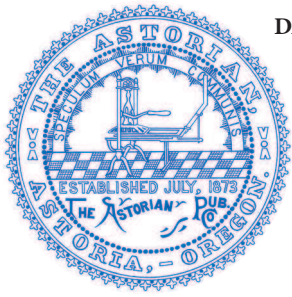


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW



Carlos Anaya/The Daily Astorian
A Regatta parade float by Sons of Beaches featured U.S. and military flags, along with a Confederate flag decal on the trailer.

Astoria Regatta not the place for divisive symbol

In what has become the highlight event of the region's oldest festival, this year's Grand Land Parade in the 123rd Astoria Regatta may be remembered more for what shouldn't have been in it rather than what was. It's unfortunate, because the festival otherwise showcased the spirit and volunteerism of the coast at its best and the organizers and volunteers deserve credit for their dedicated efforts.

While the high-profile parade featured its normal dignitaries, bands, clowns and floats, and the accompanying smiles from the vast majority of the attendees, a float built by the Sons of Beaches, an off-road enthusiast group that participates in community charity events and parades, contained upsetting bumper-sticker sized decals with Confederate logos and was followed by a truck with a Confederate flag. It sparked outrage by some who saw it and further disapproval online.

The all-volunteer, nonprofit Astoria Regatta Association issued an apology Monday, saying it was an unfortunate incident and that the association regrets "the impression caused that Regatta in any way supports or condones the display of the Confederate flag. ... Please do not let our oversight reflect negatively on Astoria, or the many, many volunteers who give thousands of hours to create a positive community event each year."

The float's main visual was a large replica of U.S. Marines heroically hoisting the American flag on Iwo Jima in World War II and the bumper stickers were affixed to the trailer carrying it and were easy to miss.

The Sons of Beaches group's leader, Jay Pitman, said the float included several other battle flags from throughout U.S. history meant to honor war veterans, and that the trailer with Confederate decals had been used in prior parades. "We don't fly our flags with disrespect," he said. "We fly it with respect to all our veterans. We do not allow any personal political issues or personal agendas. We are non-biased, non racist. We are about Americanism and supporting local law enforcement and first responders." He said the group is considering removing the flag from future parade events.

It should do just that.

The flag, first flown by the Confederate army during war against the United States, mocks what our country stands for. It is a sad part of our nation's history, as are Ku Klux Klan hoods, the Daves Act and signs declaring "Whites Only." None of which should be celebrated, and a family-friendly festival is certainly not the place for displaying a divisive symbol from the Civil War.

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than

mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

E-mail to editor@dailyastorian.com; online at www.dailyastorian.com; delivered to the Astorian offices at 949 Exchange St. and 1555 N. Roosevelt in Seaside or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.



Finding some comfort in the chaos after Charlottesville



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Dozens of people showed up in Astoria Sunday evening to hold a candlelight vigil to remember the victims of violence in Charlottesville, Va.

By ERICK BENDEL
The Daily Astorian

I still don't know how to process, much less fully articulate, my feelings about Charlottesville.



What do you say when you're confronted with an evil you can't dismiss as an isolated incident or the act of a deranged loner, but is the product of a hive mind running on pure, unreasoning hatred and self-righteous stupidity?

Last weekend, a large group of white men wielding tiki torches and identifying as white nationalists, some chanting "Jews will not replace us!" gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the planned removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee, a symbol of a society built on the enslavement and abuse of millions of human beings.

Clashes with counter-protesters turned violent. Then, on Saturday afternoon, a Hitler admirer drove his car into another vehicle, killing a young woman and injuring several other counter-protesters. Two Virginia state troopers also died in a helicopter that crashed while monitoring the riot.

On Sunday night, a vigil organized by Indivisible North Coast Oregon took place at Eighth and Commercial streets. Roughly 100 people turned out, sang loving protest songs and observed a moment of silence for the fallen.

Notably, the speakers named the source of the problem. White nationalism. White supremacy. The euphemistically labeled "alt-right."



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
People gathered Sunday evening in Astoria to sing songs and hold a candlelight vigil in honor of the victims of violence in Charlottesville, Va., over the weekend.

This starkly contrasted with President Donald Trump's mealy-mouthed speech the day before that condemned "hatred, bigotry and violence, on many sides" — let that stunning false equivalence sink in — but didn't call out the noxious ideology that fueled "Unite the Right." (This from the guy who harped on President Barack Obama's refusal to associate ISIS with Islam.)

Trump's inability to condemn white nationalism specifically for two days — an elision that neo-Nazi groups gleefully interpreted as a tacit endorsement — and only because he finally buckled under pressure, offered yet another window into the moral cowardice of the man. Which is more pathetic: marching in a white supremacist rally, or being unable to condemn the marchers because you need

their votes and feel compelled to reward their support?

Trump may pretend not to understand what really took place in Charlottesville — and what his own racist demagoguery, from birtherism onward, contributed to it — but cities across the U.S. held vigils similar to Astoria's. And they, too, understood what happened and named the problem.

Sometimes, even when your voice cracks and all you can muster is a feeble "This is wrong" because stronger and more eloquent words escape you, it's important to say it anyway.

And, if you look around, you'll find people who are struggling to process their feelings as well, but who can still recognize evil and can name it when they see it. There's some comfort to be found in that.

What do you say when you're confronted with an evil you can't dismiss as an isolated incident or the act of a deranged loner, but is the product of a hive mind running on pure, unreasoning hatred and self-righteous stupidity?