

Judicial Committee Hearing: Hate Crimes and the Rise of White Nationalism- Testimony Submitted By Simon Wiesenthal Center

The Internet, particularly Social Media, has proven time and again that everything local is global and everything global is local. Over the past few years the names have become part of our lexicon: Overland Park, Kansas City, Charleston, Charlottesville, Parkland, Florida, and especially Pittsburgh and Christchurch, New Zealand. The subculture of hatred that permeates online platforms has been paralleled by facts on the ground in the US.

According to the FBI's latest report from Nov. 2018, hate crimes increased by 16% in 2017--third straight year that such crimes have increased. The statistics confirm that victims were most often targeted by race/ethnicity with religiously based crimes being the second most reported category.¹

The highest proportion of racially targeted victims, almost 50%, were victims of "anti-Black or African American bias" while the highest

¹ <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2017-hate-crime-statistics>

proportion of religious targets, almost 60%, were victims of “anti-Jewish bias.”²

Hate crimes differ from standard crimes because, as the Justice Department asserts “A hate crime victimizes not only the immediate target but also impacts every member of the group that the direct victim represents. Hate crimes affect families, communities, and sometimes the entire nation.”³ To that we can now add that there is a global component to hate crimes as well.

Last year, majority of violent hate crimes in US were committed by extreme nationalists or white supremacists .⁴ The hate is not new but the promotion of such hate is achieved via the Internet. Taking a page from promoters of transnational Islamist terrorism, these bigots, including “lone Wolf” actors, do not necessarily rally behind a specific figure, but move within a loose subculture around various manifestations and thinkers, some current and some from previous generations.

Their ideology crosses borders without ever having to leave home- through the stroke of a computer keyboard or an iPhone. Consider the words of Brenton

² <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/topic-pages/victims>

³ <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes>

⁴ <https://www.adl.org/murder-and-extremism-2018#executive-summary>

Tarrant, the shooter in Christchurch. Tarrant, in his Manifesto, asked himself the question **“Were/are you a nationalist?”** and answered **“Yes”**. He added **“I am not a direct member of any organization or group, though I have donated to many nationalist groups and have interacted with many more.”** Tarrant explained that he got his information from **“The internet, of course. You will not find the truth anywhere else.”** And even that video games, music, literature, cinema played a formative role because **“Spyro the dragon 3 taught me ethno-nationalism. Fortnite trained me to be a killer and to floss on the corpses of my enemies.”**

Tarrant identified himself most specifically as a European **“The origins of my language is European, my culture is European, my political beliefs are European, my philosophical beliefs are European, my identity is European and, most importantly, my blood is European’** and his **“final push was witnessing the state of French cities and towns’**. He made his racial feelings quite clear, writing **“To most of all show the invaders that our lands will never be their lands, our homelands are our own and that, as long as a white man still lives, they will NEVER conquer our lands.”** For Tarrant, the presence of any type of foreigner in Europe was a sign of degradation and had to be met with cleansing violence. For example, he wrote about Jews that he was not an anti-Semite, because a **“A jew**

living in israel is no enemy of mine” (sic). For others he wrote **“The invaders must be removed from European soil, regardless from where they came or when they came. Roma, African, Indian, Turkish, Semitic...”** In his perspective, any place where whites lived was, by extension Europe, despite the presence of other who were living there before the Europeans arrived, or who had arrived later. In his words **“Australian is a European colony, particularly of British stock and thereby an extension of Europe.”** Tarrant is an adherent of what is known as the “Great Replacement”, a belief originating in France that claims that Arabs/Muslims are invading Europe, and will eventually overrun and replace the white Christian population. For many of the believers of this conspiracy theory, Jews are the ones plotting and aiding this invasion, so that they can destroy Christian Europe and thereby enact revenge and take control. An American version of this was heard in Charlottesville, where the neo-Nazi marchers chanted “Jews will not replace us”.

Tarrant’s acts were planned for maximum effect, not only in New Zealand but especially in the US **“I chose firearms for... the affect it could have on the politics of United states and thereby the political situation of the world.”** He believed that his actions would help trigger more violence, since **“It should come as no shock that European men, in every nation, and on every continent are turning to**

radical notions and methods to combat the social and moral decay of their nations and the continued ethnic replacement of their people.”

Tarrant’s ideas were shaped by the Norwegian radical murderer Anders Breivik as well as the World War II era British fascist Oswald Mosley, from whom he took his self-identification as a “**fascist**”.⁵ This combination of ideological sources, ranging from prominent fascist and extreme-right figures from the mid-20th century to today’s radicals is common to current white nationalists. For example, a publishing house based in Budapest, started by an American and a Swede, has specialized in publishing in English previously hard to find works by a series of such radical ideologues, leading the publishing company to become known as the “the world's largest distributor of far-right literature”.⁶ Richard Spencer, the white nationalist who is identified as the architect of the alt right has partnered with the publishers, and they have published writers from Italy (Julius Evola), France (Alain deBenoist) and Russia (Alexander Dugin) who are all leading theorists of the New Right. Evola who collaborated with the Nazis and Mussolini represents the past, while deBenoist and Dugin are active today. These thinkers give the movement a veneer of intellectual sophistication. They acknowledge the

⁵ All quotes are taken from Tarrant’s Manifesto, <https://www.europeanfreedom.com/2019/03/16/the-great-replacement-the-manifesto-of-brenton-tarrant-the-new-zealand-mosque-shooter/>, accessed 4/7/19

⁶ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/the-french-origins-of-you-will-not-replace-us>

past, and thus transmit these teachings anew. They are all in revolt against the modern world, against liberal society, human rights and democracy, against the results of the French revolution. As the French author, Marc Weizmann put it “The Global Language of Hatred Is French And Anti-Semites and Islamophobes Both Speak It.”⁷ The traditional hardcore racism and antisemitism of the KKK and similar groups has been updated, revised and polished for the 21st century. And in countries like Poland, Hungary, France, the UK, Ukraine and Russia it has become a legitimate political voice, giving US nationalists partners and a sense of importance.

For example Tarrant wrote that **“Green nationalism is the only true nationalism”**.

⁸ This attempt to use ecological concerns is not novel in the movement. It was used by earlier neo-Nazis like David Duke and William Pierce.⁹

The active shooters, from Breivik in Norway to Dylann Roof, Nikolas Cruz and Robert Bowers in the US or Tarrant in New Zealand are not the slick pseudo-intellectuals who are even quoted at times in “respectable’ political circles. They

⁷ https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/new-zealand/2019-04-01/global-language-hatred-french?utm_campaign=fb_daily_soc&utm_source=facebook_posts&utm_medium=social

⁸ Tarrant’s Manifesto, <https://www.europeanfreedom.com/2019/03/16/the-great-replacement-the-manifesto-of-brenton-tarrant-the-new-zealand-mosque-shooter/>, accessed 4/7/19

⁹ See Mark Weitzman, *Magical Logic: Globalization, Conspiracy Theory and the Shoah*, pp. 3-4, <https://archive.org/details/MagicalLogicGlobalizationConspiracyTheoryAndTheShoah>.

are the readers and lurkers online who gravitate to well-known social media platforms and lesser-known sites like Gab and Reddit and 4chan where they get their information from conspiracy theorists and political paranoids and where they find validation from like-minded extremists. And when they decide to act, some post announcements of the act on social media, as Bowers did on *Gab*, while Tarrant live streamed his massacres on *Facebook*- where his murders were reposted 1.5 million times.

Thus the problem is both local and global. The cause is often framed in local terms, but the underpinning motivations reflect grandiose global manifestos. Key to it all is social media, which supercharges the hateful paranoia and spreads intent and deeds virally and globally. The 2019 release of the [Simon Wiesenthal Center's annual report on Digital Terrorism and Hate](#), the 21st in the series, focuses on the growing influence of Alt-Tech, which is a new generation of social media platforms that serves the Alt-Right.

While *Facebook* and *Twitter* have removed millions of hate postings in recent years and have even banned certain offenders, they and other social media giants must do much more. In recent years Facebook has become more permissive of dangerous ads and less proactive in addressing hateful content. And they and

other companies permitted live streaming of murders, including the New Zealand massacre. Such an outrage must never be allowed to be duplicated or surpassed by terrorists of any ilk in the future. Neither Tarrant, nor the [Islamist terrorist who murdered a police officer in France](#) should have been able to use *Facebook* to multiply the crime and the terror. To the extent possible, Internet companies must take the lead in choking off the oxygen supply that bigots and terrorism covet any rely on. Without it a significant audience they would be left without the mega-attention and potential recruits they crave.

However sites like Gab, which is where Robert Bowers posted that he was going into the Etz Hayyim synagogue in Pittsburgh to begin his murderous rampage are in effect partners of extremists. The online community should work to monitor and marginalize these platforms.

Politicians-Democrat and Republican must re-establish and maintain a universal standard against hate. Those who act in the political arena can't become apologists for extreme nationalism, racism or anti-Semitism in any form. And civil society must set standards regarding our expectations of what we will allow, in our leaders, online and in our lives. how we treat others around us.

There is also an apparent convergence between white nationalists and radical Islamists. For example, the young perpetrator of a stabbing spree in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, began as a Nazi sympathizer before announcing himself as a convert to radical Islam, and even attempted to contact ISIS.¹⁰ This is not a unique circumstance, as there are other significant examples where anti-Semitism is the primary shared motivator in these alliances.¹¹ So the threats posed to our society from radical Islamists, such as ISIS and related groups is not just direct, but as Tarrant and others so-called nationalists point out, the actions of the radical Islamist groups are often used to inflame and justify white supremacist violence. Finally, this is not a time for the nation to let down its guard either against the extreme-right or Islamist threats. As such we were deeply shocked and concerned about reports that the

Department of Homeland Security was disbanding its unit on domestic terrorism.¹² Given the events of the past few years, such a move is unwarranted.

¹⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/14/us/florida-teen-fatal-stabbing-muslim/index.html>

¹¹ Mark Weitzman, Globalization, Conspiracy Theory and the Shoah, in Robert S. Wistrich, ed. *Holocaust Denial: The Politics of Perfidy*, pp. 195-211.

¹² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/department-of-homeland-security-admits-that-it-restructured-domestic-terror-team/>

To conclude, the Simon Wiesenthal Center welcomes this Congressional hearing and other moves on Capitol Hill designed to help Americans understand the scope and changing nature of the threats that confront our nation. We must as a nation have a single standard when confronting hate, racism and anti-Semitism. That is a task not only for Congress but for all citizens of the US, whatever their race, creed, religion, gender or sexual identity.

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