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Statement for the Record
United States House of Representatives
Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack in on the United States Capitol
March 29, 2022

To the Honorable Representative Bennie Thompson, Chairperson,
and Honorable Members of the Committee:

As an historian who has spent nearly two decades studying the white power movement, it is clear to me that organized, violent, and anti-democracy white power activists played a key role in the January 6 attack on the United States Capitol. While these activists represented one of three major constituencies, the others being QAnon adherents and supporters of former President Donald J. Trump, they nevertheless played a crucial role. White power activists were organized, connected with one another, and prepared to use the January 6 attack to deliberately weaken American democracy.

History teaches us that we are too close to the events of January 6 to assemble a full picture of the white power movement on that day—the full story is ten or twenty years away, and will rely on the gradual declassification of records, the testimony of people leaving the movement, the fruits of investigations, and archival processing. Only then will be able to read the movement of activists between groups, the tension between what people said they were doing and what they did, and the other insights that only history can provide. However, the earlier history *is* available to us, and has much to teach us about a set of best guesses we can venture about the movement. It is, after all, the same movement, unbowed and unbroken from the late 1970s to the present.

The white power movement has deliberately attempted to mislead lawmakers, surveillance agencies, and the public by presenting itself as a series of errant acts of violence by “lone wolves,” as reactionary violence by disaffected radicals, or as the disorganized chaos of unconnected or feuding groups. These stories together comprise a campaign of disinformation that has distorted the truth: that white power activists and groups should be properly understood as a broad and interconnected groundswell that is (1) national (and even transnational) in scope, (2) capable of mass violence and with a long record of violent acts at multiple scales, and (3) fundamentally opposed to the United States, democracy, and living in a multicultural nation.

My first book, *Bring the War Home*, presents a history white power movement from its formation after the Vietnam War to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing (its deadliest mass attack to date but certainly not the only one, and likely not the last). This earlier part of the story gives

us tools to understand the movement still with us today, one that has been violent and coordinated for decades, if not generations.

The history reveals a broad-based social movement that connected neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and skinheads; people in every region of the country; people in suburbs and in cities and on mountaintops. It joined men, women and children; felons and religious leaders; high school dropouts and aerospace engineers; civilians and veterans and active-duty troops. It was a social movement that included a variety of strategies—but its most significant legacies have evolved from 1983, when the white power movement declared war on the federal government. This was not “white nationalism” as most people understand it, because from 1983 forward, the nation in white nationalism was not the United States, but was imagined as a racial nation of white people throughout the world.

The strategies that stem from the 1983 Declaration of War include, first, the use of computer-based social network activism beginning in 1984. This has only amplified in the present, but white power activists have used social network activism to foment violent activity and to radicalize their recruits since at least 1984.

The second strategy to flow from the 1983 turn was Leaderless Resistance, or cell-style terrorism. The idea was that cells of individuals or small groups of white power activists could attack a common set of targets without contact with one another or with movement leadership. Leaderless Resistance was implemented in large part to foil the many government informants who infiltrated Ku Klux Klan groups in the 1960s. It was also meant to stymie court prosecution.

Leaderless Resistance has had a much more durable and catastrophic effect upon public understanding. It has allowed the white power movement to disappear, leaving behind a fiction of supposed “lone wolf” terrorists, bad apples, and errant madmen. It is Leaderless Resistance that supports the idea that the problem of extremism is one of lone actors or a few people, rather than a coordinated social movement motivated by a coherent political and racial ideology.

The 1983-1995 period featured many episodes of white power coordination, social networking, and spectacular violence, but at no point in this period was there a meaningful stop to this movement’s organizing. Even in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, there was no durable shift in public understanding, no major prosecution that hobbled the movement. There was no meaningful and permanent response to white power activism in surveillance organization and resources, juror education, prosecutorial strategy, or military policy. The piecemeal responses in each of these areas utterly failed to contain white power as a growing and broad-based social movement. Not even lawsuits, which were in many ways the most effective measure attempted, delivered a full stop to white power organizing and violence.

Although the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI have now declared white power groups the most dangerous source of terroristic violence in the United States, and although other government agencies have begun to grapple with this problem at long last, policymakers, surveillance agencies, academics, journalists, and activists alike are perilously late to the study and understanding of white power ideology and activism. We have failed to listen to the deadly intent of these actors and properly respond to the threat they pose to our nation and its people.

Our inability to register the threat of the white power movement persists into the present. Thus we see stories about the Tree of Life synagogue attack as antisemitic violence, the Christchurch shooting as Islamophobic violence, the El Paso shooting as anti-immigrant violence, the attempted assassinations of a Coast Guard officer as political violence, and the militias on our border and parading armed through our capital cities as “neutral.” They are, of course, acts of antisemitic, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, and political violence. But they are also actions motivated by a common white power ideology. Understood through a focus on perpetrators, they are part of the same story. Seeing them together, instead of lone wolf actions, we can begin to see a trend, a wave, a rising tide.

We have also failed to understand white power perpetrators on their own terms. Part of this owes to the urge to categorize and contain belief systems that people find fringe, shocking, or oppositional. For example, a large part of the scholarly work on the white power movement, already divorced from that on other kinds of perpetrators, has attempted to categorize and quantify the various branches of the movement—attempting to establish how many Klansmen, how many neo-Nazis, how many Skinheads, etc. In fact, this question is often irrelevant to the way that white power activists understood their own participation in the movement. The historical archive reveals that people regularly circulated between groups and belief systems, that they often held concurrent memberships, and that they used a wide variety of flexible and interchangeable symbols and ideologies.

In other words, we have erred, over and over again, on the side of assigning too much meaning to distinction between white power groups. The result has been that we have lost sight of the movement as a whole. The historical record shows us that the commonalities between present-day white power and militant right groups are more important than their divisions, particularly in this moment, which activists understand as a time of emergency.

Scholars and watchdog groups who seek an aggregate count of the movement’s varied branches—one that includes, for instance, both Klansmen and neo-Nazis rather than only one of these often overlapping self-designations—estimate that in the 1980s the movement included around 25,000 “hard-core members;” an additional 150,000-175,000 people who bought white power literature, sent contributions to groups, or attended rallies or other movement events; and another 450,000 who did not themselves purchase materials or participate, but who read the literature. This organizing model both worked to pull activists available for radicalization in to the center and to push ideas out to the mainstream. We might well consider a ring of activity still outside of the outer circle, where people who would never directly engage white power publications would nevertheless be moved by the ideas presented therein. Estimates by scholars and monitoring agencies today indicate that numbers are much higher, very likely in each ring of organizing.

The future envisioned by the white power movement is profoundly radical, and not just the overzealous patriotism that many people think of when they hear the word “nationalism.” Indeed, the mass casualties wrought by this movement are not, in themselves, the movement’s goal. They are means to an end, a way to awaken a broader white public to what white power activists see as obvious: the threats posed to the white race by immigration and racial others. The violence is meant to mobilize white people around the world to wage race war.

It is critical to understand this imagined future, as well as the strategy that white power activists believe can make it manifest. A central text in this regard is *The Turner Diaries*, a novel turned cultural lodestar that has played a key role in white power organizing since its publication in the late 1970s. It remains important to the movement because it sets out to answer the question that the entire idea rests upon: how can a tiny fringe movement hope to overthrow the United States—the most powerful, militarized superstate in the history of the world?

In *The Turner Diaries*, the narrator describes the problem as “a gnat trying to assassinate an elephant.” The novel then lays out a plan in which white power cells and undercover operatives use Leaderless Resistance to carry out assassinations, attacks on infrastructure targets, and sabotage to awaken a broader white public to their cause. Through guerilla warfare and cell-style terror, they are able to seize an Air Force base with nuclear weapons, provoke a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the Soviet Union (and Israel), and then take over first the United States and then the world. The novel concludes with the mass genocide of nonwhite people throughout the world using nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

Resonances of *The Turner Diaries* appeared at every turn on January 6, 2021. It is impossible, from the vantage point of a historian looking at such recent events, to know how many are coincidental and how many are purposeful, particularly because symbols have divergent ideological meaning to the three different groups that constituted the mob (white power activists, QAnon followers, and the Trump base). But to white power activists, these things couldn't have gone unnoticed.

Someone constructed a gallows outside the Capitol on January 6, where people took selfies; others called for the hanging of politicians. Turner, after the novel's attack on the Capitol, wrote that the politicians and leaders “...are all inevitably headed for the gallows.” The gallows also signifies the Day of the Rope and the ritualistic hanging of race traitors, politicians, communists, and journalists—hence the scrawled “Murder the Media” on January 6.

Even the action of January 6 unfolded with the same timing and on the same set as the attack in the novel, at the moment when cameras moved between the House Chamber and the building exterior (although reversed). In both actions, the point was not mass casualties (even in a movement that elsewhere sought out high body counts, both in life and in fiction). The point was the movement's ability to strike at the heart of power. As the novel's narrator writes,

Despite all the noise and smoke and wreckage caused by our attack on the Capitol, only 61 persons were killed, we learned from later news reports. Among these are two Congressmen, one subcabinet official, and four or five senior Congressional staffers. But the real value of all our attacks today lies in the psychological impact, not in the immediate casualties. For one thing, our efforts against the System gained immeasurably in credibility. More important, though, is what we taught the politicians and the bureaucrats. They learned this afternoon that not one of them is beyond our reach. They can huddle behind barbed wire and tanks in the city, or they can hide behind the concrete walls and alarm systems of their country estates, but we can still find them and kill them. All the armed guards and bulletproof limousines in America cannot guarantee their safety. That is a lesson they will not forget.

Finally, both in the novel and on January 6, the Capitol attack functions primarily as a recruitment mechanism. In the immediate aftermath of the January 6 insurrection, white power and militant right activists heightened efforts to recruit from other conspiratorial social movements that had participated, as well as a broad and interconnected network of possible recruits available to them through social media. Although it's too soon to tell how effective these

efforts were, and how much the movement might have grown, its reach into mainstream politics is beyond dispute. White power ideology has made its way into the political mainstream. Even elected officials at every level now openly proclaim their adherence to QAnon and other conspiracy theories, and at least 28 now have documented connections with the Oath Keepers, an unregulated and extralegal private army.

I cannot overstate the depth of concern expressed by my colleagues in the academy and monitoring spaces that the January 6 attack is an opening salvo in further action against American democracy and its institutions. I would add that it is hardly the opening shot, but rather part of a decades-long war, one in which lawmakers, along with surveillance agencies, the Department of Defense, and the American people find themselves struggling to keep pace. The work ahead is pressing and urgent, and threats are present both in the form of guerrilla warfare and mass-casualty attacks, and in attacks on the functioning of American democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen Belew". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

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Postscript:

I am happy to provide detailed sourcing information for this testimony. It draws on my scholarly monograph, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); a close reading of *The Turner Diaries*; and information from the historical, journalistic, and sociological literatures on the white power movement.

My research relies upon the following sources:

Archives

Elinor Langer Research Collection, Special Collections, University of Oregon,
Eugene, Oregon

Gordon Hall and Grace Hoag Collection of Dissenting and Extremist

Printed Propaganda, Ms. 76, Brown University Library, Providence, Rhode Island

Greensboro Public Library, Greensboro, North Carolina
(Clipping File: Greensboro Shooting, November 3, 1979)

Intelligence Project Holdings, Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, Alabama
(Clipping Files, Database, Photographs, Unpublished Materials, Court Records)

Keith Stimely Collection on Revisionist History and Neo-Fascist Movements, Special Collections, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon

Western History Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado
(Biography Clipping Files: Berg, Alan, 1934–1984)

Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas

Selected Newspapers, Newsletters, and Periodicals (White Power Movement and Affiliate Groups)

America's Promise Newsletter

Aryan Crusaders for Christ Newsletter

Aryan Women's League Newsletter

Battle Flag

Calling Our Nation

Christian Patriot Women

Confederate Leader

Crusader

Fiery Cross

Focus Fourteen

From the Mountain

Instauration

Inter-Klan Newsletter and Survival Alert

Jubilee

Klansman

National Vanguard

New Order

Oklahoma Separatist

Patriot Matchmaker

Patriot Report

Patriot Review

Right as Reina

Scriptures for America Worldwide

Seditionist

Teutonic Unity

Thunderbolt

True Israelite

White Aryan Resistance / White American Resistance (WAR)

White Carolinian

White Patriot (Metairie, LA, and Tuscumbia, AL)

White Power

White Sisters

Selected Moving Image Sources

Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Testimony News footage of the Greensboro shooting, WTVD-TV, WFMY-TV Race and Reason (public access)

Sally Jessy Raphael

Saturday Night Live

Video recordings of speeches

Government Documents

Documents obtained through the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms

Central Intelligence Agency

Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Investigation (Correspondence, Reports, Clippings, Files)

U.S. Marshals Service

Trial Testimony and Court Documents

Consent Decree, Brown v. Invisible Empire Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, no. 80-NM - 1449-S, S.D. Ala., Nov. 21 (1989).

Vietnamese Fishermen's Association, et al., v. The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, et al., no. H-81-895, 518 F. Supp. 198 (1982); 34 Fed. R. Serv. 2d (Callaghan) 875; June 3, 1982.

United States of America vs. Bruce Carroll Pierce et al., CR-85-0001M (W. D. Wash, 1985), Accession 21-95-0078, Location 823306, Seattle, WA.

United States of America vs. Miles et al., no. 87-20008 (W. D. Ark, 1988), Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, IL F-7424.

Watchdog Groups

Anti-Defamation League

Center for Democratic Renewal (Anti-Klan Network) John Brown Anti-Klan Committee

Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, Alabama

Klanwatch Intelligence Project