

Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America

Kathleen Belew

Harvard University Press, 2018

Reviewed by Kristy Campion



Historian Kathleen Belew, an American Studies expert with the University of Chicago, is an important new voice for research into right-wing extremism. Belew's new book, *Bring the War Home*, provides an in-depth history of the white power movement in the United States between the 1980s and late 1990s. Spanning the Ku Klux Klan and its affiliates, skinhead groups, neo-Nazis and paramilitaries, the study frames intergroup alliances as a cohesive social movement, wrought by extremists and activists through a series of unifying narratives. Significantly, the Vietnam War provided a unifying narrative for right-wing extremists, some of whom were veterans who would later play key roles in the movements' development. These veterans felt that the United

States' government had failed them in the Vietnam conflict by limiting their use of force and thus preventing them from dealing with the so-called communist problem. Anti-establishment and conspiratorial narratives soon developed, which, for select right-wing extremists, justified bringing the fight home against communist opponents domestically. The Greensboro Massacre in 1979 was one such expression of lethal violence by the extreme right against left wing opponents.

Bring the War Home provides a wealth of data on key leaders in white supremacist circles such as Louis Beam, Richard Butler, Don Black, Glenn Miller and Robert Miles; paramilitary figures such as Tom Posey and Michael Perdue; and right-wing terrorists like David Lane and Timothy McVeigh. Organisations such as the John Birch Society, the Knights of the Klu Klux Klan (KKKK), the Aryan Nations, Civilian Military Assistance (CMA) and The Order, all figure prominently. The harassment of the Vietnamese community on the Texas coast, the Morningside Homes shooting in Greensboro, The Order's terrorist campaign, Waco Siege, Ruby Ridge and the Oklahoma City Bombing are among the important events explored in meticulous detail. Belew's overarching argument is that the narratives of the Vietnam War functioned as a social cohesive, allowing the white supremacist, paramilitary and other subcultural movements to unite and execute violent acts, which eventually escalated to the Oklahoma City bombing.

The primary contention offered in *Bring the War Home* is that the Vietnam War united the many diverse factions on the American extreme right— even those who had not served in the military. The theory is a novel one and worthy of investigation. While it is discussed intermittently early on, the argument gains traction in Chapter 6, ‘Weapons of War’. Although active service personnel participation in hate groups was discouraged, Belew demonstrates that the white power movement was able to leverage networks and sympathisers within the armed forces to obtain its objectives. This included the acquisition of explosives. In 1986, a Congressional Report on Fort Bragg found that sixty-seven kilograms of plastic explosive, sixty-four kilograms of TNT, over three hundred metres of detonating cord, thirteen hand grenades and thirty-five antipersonnel devices, were missing and possibly in the hands of extremists. At least US\$50 000 of equipment was known to be obtained by Glenn Miller’s White Patriot Party through a network of military sympathisers. It was not until December 1995, when active service white supremacists murdered two black people, that decisive action was taken to prohibit service personnel from joining hate groups.

The book moves on from resource acquisition and theft from military ordnance through to the role of white women, and then the impact of the

Waco Siege and Ruby Ridge. It ends with the Oklahoma City bombing on 19 April 1995 by Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh. Belew demonstrates the bombing was the ‘fulfilment of the revolutionary violence wage by white power activists’ by demonstrating the immersion of McVeigh in the American white power milieu.¹ She casts this as the dreadful culmination of the war against the United States government that Glenn Miller and his allies had declared on 6 April 1987.

Belew’s objectivity in exploring and explaining the occasionally emotionally evocative concepts in the right-wing nexus testifies to her skill as a historian. She aims for accuracy and provides surplus detail to support her assessments of now-notorious individuals. Extensive archival research was undertaken, which added depth and nuance to important figures and leaders in the American extreme right. In particular, the detail documented on Louis Beam, who originally popularised the concept of leaderless resistance as an organisational model for violent groups, and David Lane, author of the ‘Fourteen Words’ and member of the terrorist group The Order, represents one of the most comprehensive reviews of these figures to date.

New scholars to the field will find Belew’s portrayal gives all the foundational knowledge they require on these personalities. Her writing is accessible, and

1 Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 236.

American-specific nuances are often explained for international audiences. Moreover, her engagement with policy positions, errors, and miscalculations in state and policing responses provides a useful compendium on what to avoid for policy makers today. There are many lessons to be learned from this book namely in how excessive or weak government responses or inaction can have a damaging effect on community cohesion, and create an environment where right-wing extremist subcultures can thrive.

Further discussion was needed to orientate the terminology. While the foreword stipulated that 'white power' would be the encompassing term to refer to the movement/s, it needed to be critically established. Closer delineation of the right-wing extremist nexus in the US, notably regarding the divisions between the white supremacist movement, libertarians and the sovereign movement, would have circumvented any over-generalisation regarding ide-

ological homogeneity. It was unclear at times whether the focus was on the white supremacist movement proper, as symbolised by David Lane, or the broader militia and sovereign movement. While these two movements are inherently connected, their distinctions are nonetheless worthy of note.

Kathleen Belew should be commended for her extensive research into the extreme right in the United States of America. *Bring the War Home* is an important resource for readers into the American extreme right in the context of the Vietnam War. It provides detailed, accurate and timely insight into important actors and events which influenced not only the evolution but also the endurance of right-wing extremism, which Belew attributes to poor prosecution efforts, a misinformed public and limited state action. In conclusion, *Bring the War Home* will become an essential resource for both students and scholars investigating right-wing extremism in the American subcultural context.