

# False Reporting About ‘Very Fine People on Both Sides’

On [July 27, 2020](#), PolitiFact published a fact check of Vice President Joe Biden’s claim that President Trump is the first racist president of the United States.

Though the fact check apparently did not require the step, PolitiFact informed readers that one may qualify as a racist based on making statements that others consider racist. In a section apparently intended to provide examples in support, PolitiFact said Mr. Trump responded to violence between two groups of protesters in Charlottesville by saying some of the neo-Nazis involved were very fine people. Here’s how the fact check expressed that idea:

As president in 2017, Trump [said](#) there were "very fine people, on both sides," in reference to neo-Nazis and counterprotesters in Charlottesville, Va.

However, PolitiFact itself published [an “In Context” feature in 2019](#) showing that its July 27, 2020 interpretation was false. PolitiFact linked to that “In Context” feature in the fact check but apparently without much consideration of the context.

Leading up to the “very fine people” remark, Mr. Trump said “Those people -- all of those people -- excuse me, I’ve condemned neo-Nazis. I’ve condemned many different groups. But not all of those people were neo-Nazis, believe me. Not all of those people were white supremacists by any stretch. Those people were also there because they wanted to protest the taking down of a statue of Robert E. Lee.”

And very shortly after the “very fine people” comment, Mr. Trump said “So you know what, it’s fine. You’re changing history. You’re changing culture. And you had people -- and I’m not talking about the neo-Nazis and the white nationalists -- because they should be condemned totally. But you had many people in that group other than neo-Nazis and white nationalists. Okay?”

Twice Mr. Trump made abundantly clear that he condemns neo-Nazis. The context makes clear that the “very fine people” on the right he had in mind were not neo-Nazis or white supremacists but merely defenders of the Robert E. Lee statue. PolitiFact’s 2020 reporting ignored the obvious context and falsely reported Trump was saying some of the neo-Nazis were very fine people.

As I noted in my message to PolitiFact calling for a correction, it is not the place of a fact-checker to assure readers Mr. Trump was referring to neo-Nazis when the context clearly shows otherwise.

A week after I submitted my correction request to PolitiFact, the organization has taken [no noticeable action](#) to correct its false reporting. That inaction ought to strike any fair-minded person as a failure to scrupulously adhere to an open and honest corrections policy.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Bryan W. White  
Editor, publisher Zebra Fact Check