

Washington Braces for Far Right Rally a Year After Charlottesville Clashes

Washington braced for a white nationalist rally on Sunday organized to coincide with the anniversary of last year's racially charged violence in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The "Unite the Right 2" event was set to take place at 5:30 p.m. in Lafayette Square, across the street from the White House. Several demonstrations by counterprotesters, who were expected to outnumber the white nationalists, were to take place nearby.

Authorities have promised an enormous police presence to keep both sides apart and avoid the street brawls that broke out last year in downtown Charlottesville. A local woman, Heather Heyer, was killed when an Ohio man, James Fields, drove his car into a crowd of counterprotesters.

At the time, President Donald Trump said there were "very fine people" on both sides, spurring criticism from across the political divide that he was equating the counterprotesters with the rally attendees, who included neo-Nazis and other white supremacists.

On Saturday, Trump condemned "all types of racism" in a Twitter post marking the anniversary.

Kellyanne Conway, a senior adviser to Trump, said on Sunday that the media was "just not covering" the president's repeated denunciations of white nationalists.

"He's calling for unity among all Americans and he denounced all forms of bigotry and acts of violence and racism," Conway said on ABC's "This Week."

In Washington on Saturday evening, nearly two dozen police officers patrolled Lafayette Square, where members of the Washington chapter of Black Lives Matter were sprinkled through the park, seemingly standing on guard.

Organizers of #OccupyLafayettePark, a civil rights group that holds nightly protests in the square, held up posters reading “Love America, Hate Trump” and “Defend The District From White Supremacy” just steps away from the White House.

In picturesque college town of Charlottesville, hundreds of police officers maintained a security perimeter around the normally bustling downtown district throughout the day on Saturday. Vehicular traffic was barred from an area of more than 15 city blocks, while pedestrians were allowed access at two checkpoints where officers examined bags for weapons.

Hundreds of students and activists took to the streets on Saturday evening. Many of the protesters directed their anger at the heavy police presence, with chants like “cops and Klan go hand in hand,” a year after police were harshly criticized for their failure to prevent the violence.

Earlier on Saturday, a group of anti-fascist protesters walked through the downtown area, holding signs with messages like “Good Night White Pride.” But the day was largely free of confrontation.

On Sunday morning, activist Grace Aheron, 27, donned a Black Lives Matter T-shirt and joined hundreds of Charlottesville residents who gathered at Booker T. Washington Park to mark the anniversary of last year’s bloodshed.

“We want to claim our streets back, claim our public space back, claim our city back,” Aheron said at the park.

Several events were scheduled in the city including a gathering that will include veteran civil rights activist Reverend Al Sharpton and Susan Bro, the mother of the woman who was killed a year ago.

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