



September 23, 2020

Hon. Janice Schakowsky
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2367 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
1035 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Statement for the Record

**By Brenda Victoria Castillo President & CEO, National Hispanic Media Coalition
Hearing: Mainstreaming Extremism: Social Media's Role in Radicalizing America**

Dear Chairwoman Schakowsky, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, and the Honorable Members of the House Subcommittees on Consumer Protection and Commerce,

The National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) applauds the Subcommittee for holding this hearing to evaluate the state of white supremacy, extremism, and online hate in our current state as a country. NHMC was founded thirty-five years ago specifically to combat hate against Latinx in the media. For more than three decades, our team has fought tirelessly on the front lines to dismantle white supremacy and push for accurate representation of the Latinx community.



Hate has escalated on online platforms, and so too has NHMC’s work. The need for civil rights advocacy in the social media and content moderation space has never been more apparent than it is now, in 2020. As such, NHMC is proud to be one of the lead organizations in the Stop Hate for Profit campaign, which launched in July 2020, and aims to hold Facebook accountable for its ongoing practice of profiteering off of advertisements purchased by organized hate and extremist groups. Fortunately, our campaign has gained significant steam, securing more than 1,000 businesses, including big names like Coca-Cola, The Hershey Company, Adidas, and Ford. The campaign continues to be strong on the public interest and civil rights side, with over a hundred organizations signed on to our coalition’s effort. Despite all of this momentum, not to mention the very clear evidence of Facebook’s harmful practices, Facebook has not addressed any of our coalition’s concerns, and continues to carry out publicity stunts chalk full of false promises.

However, as is with any fight worth fighting, our coalition of legacy civil rights and tech rights groups have pressed on in recent weeks, launching a new effort to “pause” activity on Facebook’s successful subsidiary company, Instagram. Our campaign picked up significant support and momentum with day-long Instagram pauses from celebrities and activities alike, including Rosario Dawson, Sascha Baron Cohen, Michael B. Jordan, and Leonardo DiCaprio.¹ Among the most impactful allies in this fight was Kim Kardashian, who, by pausing her

¹ Press Release, Stop Hate For Profit, Sept. 15, 2020, <https://www.stophateforprofit.org/celebrities-join-instagram-freeze>.



Instagram feed, caused a momentary drop in Facebook's stock.² Again, despite our momentum and mainstream awareness, Facebook has yet to come to the table with answers to our many demands and questions.

This inaction from Facebook is not unique to the SHFP campaign. As a founding member of the Change the Terms coalition—another group that actively pursues accountability from big tech companies like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, and Tik Tok—NHMC, has gotten a lackluster response from Facebook for years. While other social media platforms are not perfect, it is NHMC's experience that those platforms in the very least take our concerns seriously and work towards change and progress, even if it's slow-moving. One excellent example of this is the case of Twitter's recent ban of David Duke. Over the course of a year, NHMC and allies in the Change the Terms coalition called upon Twitter to ban Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Klu Klux Klan and avid white nationalist, from its platform. Eventually, Twitter followed through on that demand and went further to ban other kinds of organized hate and bad actors by updating the platform's community policies. In addition, Twitter, Tik Tok, and Reddit alike frequently offer meetings to our coalitions with top tier executives, while Facebook, Google, Youtube, and Instagram typically coddle our groups with well intentioned staff who lack decision making power.

² Bloomberg (@business), Twitter (Sept. 15, 2020, 3:22PM ET), <https://twitter.com/business/status/1305950220015071234?s=20>.



As advocates for the safety and protected rights of the Latinx community online, we believe these companies are not doing enough to stop, demonetize, demote, ban, and deplatform hate and disinformation. While we commend Twitter and others, we know their recent actions are far from what we are accustomed to seeing from the tech industry. Unfortunately, we continue to be disappointed with Facebook and the company's refusal to do more against hate-speech and disinformation—particularly when that hate and disinformation is being spread by politicians.³ In recent months, Facebook took down a Trump campaign ad that featured a Nazi concentration camp symbol,⁴ yet the platform continuously allows the Trump campaign to advertise and post disinformation without being fact-checked. Facebook has adopted a hands-off policy and in doing so they are neglecting the real life harms that come from disinformation.⁵

This is certainly apparent by the four-year-rise and sixteen-year-high in hate crimes in the U.S.,⁶ something that NHMC undoubtedly believes is connected to the rise in organized hate on social media. In the wake of the attempted murder of Jacob Blake by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Facebook allowed events and groups to flourish and grow on its platform while promoted armed counter-protests, some specifically calling Black Lives Matters protestors “thugs” who needed to be taught a lesson. Despite being flagged hundreds of times and reviewed

³ McCarthy, T., Zuckerberg says Facebook won't be 'arbiters of truth' after Trump threat, The Guardian (May 28, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/28/zuckerberg-facebook-police-online-speech-trump>.

⁴ Ghosh, S, After 4 years of timidity, Facebook and Twitter are finally taking basic steps to curb Trump's worst instincts, Yahoo News (June 19, 2020), <https://news.yahoo.com/4-years-timidity-facebook-twitter-112838950.html>.

⁵ Isaac, M., et. al, Facebook Says It Won't Back Down From Allowing Lies in Political Ads, NY Times (January 9, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/09/technology/facebook-political-ads-lies.html>.

⁶ Adeel Hassan, Hate-Crime Violence Hits 16-Year High, F.B.I. Reports, NY Times (Nov. 12, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/12/us/hate-crimes-fbi-report.html?auth=login-google>.



several times by Facebook’s own content moderation teams, groups like this remained online for days.⁷ Two BLM protestors were murdered at point-blank by a white supremacist as a direct result of this kind of lax-enforcement of the company’s existing content moderation policies by Facebook.

Again, this tragic event is not unique. In August of 2020, a white supremacist drove twelve hours across the state of Texas to El Paso, and after posting his manifesto online calling for a stop to the “Hispanic Invasion”,⁸ opened fire and murdered 23 people, the majority of which were Mexican Americans.⁹ Where did this hate and rhetoric come from to cause one of the largest slaughters of Latinx in America come from? Perhaps from one of the 2,200 ads the Trump Administration ran on Facebook referring to Latinx immigrants as “an invasion.”¹⁰ The likelihood that the white supremacist murderer from El Paso in 2019 was radicalized online is supported by numerous accounts of increased recruitment and radicalization tactics by organized hate and extremist groups targeting young, rebellious social media users.¹¹

⁷ Russell Brandom, Facebook chose not to act on militia complaints before Kenosha shooting, The Verge (Aug. 26, 2020), <https://www.theverge.com/2020/8/26/21403004/facebook-kenosha-militia-groups-shooting-blm-protest>.

⁸ Tim Arango, et. al, Minutes Before El Paso Killing, Hate-Filled Manifesto Appears Online, NY Times (Aug. 3, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/patrick-crusius-el-paso-shooter-manifesto.html>.

⁹ Eleanor Dearman, Racism and the Aug. 3 shooting: One year later, El Paso reflects on the hate behind the attack, El Paso Times (Aug. 1, 2020), <https://www.elpasotimes.com/in-depth/news/2020/07/30/el-paso-walmart-shooting-community-reflect-racist-motive-behind-attack/5450331002/>.

¹⁰ Natalie Martinez, Facebook let Trump's campaign run over 2,000 ads referring to immigration as an “invasion”, Media Matters (Aug. 5, 2019), <https://www.mediamatters.org/facebook/facebook-let-trumps-campaign-run-over-2000-ads-referring-immigration-invasion>.

¹¹ Robert Ruzskowski, A former white supremacist's warning: No one's properly addressing online extremism, NBC News (Aug. 12, 2019), <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/former-white-supremacist-s-warning-no-one-s-properly-addressing-n10414>



The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that online platforms indeed do have the ability to moderate content for public health reasons, demonstrated by their collective, strategic effort to identify and take down misinformation. The actions by big tech companies to take action against the dangers of the rapid spread of false information prove that, even with reduced content moderation team capacity during a pandemic, it is possible to reduce the consequences of harmful content.

Hate and disinformation, often working in tandem as organized hate continues to create and spread false information online, are thriving as a result of platform inaction, and thus continue to divide our country and threaten the safety of our future generations. Disinformation initiated by organized hate or extremist groups interferes with the integrity of our elections, specifically targeting marginalized groups and swing districts.¹² It fuels voter suppression by spreading false information about voting times and locations, targeted to communities of color and perpetuating hate and violence. Particularly, as we witness how disinformation about the movement fans the flames of white supremacy. These targeted lies have been used as a weapon for silencing our voices, distorting our stories, and erasing our culture and humanity. Pointing

⁷⁶; Cynthia Miller-Idriss, We're living in a perfect storm for extremist recruitment. Here's what we can do to stop it, CNN (July 19, 2020),

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/19/opinions/online-radicalization-risk-pandemic-miller-idriss-united-shades/index.html>; Testimony of George Selim Senior Vice President for National Programs ADL (Anti-Defamation League), Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation Hearing, Sept. 18, 2019, <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/304BA45C-7F3C-415E-BA29-154CD70FC927>.

¹² Mie Kim, Y., Voter Suppression Has Gone Digital, Brennan Center (June 22, 2020), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/voter-suppression-has-gone-digital>.



specifically to the Trump administration creating a false perception on immigration and getting caught using an image of Morocco's border being rushed by immigrants.¹³ He chose to use this moment of chaos to discredit Latinx immigrants and change the reality of the situation. This purposeful dehumanization of the Latinx community for political gain, among many other examples of hate and disinformation, is one of the many reasons we demand change.

In this moment, we have an opportunity to be on the right side of history and to be a part of the movement to end white supremacy's chokehold on our democracy by eliminating organized hate's online footprint. NHMC is committed to exploring policy, legislative, and partnership solutions to drive accountability for all stakeholders involved, and sincerely appreciates the Committee's efforts to address disinformation during the current crisis.

Yours in the Movement,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brenda Victoria Castillo', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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¹³ Collins, E., Trump ad uses footage from Morocco, not Mexican border, Politico (January 4, 2016), <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/01/donald-trump-ad-footage-border-morocco-217332>.