

The Media's Deranged Hysteria Over Elon Musk's Restoration of Free Speech

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Glenn Greenwald: If a mild amount of free speech is restored to Twitter, will this result in the murder of large numbers of people? If Elon Musk follows through on his promise to reduce the amount of political censorship on that platform, will large numbers of people in so-called marginalised groups end up dead as a result? There's nothing wrong with your Internet connection. These questions are indeed as absurd, incoherent and laughable as they sound. It should be impossible to pose them with anything resembling a straight face. And I will confess that in order for me to have said those questions without bursting out cackling, or at least succumbing to an ironic and contemptuous smirk, a significant amount of intellectual focus and discipline was necessary for me to get through those questions. So why am I starting our programme tonight by asking such blatantly inane and moronic questions? Because these are the questions being raised by our country's largest and most influential media corporations. In fact, they are not just asking these questions. They are answering them in unison and with almost no dissent or doubt included. And their answer to those questions is a resounding yes. I know it can be hard to believe, or at least it should be hard to believe. But the wealthiest, once, most prestigious and most mainstream news organisations really are explicitly and earnestly insisting that Elon Musk is about to have large amounts of blood on his hands. Why? Because he intends to allow a broader range of political opinions and perspectives to be heard. There's nothing else to it than that. To these people free speech is not a fundamental right. It is not the linchpin of political liberty enshrined in the First Amendment to the US Constitution. To them as it is to all petty tyrants and authoritarians free speech is a danger. It is a hazard, a menace, something that frightens them to their core. They see free speech the way most people see a raging forest fire or a contagious fatal illness or a violent prison riot; as something that is scary, fatal, and that therefore must be controlled and then extinguished at all costs. And to be fair to these censorship advocates, which I will never tire pointing out that the leaders of this pro censorship movement are the people who call

themselves journalists. A state of affairs, as surreal and bizarre as if the leading advocates of more cigarette smoking were cardiologists. To be fair to them, there is a grain of truth in what they are saying. To those who seek to preserve status quo power structures, to those who rely on lies, propaganda and disinformation campaigns to manipulate populations and entrench their own power and maintain their own status, to those who seek to live in a caste system in which only their beliefs can be heard but no challenges to or dissent from their beliefs can be, it is true that free speech is dangerous. Dangerous to those people. That's why every tyrant and despot throughout history has done what our leading media organisations are doing now, attempting with all their force to crush free speech. To those who seek the power to rule over others, the ability to deviate from their orthodoxies, to question in doubt their assertions to present alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world is genuinely destabilising and thus threatening to their hegemonic rule. But these media activists and their left leaning liberal allies in Media Matters and the Anti-Defamation League and official Democratic Party circles, they don't have such high minded thoughts. They're not analysing and thinking about power systems and how they function in this way. The reaction to Elon Musk's preliminary loosening of Twitter censorship is purely reactionary, just deeply emotional, almost primal, and it's honestly embarrassing to watch. And while it is easy to mock and necessary to mock, as we are about to do, what they are saying, also contained within it are some deeply insidious and important and threatening propositions. These shrill and neurotic and obviously unwell media employees streaking about all the people who will die from free speech, what they're doing, unwittingly or otherwise, are laying the foundation for far more serious, unless frivolous people to implement still greater means of stifling dissent and shielding their propaganda from challenge. Without much notice, they have already created a multipronged framework that is close to fully empowering them to ban all dissent from the Internet. That is not hyperbole. It is not an exaggeration, as I'm about to show you. And there's nothing funny about that. The hysteria provoked by Elon Musk's announced intention to purchase Twitter and restore to it a modicum of free speech has been building for months. But two events in particular over the last week, first, Musk decision to allow Donald Trump to return to Twitter based on the result of an online poll in which 15 million people voted, followed by a second poll after which Musk announced an amnesty to allow the return to Twitter of, quote, all suspended accounts provided they have not broken the law or engage in egregious spam, those two events have escalated the intensity of this collective meltdown beyond anything that could be imagined. The frenzy they have worked themselves into, merits professional attention. And that's not something I say lightly. It has to be seen to be believed. A glimpse of the histrionics that were to come was first provided by the Associated Press, which promoted a new article on Twitter with this social media announcement. Quote: "New Twitter owner Elon Musk said he is granting "amnesty" for suspended accounts, which online safety experts predict will spur a rise in harassment, hate speech and misinformation." Now, all you need to know about that article by AP is contained in the first paragraph of the article. There's nothing else added to it other than this. Quote: "New Twitter owner Elon Musk said Thursday that he is granting amnesty for suspended accounts, which online safety experts predict will spur a rise in harassment, hate speech and misinformation." First of all, what is an online

safety expert? An online safety expert. Where did such people come from? What do you need to qualify as that? Is there like a certificate that you get pronouncing that you are now qualified to call yourself this? Are there universities that have majors in online safety now? It would not surprise me in the least if this does start to happen. But right now, do Princeton and Harvard have graduate programmes to become an online safety expert? The way one becomes a radiologist or an engineer or a physicist or an accountant? No, they do not. This is a completely made up title. This is not something that exists. But it is important that you take note of how frequently media organisations now manufacture and then baptise completely fraudulent titles and expertise industries with the sole purpose of disguising their highly politicised and ideological censorship agenda as something more elevated.

[Says ironic:] Oh no, we don't determine what should be censored or not censored based on our political agenda. Perish the thought. We're journalists. We don't have political agendas. We're just using science. Apolitical conclusions, neutral data. And where do we get those? From online safety experts.

This scam has become so commonplace and what passes for journalistic discourse and it's vital that you watch for it; this all started when media outlets began realising how the public's faith and trust in their pronouncements had completely collapsed. Because the public was on to their scam, namely that they constantly advance their political agendas under the guise of journalism, which of course made the public quite rationally stop trusting what is called journalism. As this new study released in 2021 shows, quote, "For the first time ever, fewer than half of all Americans have trust in traditional media, according to data from Edelman's annual trust barometer shared exclusively with Axios..." 56% of Americans agree with the statement that, quote, "Journalists and reporters are purposely trying to mislead people", purposely trying to mislead people "by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations..." 58% of Americans think that, quote, "most news organisations are more concerned with supporting an ideology or political opposition than with informing the public." Those numbers are catastrophic for an industry whose brand is trust. If media outlets can't get the public to trust or place faith in their pronouncements, they may still be able to generate some economic profit by keeping the news entertaining, but they become stripped of their real power as institutional actors. And that is when they invented a new term out of whole cloth: fact checkers. To imply that those who bought this title were not just ordinary journalists the kind you've come to hate, because you know that everything they say is either in service of their ideology or the agenda of their secret sources in the US security state.

[Says ironic:] No, this is a new group of journalists, elevated, special, residing above the fray. They use one tool and one tool only: the facts. These people, fact checkers, are unburdened by the subjectivity that plagues the rest of humanity. They have ascended to a level of enlightenment, previously thought unattainable. The realm of objectivity. This group of employees of the same media corporations that the public learn to hate and distrust, do nothing but pronounce truth and falsity, distinguish accuracy from lies. And the way you know that is because it's right in their title. Fact Checkers. A very special term to which only the most enlightened are entitled. How does one become a fact checker? What distinguishes an ordinary reporter from a sacred fact checker?

The same thing that qualifies someone to be an online safety expert. Absolutely nothing. It's a fraud, a scam, an invented title, which media outlets have decided that they and they alone are empowered to bestow.

Now, the worst and most blatant example of this fraud is the emergence of the utterly fraudulent industry of so-called disinformation experts and misinformation reporters. I'm sure you remember that deranged hashtag resistance fanatic whom the Department of Homeland Security wanted to anoint as disinformation Tsar Nina Yankovic. A power grab by the US government that was a bridge too far even for our censorship happy political culture.

Watching the US security state openly arrogated to itself the power to decree what is true and false so that big monopolies can determine which viewpoints are and are not permitted is something that still thankfully makes many Americans recoil, at least for now. But all of that was justified based on the claim that this preposterous online Democratic Party activist had somehow merited the title disinformation expert; like online safety expert. What does that even mean? The term disinformation is just a newly concocted term for lies. Nobody is more or less qualified to dictate what counts as a lie. But if you can convince the public that this is a real expertise, then you can justify censorship as the by-product not of what it always is and has always been and still is, namely the desire by those in power to prohibit any deviation from their decrees, but you can depict it as something that has been determined through a rigidly scientific and steadfastly non-political process made by people who have an expertise that you lack. Just as a cardiologist has specialised understanding of how the heart functions, and an aeronautical engineer has specialised knowledge of how planes fly. Disinformation experts understand things that you don't and can't because they're experts in the truth, and you must therefore defer to their judgements. That's the reason all of these fake expertise industries and the laughably baseless titles are being promulgated by media organisations. They can't just come out and make it explicitly clear that they are demanding the censorship of views of people they dislike, even though of course that is exactly what they are really doing. They instead have to hide their tawdry tyranny behind a facade of science, data and experts. And so they just find people who agree with them to recite the views these media organisations want to express themselves but can't, and thus present them to you as the judgements not of those media organisations but of the experts.

Hence, "Musk said he is granting amnesty for suspended accounts, which online safety experts predict" not AP reporters, but "online safety experts predict will spur a rise in harassment, hate speech and misinformation." But a mere rise in harassment and hate speech, was not sufficiently melodramatic for our media hysterics. They had to quickly escalate the accusatory rhetoric. These warnings about hate speech quickly morphed into threats of mass murder. If Elon Musk is permitted to restore just a bit of free speech, Twitter prepares to die. This is how Axios put it, quote, "Activists warn lives at risk over Elon Musk's amnesty plans for suspended Twitter accounts." Lives are at risk.

Now when it comes to neurosis and histrionics, there is absolutely nobody working in today's corporate media who is bolder or more unhinged than The Washington Post Taylor Lorenz, who really outdid her colleagues in warning the public of the blood that is about to flow in

the streets of America. And not just any blood, the blood of brown people and black people and LGBTQIA+ and women and Jews and Muslims and the disabled, all what is known as marginalised groups. That at this point includes roughly 80% of the population, everyone except white, straight, Cis Christian males. According to Taylor Lorenz and the online safety expert she consulted, and therefore, according to the massive media platform of the Jeff Bezos owned Washington Post, we should begin planning the funerals of large numbers of vulnerable people if Elon Musk gets away with allowing people with views disliked by left liberals to be heard on Twitter.

Her new article on the terrifying dangers of free speech was presented this way by The Washington Post, quote, "Opening the gates of hell: Musk says he will revive banned Twitter accounts. Now note here, free speech is not just kill. It summons the demons and the ghouls and Satan's most nefarious lab monsters to be unleashed and invited back to Earth. As I said, when it comes to neurotic hysteria, nobody working in today's media can compete with Taylor Lorenz, who claims to suffer from virtually every physical and mental illness included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders fifth edition and even for many that are not yet included there.

According to her new article in The Washington Post on how Musk is pulling open the gates of hell by allowing mildly greater free speech on Twitter, quote, "Elon Musk plans to reinstate nearly all previously banned Twitter accounts - to the alarm of activists and online trust and safety experts." Not just online safety experts, Lorenz consulted with online trust and safety experts. And here's what these prestigious experts told her: quote, "Angelo Carusone, chairman and president of Media Matters, a non-profit advocacy group and media watchdog, said that Musk's decision could mean bringing back networks of individuals that include the American Nazi Party and, quote, 'a whole bunch of 8chan, 4chan, conspiracy theorists who engage in harassment and abuse.' 8chan and 4chan are two message boards known for their racist and anti-Semitic posts." Reversing the suspensions would mean, quote, "turning Twitter into a one stop shop for operationalising doxing and harassment. And an engine of radicalisation", Carusone said. It's a red pill Pez dispenser. And quitting Twitter, Lorenz warned, won't keep you safe. Quote, "Even if you're not on Twitter, you can still be the recipient of these campaigns", he said. He predicted that public health officials, election officials, journalists and teachers will all be targeted. In other words, when free speech is allowed, there is nowhere to hide.

Now it is tempting, but it is crucial that we not allow the laughable and ludicrous, unwellness of these people to obscure just how dangerous it is what they're doing. There are not many universal and absolute lessons that history provides, but there are some. And one of them, perhaps the clearest, is that what is truly dangerous is not free speech, but the attempts to deny it. Another lesson from history is that those who rely on and need systemic censorship to silence their adversaries are never the good guys in history, and the people on whom Lorenz relies to justify her censorship agitation are anything but the good guys. One of them is the trans-activist Alejandro Caraballo, identified by The Post as, quote, "a clinical instructor at Harvard Law's Cyber Law Clinic". Like most of her like minded censorship

advocates, Caraballo relentlessly chirps about the need for censorship to protect society from what she calls hateful messages. But just the most cursory glance at her very prolific Twitter feed will reveal one of the most deeply hateful and rage driven people you will ever see. When it comes to Caraballo's enemies, there is virtually no level of hatred or vitriol too severe to her to express. Her commentary is a non-stop spigot of rage and anger and contempt for those with whom she disagrees. Watching people like Caraballo demand censorship as a necessary tool to stop hatred would be like watching Dick Cheney demand censorship as a means of stopping human rights abuses. But left liberals like Caraballo believe that they are too enlightened to be hateful, or at least the hatred they spew is noble and for the right cause. She therefore sees no contradiction between posturing as an activist against hate while spreading and spending every day directing fiery hatred at anyone who sees the world differently.

But the most disturbing part of all of this is being overlooked by most who are discussing it. These people are not just impotently stomping their feet in anger at Elon Musk's attempts to restore free speech on Twitter. They have a plan to force that to happen. One that very well might work. And I say that because I watched it work before. Some of you may recall that in early 2021, a social media app named Parler became the single most downloaded app in the United States, more downloaded than YouTube or Instagram or Facebook or TikTok. That happened because Twitter and Facebook united to ban the sitting president of the United States from speaking on their platforms. An act of censorship so audacious and extreme that world leaders, including many who dislike Trump, warned of how dangerous it is, how anti-democratic it is for big tech to be able to silence democratically elected leaders. Democrats like Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez watch Parler explode in growth. And now for years, liberal censorship defenders would say Twitter and Facebook are private corporations. They have the absolute right to censor whomever they want. And if you don't like it, go start your own social media company that sensors less. Well, the founders of Parler, who are not MAGA adherents or Trump supporters, but are mostly libertarians who emerged from the Ron Paul presidential campaigns of 2008, 20 and 2012 took that to heart. They didn't like the censorship regime instituted by Twitter, so they started their own social media platform. And the problem for Democrats like AOC, was that it worked. It became wildly popular. And AOC and her pro censorship allies in the Democratic Party and in the corporate media simply cannot tolerate even having one place on the Internet that is free from their control, that resists their demands about who can and cannot be heard. That's what we're seeing right now. Rage and fury and uncontrolled panic. That there might be just one social media platform, Twitter, which refuses to take orders from the AOC's and Taylor Lorenz's and Chuck Schumer's and Homeland Security's of the world about who can and cannot be heard on the internet. And its AOC watch Parler explode in popularity; she simply could not allow this. She saw liberal censorship groups like Sleeping Giants and Media Matters find a way, a plan to destroy Parler, namely by abusing the monopoly power of Google and Apple to do so. AOC took to Twitter right as Parler became the number one most downloaded app and demanded that the two Silicon Valley monopolies act immediately

to destroy that free speech app because it was becoming too popular.

Here is her public dictate. This is AOC: "What are Apple and Google Play doing about this?" Once Apple quickly obeyed and removed Parler from its store, which not only prevented future users from downloading Parler, but also prevented current users from downloading updates that are needed for the app to run correctly and smoothly she then demanded that Google follow suit in her subsequent tweet. Quote: "Good to see this development from Apple." Meaning Apple had to remove Parler from its store. "Google what are you going to do about apps being used to organise violence on your platform?" Once Google then quickly submitted to her demands, Parler was crippled and it was then destroyed altogether when other Democratic members of Congress applied similar pressure to Amazon, the dominant hosting services in the country, to cancel Parler's hosting account, which not only destroyed it as an app but removed it entirely online.

As the headline of my own reporting on that episode suggests, this was one of the most alarming censorship successes yet because it meant that Democrats were able to use the monopoly power of Google and Apple, two major donors to the Democratic Party, whose businesses are subjected to the regulatory power of Democrats, to destroy any social media platform overnight that allowed the hearing of views the Democratic politicians like AOC want to be suppressed. The destruction of Parler was celebrated by The New York Times in an article recounting what happened. These passages from that The New York Times article tell the story. Quote, "On the app, which had become a top download on Apple's App Store, discussions over politics had ramped... By Saturday night, Apple and Google had removed Parler from their app stores and Amazon said it would no longer host the site on its computing services, saying it had not sufficiently policed posts that incited violence and crime. Early on Monday morning, just after midnight on the West Coast, Parler appeared to have gone offline." That's how quickly it happened. A censorship success that powerful is not one that is going to be forgotten. And the censorship trans activist prominently cited by Lorenz in her article, Carballo, explicitly and vehemently demanded that Google and Apple once again wield their monopoly power to destroy Twitter if Musk continues to insist on refusing to censor further. On the ground that huge numbers will die if free speech thrives. Quote, "Apple and Google need to seriously start exploring booting Twitter off the App Store", said Alejandro Caraballo, clinical instructor at Harvard Law's Cyber Law Clinic. What Musk is doing is existentially dangerous for various marginalised communities. It's like opening the gates of hell in terms of the havoc it will cause. People who engage in direct targeted harassment can come back and engage in doxing, targeted harassment, vicious bullying, calls for violence, celebration of violence; I can't even begin to state how dangerous this will be.

Now, in case you think that's just one person resuscitating the plan to use Google and Apple's monopoly power, last week, one of the leading censors in the old regime of Twitter, Yoel Roth, the former head of Trust and Safety, published an op ed in The New York Times, the primary purpose of which was to heap praise on himself for all the multifaceted and abundant societal benefits generated by all the censorship orders he issued on Twitter. For some reason, he notably forgot to mention Twitter's banning and the days right before the 2020 election of

The New York Post reporting on the Hunter Biden laptop based on the CIA lie that the laptop was, quote, "Russian disinformation". But in the course of heralding all the reasons we owe him so much gratitude for all the censorship he brought us and installed, and implicitly suggesting that Musk was guilty due to his evident intention to abandon that censorship regime, the now former Twitter executive very clearly warned that Apple and Google can and likely will crush Twitter if Musk continues to insist on a regime of free speech rather than a censorship regime which Roth built and oversaw. Quote: "Failure to adhere to Apple's and Google's guidelines would be catastrophic, risking Twitter's expulsion from their app stores and making it more difficult for billions of potential users to get Twitter's services. This gives Apple and Google enormous power to shape the decisions Twitter makes." Twitter will have to balance its new owners goals against the practical realities of life on Apple and Google's Internet. On Apple and Google's Internet. No easy task for the employees who have chosen to remain. And as I departed this company, the calls from the app review teams had already begun. Now, the threat posed by Musk's attempt to restore a modicum of free speech have dragged into the brightest light yet, the multiple prongs of the censorship regime.

If someone threatens to restore free speech, you first begin seeing united media pressure from the world's largest corporate corporations, creating a narrative that anyone who endorses or allows free speech will have blood on their hands. Which results in the first instance in having advertisers, corporations decide that they want nothing to do with a platform that The New York Times and The Washington Post and CNN and every other organisation are warning is responsible for mass murder. It's also important to realise that billionaires are human beings who live in society and they don't want to be expelled, most of them, from the decent liberal precincts. And if the media narrative continues to be that they are people who are responsible for mass murder because of free speech, that too is an enormous level of pressure. But when all else fails, if all else fails and people like Elon Musk decide that they're willing to withstand the loss of advertisers and willing to withstand the narrative created by these media outlets, that they have blood on their hands, that are going to result in the murder of marginalised people, Democrats now can use the monopoly power of Google and Apple. Because without Google and Apple allowing an app in your store, no app, including Twitter, can survive.

And so what we have now, and it's so important to realise this after the example of Parler and now with the intention to do the same to Twitter, is a framework on the Internet where any speech that is not approved of by Google and Apple - and they're not making those decisions alone, they're being heavily influenced by Democratic politicians who have the power to regulate Google and Apple, offer them largesse and rewards for obedience and punishment for disobedience - are now subject to being destroyed if Apple and Google decide that they should be removed from their stores. So indeed, let's laugh at and mock these media hysteria rituals because they deserve it. But let us not let that laughter obscure the very real, powerful and effective censorship structure that each month is being fortified brick by brick. No matter how dangerous a particular tweet or its author might be there is simply nothing more dangerous to a democracy or a society than the inexorable construction of a system designed

to suppress with the force of law and corporate power, all dissent or questioning of the propaganda that our most powerful institutional actors are imposing. And the utterly unhinged reaction to Elon Musk's free speech gestures are about nothing other than that. Thanks for watching this clip from System Update catch our full shows for free live weekdays at 7 p.m. Eastern on Rumble. And join our locals community at greenwald.locals.com for all of my written journalism exclusive aftershow Q&A and more.

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