and bigotry, including denying that President Obama was born in the U.S.; contending that Judge Gonzalo Curiel could not rule on a case against him because of the Judge's Mexican heritage; failing to disavow the support of Klansman David Duke; continually referring to U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren as "Pocahontas"; disparaging Muslim Americans; labeling Mexican-Americans as "rapists" and other slurs.
- The Trump Administration's unconstitutional "Muslim ban," held by federal courts to be intentionally discriminatory based on religion.
- Action by the Trump Administration and Justice Department, led by Jeff Sessions, to abandon vigorous civil rights enforcement through consent decrees and other approaches; to challenge higher education diversity policies as discriminatory against whites; slashing civil rights enforcement by the Departments of Labor, Education, EPA, and other entities.
- The Trump Administration's bogus "Election Integrity" Commission, led by Kris Kobach, rooted in a falsehood about non-existent voting problems, which has sought invasive voting information from the states and is clearly designed to infringe the voting rights of citizens of color.
- Attempts in many states to violate the voting rights of people of color, to exclude Muslims, and persecute immigrants, as well as the many hate crimes that have occurred around the country over the past year and have been ignored by this President and his administration.

Consider these examples of effective messaging:

"President Trump's press conference and tweets today are not enough. He must take responsibility for his role in propagating white nationalist ideology and fueling their movement. We call on him to immediately denounce the white supremacy movement by name and remove those who condone white supremacy, like Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, from the White House. Their mere presence, and their prime roles in fanning these flames of bigotry, is a silent endorsement of this violence. There is only one side of hate, vulgarity, and violence."

—Muslim Advocates

"I'm sure white supremacists remain reassured that they have a friend in the White House. A president who spews vitriol and heaps scorn on his enemies virtually every day – and who has no trouble calling Mexicans killers and "rapists" – still can't break off the unholy alliance with bigots that he's been cultivating since he first claimed President Obama's birth certificate was bogus."

— Richard Cohen, Southern Poverty Law Center

Reject Attempts to Dodge or Divide

Call out attempts to divide us, without repeating the other side's message. An effective message from our research includes:

Our country is changing, getting more and more diverse. It might make some people uncomfortable, but it is our reality, and a constant throughout our history. Politicians play on this fear, trying to divide us. They push unwise and divisive ideas like sending federal troops to police our cities, building a border wall, or singling out Muslim Americans because of their religion. If we take the bait on these, it makes our country weaker, not stronger. Our nation is stronger when every one of us can contribute and share ideas, and when everyone's basic rights and dignity are respected. We need to embrace ideas that unify us as a diverse people and make our country stronger, and we need to speak out against discrimination and prejudice when we see it.

Lift up Positive Solutions.

After condemning the problem, turn to positive solutions, including systemic change. This can include, for example, removing white supremacy and its proponents, root and branch, from the government; aggressive civil rights and anti-hate crimes enforcement; upholding voting rights and dismantling the discriminatory “election integrity commission”; abandoning wrongheaded attacks on university diversity policies; ending the “Muslim ban” and halting attacks on sanctuary cities.

Beyond the administration, it’s crucial to demand that all policymakers and institutions reject and proactively eradicate supremacist, discriminatory, and exclusionary policies. It is unacceptable for any leader—governmental, business, faith, or otherwise—to remain silent in the fact of this crucial moment for the country. We must demand that leaders and institutions throughout our nation take a stand against white supremacy and bigotry, including inside their institutions.

Building Values-based Messages

We recommend structuring messages with a Values, Problem, Solution, Action formula. For example:

Value

Our country’s greatest strength is the diversity of our people and the principles of equal dignity and inclusion that unite us all.

Problem

The hatred and terrorism that we saw in Charlottesville are terrible reminders that white supremacy is a dangerous threat to our nation and our values. President Trump’s flawed and feeble response only reinforces the unacceptable pattern of bigotry in his rhetoric, among his advisors like Steve Bannon and Kris Kobach, and in policies like the “Muslim ban” and the undermining of voting rights.

Solution

The President must not only condemn white supremacy, bigotry, and violence, but also rid his administration of supremacists and their ideology, and commit to a policy agenda of equal justice and inclusion.

Action

Contact President Trump today to demand clear action for unity and inclusion in his administration and throughout our country.