

Written Testimony of Professor Brenda Stevenson
Nominee for the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Collection Review Board
U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
January 13, 2022

Good morning. I am deeply honored and thankful that you, the members of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, are allowing me to speak to you today regarding my nomination to serve on the Civil Rights Cold Case Review Board. I am honored by and grateful to President Biden for this nomination. I am appreciative of the Organization of American Historians for submitting my name for consideration. As always, I want to acknowledge my family for their encouragement and support. I truly thank God from whom all of my blessings come.

As an historian and U.S. citizen, I realize the importance of both historical documentation and transparency, particularly as related to difficult aspects of our society's functioning across time. I grew up in Virginia, a state that has stood at the center of democracy and of racial conflict, located in a region that, unfortunately, has a legacy as being a site of inequality. My parents were hard working, God-guided Americans. My father, a longshoreman, and my mother, a home maker, labored tirelessly so that I and my siblings could be well educated, get great jobs, and live fulfilled lives. They believed in the great promises of the United States as a democracy, as well as our responsibilities to the nation, and they implanted those ideals in me. But one of their tragic "truths," based on their communal experiences, was that black and marginalized people could be harmed without legal recourse. No citizen should bear the burden of the fear of inequality. I believe that our nation as a whole has a deep and abiding interest in issues related to civil rights, social justice, and equality within the context of our legal system.

The mission of the Civil Rights Cold Case Review Board is to assist in the implementation of Civil Rights Cold Case Records Act of 2019. If I am confirmed, I will work tirelessly to make certain that this work is comprehensively and competently completed in the time frames established in the law. The National Archives is tasked with collecting, preserving, securing, digitizing, and indexing Civil Rights Cold Cases in preparation for public viewing and use. The Review Board will aid preparation for public use in several ways. The Board will determine if a record constitutes that of a civil rights cold case. It will decide if a civil rights cold case record or information (partial or complete) in that record qualifies for postponement of public disclosure. The Board will resolve how to separate that which can be made public from that which cannot, including the provision of a summary or substitute record. It is the Board's responsibility to publish its decisions about record disclosure within two weeks of Board decisions. These published decisions go to the cold case's originating body, the Federal Register, the President, and to Congress. Annually, the Board must report its activities to the Speaker of the House; the House Minority Leader; the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the House of Representatives; the Majority Leader of the Senate; the Senate Minority Leader; this body, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate; the President; the Archivist; and the head of any government office whose records have been the subject of Review Board activity. With all of these entities, the Board also must cooperate.

These are heavy responsibilities that will take time, energy, intellect, experience and heartfelt commitment, cooperation between Board members and their staff, as well as with NARA, the Congress, the Judiciary, and the White House. These responsibilities, along with the promise to the American people that the history of the 2019 Civil Rights Cold Case Records Collection Act embodies, is the work at hand. I believe that, if confirmed, I will be instrumental in fulfilling these duties. My educational background, proven expertise in U.S. history, the history of race and racial conflict, successes as author, teacher, mentor, administrator, and public-facing intellectual, along with my deep personal interest in social justice, have prepared me to be especially capable of and committed to this work.

I currently hold an Endowed Chair in Women's History at the University of Oxford. Previously, I served as an Endowed Professor of History and Professor of African American Studies at UCLA. I have published multiple books, and scholarly and popular articles that stand as evidence of my research and analytical skills as applied to the nation's history. My interviews and commentaries on race, racial justice and society in America can be found on NPR affiliates and other national and international media outlets. My research has been supported by numerous institutions including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. It has been awarded, among other distinctions, the James Rawley Book Prize for the Best Book on Race Relations in America. My administrative experiences include chairing History and African American Studies at UCLA and Oxford's Center for Gender, Identity and Subjectivity.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about this important work. I look forward to your queries and comments.