

The SPLC's Censorship Collaboration with Google

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Social media giants profess “community guidelines” to which users must adhere. Yet when the politically correct use “hate speech” as a rationale to curtail reasonable content and online discussion, censorship is the inevitable outcome.

Juniper Downs, YouTube's Public Policy and Government Relations representative, recently testified before the Senate Commerce Committee that:

We also work closely with members of our Trusted Flagger program, which is comprised of NGOs and government agencies with specific expertise who are provided a bulk-flagging tool to alert us to content that may violate our policies....

Machine learning is now helping our human reviewers remove nearly five times as many videos in violation of our policies than they were previously....

We expanded our Trusted Flagger Program to an additional 50 NGOs in 2017, including to groups like Anti-Defamation League and several counter-terrorism experts such as the Institute of Strategic Dialogue and International Centre for the Study of Radicalization.... In 2018, we will have 10,000 people across Google working to address content that might violate our policies.¹

Downs also stated that YouTube “shadow bans” (or “ghost bans”) videos that they deem offensive, even though the videos don't incite violence or hatred:²

Some borderline videos, such as those containing inflammatory religious or supremacist content without a direct call to violence or a primary purpose of inciting hatred, may not cross these lines for removal. But we understand that these videos may be offensive to many and have developed a new treat-

ment for them. Identified borderline content will remain on YouTube behind an interstitial, won't be recommended, won't be monetized, and won't have key features including comments, suggested videos, and likes....

We also collaborate across the industry....

This policy announcement raises several pertinent questions:

- Who are the “Trusted Flaggers” and who has deemed them trustworthy?
- Do the same “Trusted Flaggers” operate across multiple social media platforms?
- What are the guidelines for content removal and shadow banning?

It was recently revealed that the widely discredited, ultra-Left Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has partnered with Google in order to censor YouTube videos.³ It is not clear how long the SPLC has been involved with YouTube's “Trusted Flagger” program, which was initiated in 2012. It is also not clear whether the uber-rich SPLC is getting paid for their effort.

“Trusted Flaggers” such as the SPLC are given the ability to mass flag content for further review by YouTube personnel. In addition, the partner groups act as guides to YouTube's software engineers who design the policing algorithms. In other words, the flaggers have immense power over YouTube content.

Indeed, the SPLC had suggested that inadequate Google and Facebook censorship were to blame for the radicalization of Dylann Roof, who shot and killed nine members of a black church in Charleston, S.C., in 2015.⁴

It should be noted that while YouTube trusts the leftist SPLC, the Pentagon and Department of Defense do not. The Pentagon has officially severed all ties to the SPLC after previously relying on the group's training materials on extremism. In 2014, the FBI removed the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) from its civil rights division resources pages.⁵

Even so, corporate interests are falling over themselves to jump on the leftist bandwagon. After the August 12, 2017, Charlottesville Antifa clash, JPMorgan announced plans to donate \$1 million to the ADL and SPLC, as did Apple. Even posturing Hollywood leftists

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have publicly enriched the SPLC: George Clooney committed to a \$1 million donation to the SPLC.⁶

MULTIFACETED ASSAULT

Robert Spencer observed that after the Charlottesville incident:

The Left is trying to use Charlottesville as its Reichstag Fire moment to try to crush all dissent. CNN gave the Southern Poverty Law Center’s spurious “hate group” list wide play, and an effort has begun to deny all platforms to those “hate groups,” without any regard for the fact that the SPLC includes legitimate organizations that dissent from the Leftist agenda.

He continues:

The SPLC has eagerly taken up this term as a key element of its censorship strategy, publishing lists of key “Islamophobes” (including David Horowitz and me) that have grown so absurd that they even include a reformist Muslim, Maajid Nawaz. ...

And Google has been engaging in censorship. The establishment media in the West completely ignored the story, but Turkey’s Anadolu Agency reported several weeks ago that “Google’s first page results for searches of terms such as ‘jihad’, ‘shariah’ and ‘taqiyya’ now return mostly reputable explanations of the Islamic concepts....”⁷

Other social media corporations are similarly engaged in restriction of free speech. In 2016, Facebook took part in a censorship campaign to silence “hate speech” in Europe. This is likely a direct response to government pressure to censor discussion of the migrant crisis currently threatening Germany and Europe.⁸

INSTANCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA CENSORSHIP

YouTube recently deleted a number of legitimate pro-Second Amendment videos and user channels. Jerome Corsi of Infowars reported that YouTube disabled his live stream.⁹

YouTube has arbitrarily restricted 40 Prager University videos that in no way violate YouTube “community guidelines.” PragerU has filed a lawsuit against video giant YouTube for its systematic censorship of their videos for “ideological discrimination.”¹⁰

Reporter and anti-jihadist Pamela Geller reported in August, 2017 that:

I have been posting videos to YouTube since 2006 and now, for the first time, I am banned for two weeks. It’s nonstop now — Facebook blocks and bans, Google AdSense permanent

disabling my account, the Paypal block (a decision that was reversed...), and YouTube demonetizing my videos. But this is a first. And it’s not just the social media giants — internet filters are banning the site as well.¹¹

Interestingly, Amazon arbitrarily removed a legitimate 5 star review of Pamela Geller’s book *Fatwa: Hunted In America?*¹² It thus appears that inter-corporate censorship is clandestinely coordinated. It should also be noted that Geller’s daughters have been outed by vile leftist media, and they, too, are now in fear for their lives.¹³

Geller’s YouTube account was reinstated a month later. She subsequently reported that social media giants including YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram were censoring content per approval of Iran’s Islamic authorities, commenting:

Why the block? Because under Islamic law, you cannot criticize Islam. Facebook adhering to the most extreme and brutal ideology on the face of the earth should trouble all of us, because Mark Zuckerberg has immense power. He controls the flow of information. We did not give him the power to abridge our unalienable freedoms.¹⁴

Thomas Lifson of *American Thinker* observed that:

Social media platforms must be viewpoint neutral. That threat is necessary to counter the pressure Facebook obviously faces from Muslim governments like Pakistan’s. Losing a billion-plus-strong market like the 57 Muslim countries is obviously undesirable for Facebook, so its management is responding to pressure.¹⁵

RAMPING UP FOR THE MIDTERMS

Much to their chagrin, the Left lost the 2016 election. In November 2016, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg wrote, “Of all the content on Facebook, more than 99 percent of what people see is authentic. Only a very small amount is fake news and hoaxes.” Yet within a week, he unleashed an aggressive 7-point plan to eradicate that purportedly minuscule amount of false information on Facebook user accounts. In other words, to censor information inconsistent with the progressive Left agenda.¹⁶

It also has been noted that after the election, Facebook pared down President Donald Trump’s Facebook presence by about 45 percent, while progressive politicians covered by the mainstream media have not seen a similar decline in their online presence.¹⁷

In preparation for the 2018 midterm elections, the Left is using every means at their disposal to

silence those who espouse a conservative perspective. Organizations like the SPLC, along with social media giants, aren't really that interested in stopping hate speech. Their behavior reveals an overt intent to blatantly censor political views counter to the progressive leftist agenda. If this politically weaponized censorship is not challenged, it will continue to be used in an increasingly pervasive manner.

IS IT TIME TO REGULATE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media companies such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter are private companies that can do what they want within the constraint of the law. Yet today these global companies constitute an essential part of the Internet infrastructure. They dominate the social media sector, much as railroad and telecommunications companies had dominated their markets. At this point the cost of entry effectively prohibits competitors from entering the market (with a few exceptions, such as gab.ai).

Susan Benesch, director of the Dangerous Speech Project, noted that:

Facebook is regulating more human speech than any government does now or ever has. They are like a de facto body of law, yet that law is a secret.¹⁸

Pamela Geller has filed suit against Facebook, stating that:

The American Freedom Law Center (AFLC) is filing a federal lawsuit today in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, challenging Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) under the First Amendment. In a press release, the AFLC explained that "Section 230 provides immunity from lawsuits to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, thereby permitting these social media giants to engage in government-sanctioned censorship and discriminatory business practices free from legal challenge." The lawsuit was brought on behalf of the American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI), Pamela Geller, Robert Spencer, and Jihad Watch.¹⁹

Geller recommends breaking up social media monopolies accounting to Section 2 of the Sherman Antitrust Act.²⁰ Perhaps YouTube could again be separated from Google, but that in itself would not directly inhibit censorship. Thomas Lifson has posited that after such a breakup, social media networks would be crippled and ineffectual. Instead, he supports "legislation that requires social media to censor only direct threats, making it illegal to delete content on any other basis."¹⁵

Attorney and talk show host Sean Hershey wrote in *WorldNetDaily* that:



The fact that the Left has such dominance over the foundational institutions of America explains how their political opponents, despite controlling the presidency and both houses of Congress, are virtually unable to accomplish any of their agenda....

Bloomberg Technology reports this week that the large tech companies are working hard to deny access to their services to people and organizations they deem offensive. Facebook, Google, AirBnB, Uber, PayPal, Apple, and others, including traditional financial services, are shutting down accounts and refusing service based purely on political opinion....

As Google, Facebook, and others have no real competitors, and considering their sheer size and domination of the service they provide, it may be time to begin the discussion of public regulation of certain mega-businesses in the tech industry.²¹

One of the questionable aspects of regulation is that it could essentially freeze the social media infrastructure into a regulated state, curtailing competition and market innovation. Yet it is abundantly clear that the current infrastructure is not functioning equitably across the political spectrum. When the rich, radical leftist SPLC is involved as a “Trusted YouTube Flagger,” it becomes abundantly clear how insidious corporate political censorship has become. ■

Endnotes

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