



What You CANNOT SAY on TikTok: With Commentator Guy Christensen

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): All right, Guy Christensen is an activist. He's a political commentator who in recent years has become one of the most visible creators on TikTok, advocating for the Palestinian people amidst Israel's genocide in Gaza. He currently has 3.5 million followers on the platform where he and other creators are increasingly seeing their Israel critical views censored. He also has some impact in his real life that also strikes me as very un-American. We're gonna try and talk to him to the extent he's able to talk given ongoing lawsuits and he joins us tonight and I'm really excited to talk to them. Guy, thank you so much for taking the time. It's great to see you.

Guy Christensen (GC): Thank you Glenn, I'm glad to be on.

GG: Absolutely. All right. So for those who don't know you – and it was funny before the election I used to talk to my staff a lot about how we have such a diffused world now of influence and fame and celebrity where the people who are often the most famous among people under 30 or 35 are completely unknown to the professional media class. That's why you see the New York Times up to the 2024 election running these profiles like: Hey, there's this guy named Theo Von. Who is he? And hey, there seems to be this sensation involving a guy named Kai Cenat. And these are people who attract millions and millions of people, and I think that's the case for you as well; a huge following on TikTok, but I would guess most political junkies who are a little bit older aren't familiar with your story. You're very young. You've obviously made the Palestinian cause and Israel's destruction of Gaza one of the main focal points of your activism and your commentary. Can you just talk us through a little bit about what your trajectory has been that brought you to being a political commentator on TikTok and why that issue has become so important to you?

GC: Yeah, so I've been making videos on TikTok since I was 13 years old. I'm 19 years old now and I didn't really do politics before October 7th. So it was about, you know, four or five

years of me making comedy videos, a little bit of politically adjacent videos, but I garnered a platform on there of about 2.5 / 2 million followers. And all of a sudden on October 7th, my feed was flooded with pro-Israel propaganda, dehumanising Palestinians and me having no prior knowledge about Israel and Palestine was shocked. I was disgusted by what I was hearing, like not knowing anything. And that shock provoked me to dig into the reality of Gaza, which I discovered was an open air prison far before Hamas crossed the border on October 7th. I learned a little bit about the apartheid system, the brutal military occupation that Israel has had over the West Bank for the last 50 plus years. And I remember saying to myself like why do I have so many followers? Why do I have this platform, this influence, this privilege if I'm not gonna say something when I think I should?! And at the time there was no pro-palestinian voices that I knew of that I was seeing on my feeds or in the media. It was all the opposite. It was like, you remember the Harvard students getting doxed on that truck going around campus because they signed simply a letter calling for a ceasefire on October 8th. And Bill Ackman was saying: They're gonna be blacklisted, kicked out of college, never gonna have a job. And I was looking at all this and so it was a hard decision, but it ended up being the right one for sure. And so I've spoken out about Palestine with my platform. Ever since we've reached hundreds of millions of people with our message about humanity. And I mean, this year alone, we raised over half a million dollars and sent it all to Gaza, where we are running a daily on the ground food distributions and multiple refugee camps across the territory.

GG: What's really interesting about this, and I've thought about this a lot, especially in the last couple years, is that as you get older, well, first of all, you're going to find that you become a person who starts sentences by saying, as you get older and that's disturbing enough, but in addition to that, as get older you're gonna start to realise that a lot of political conflicts that seem new are actually repeats of history. And you know, there's all kinds of cliches about repeating history. But a lot of times our political fights that seem really new in the moment are actually either based on the past or just you can find very similar, if not identical, conflicts in the past. And as somebody who has been a critic of Israel for so long, what's fascinating me about the last couple of years is that we haven't really had Israel and the US relationship to it on the front burner of American politics, probably since at least 2014, which is, you know, Israel bombs Gaza every year, but that was the last time Israel bombed it on a massive scale. No one knew what they did this time, but it's still massive enough that people are paying attention, but that's a long time. That's a decade. It's like a lifetime in politics. Didn't really nearly last as long. And so while a lot of people like me and in my age group are very seeped in Israel and understand that I know that for people in your generation and even older, this is like the first time you're really getting a look at the true face of Israel, but also the true face of the US relationship to Israel. What is it that kind of surprised you or shocked you to the extent that you prioritise this issue? Like, what was it about this as opposed to all the other injustices and suffering in the world?

GC: Well, I think there's two things. Right after I'd begun my research into the true nature of the Palestinian struggle for liberation, I saw parallels as you were talking about things repeat across history with the Zionist idea of a greater Israel and America's manifest destiny and the

colonisation and genocide of the Native American people here. That was actually one of the first videos, if not the first video I made talking about Gaza during that initial period of learning. I think that what I've come to learn, and it's not shocking anymore, but as I've paid close attention to the actions of our elected officials, the actions of those in the executive, the power brokers and institutions in this country is that following October 7th, I swear they spent about six to eight months exclusively working to further Israel's interests. All the discourse online, all the votes in Congress to redefine anti-Semitism or to ban TikTok or to enshrine certain definitions across the political levels in this country is really honestly disgusting because I mean, it was my first, as you said, confrontation with the nature of the US-Israeli relationship. And prior, I believed naively that our elected officials were supposed to serve us and learning about AIPAC, and they're not the only, as we know, not the only pro-Israel lobby, it's an extensive network of billionaires and registered lobbying organisations and foreign agents in the United States all working to fund our elected officials, but seeing them in 2024, just a few months after I was introduced to all this, blow \$100 million, AIPAC blew \$100 billion, the pro-Israel interests spent at least a quarter billion and they bought a super majority of the seats in our Congress. I mean, all of this was shocking and I realised how important it is to counter Zionist influence in this country who are buying and taking away our representation in government. And so that's why I've focused so hard on this. I think it's not only important in terms of getting in touch with our humanity and standing up for our brothers and sisters who are being killed with our tax dollars, but also in terms of trying to make possible real change in this country.

GG: You had said this was kind of your first introduction into this issue, and you talked about some of the incredible exertions of corporate and financial and political power wield at the very beginning, almost a signal to people: Look, if you want to have a career, if you're a young person and you're thinking about opposing Israel, you better think twice. And we interviewed those Harvard students who, at the very beginning, whose faces were plastered all over Harvard, paid for by very wealthy Israel interests, trying to permanently ruin not just their standing in school but their careers before it even got started. And I remember asking them, whether you expected this kind of level of attacks or not, do you kind of regret it? Like you're at Harvard, I know what that means, I know a lot of people went to Harvard that you're hyper competitive in your career, you're hyper competitive in your academics. You've just been told that entire industries, big law firms, hedge funds, those are gonna be cut off to you as a result of this blacklist Bill Ackman and others are keeping. Do you regret it? And they immediately said: "Not even in the slightest, like I wouldn't even feel that I could look at myself in the mirror if I hadn't done this." When you started talking about this issue, because I can tell you that for decades, this is what has changed so much, the bipartisan control of Israel discourse was so great that everybody understood that you were either going to suffer career destruction or reputational destruction, or come very close to it if you decided to speak out against Israel. There're countless examples of people who did that and then got destroyed, which of course makes it less likely others will. Did you have a feel as somebody who came to this new, as to kind of what you might be unleashing against yourself, especially given the size of your platform?

GC: Yeah, I mean, that was the main question. I was 17, I was a senior in high school when all this started happening in the world and in my life. And looking at that specific story about the Harvard students, I remember thinking to myself, if I do this, I'm opening myself up to all the attacks that they're facing. And at the time, I am about to wrap up my high school education and go on to hopefully college and I was definitely thinking that they might kick me out of college for this one day for simply speaking up.

GG: All right, so that turned out to be quite prescient, given that, and I know you had mentioned to me, and I told you I was a litigator and a lawyer in a previous life, so I understand fully that there's litigation around this question, so you're restricted in what you can say, I know your lawyers will kill you if you say too much. So I wanna just ask you about it and talk about it however you can, to whatever extent you're comfortable doing it. So you've been attracting a lot of attention for a while. I've seen you in places, I've seen your influence growing. I think you were on Breaking Points, who were hosted by my friends, and I remember seeing you on there, and I think I watched some of it. So you've obviously been attracting a lot of attention, and my guess is there had to have been people waiting for you to do something that could have given them a kind of a hook into really trying to attack you, given the size of the platform that you have on TikTok and how outspoken you've been against Israel. And there was this incident at the Israeli embassy, I think it was in June, something like that, when two Israeli staffers, staffers at the Israeli embassy were gunned down in the streets of Washington. You posted about it originally saying, of course, you abhor the violence, you don't support killing of civilians, kind of rethought it, decided they weren't entirely civilians, they were diplomats with the government committing a genocide. Maybe there's some justification to it, all of which is constantly protected speech. And those posts kind of gave your critics a way to start pressuring Ohio State to take action against you and punishing you, and they proceeded to do that. What can you tell us about that whole incident, where things are with it, if you can tell us about anything?

GC: Um, bear with me as I think. I don't know exactly what I'm allowed to say, but the ACLU is representing my case right now. Shout out to them; defenders of free speech in this country. And I want to make it clear that I am a non-violent person. I don't commit violence. I don't incite violence with my platform and I've never, ever said anything, posted any video, shared any message that goes towards that end of violence. I'm not encouraging that. It would ruin my platform, obviously; in the way that they've tried to paint me as this violent individual who's like a jihadi terrorist, a sleeper cell in the United States, influencing young Americans to follow these violent steps. So now that we've got that aside, I do want to mention that around the time when all this happened in the spring, I had launched this campaign. I actually went on a what ended up being a six-day hunger strike of my own and raising money off of that and the viral videos to launch our campaign on the ground in Gaza, which I mentioned previously, doing daily food distributions inside of refugee camps in a humane manner, unlike these GHF death camps run by Israel and mercenaries from the United States. This campaign was gaining a lot of traction, and so I think it's not a coincidence that they took that moment as the opportune one to go after me and smear me with all these accusations like in the New York Post, the Times of Israel, Haaretz, the

Jerusalem Post. Every single Zionist outlet in the United States, every single Israeli news outlet overseas, all posted the same story the same week about me smearing me and trying to generate a harassment attack against me to throw me off of what I believe could have been even bigger than what we made it, distributing food to Gaza and raising awareness; it was three months of total starvation of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip by Israel.

GG: Yeah, and just let me ask you before I move on to something else just on this case, and to the extent that you can again, I mean according to the ACLU releases, according to news articles about your story, and it's got to be weird having massive numbers of media outlets from not just the United States but around the world attacking you in such vicious ways when you're 18 years old, you know 19 years old a freshman in college, it's kind of indicative of how desperate they are, especially when it comes to young Americans, to destroy any space to criticise Israel, but the Ohio State did in fact take action against you for those posts, right? And you do currently have either your enrollment suspended or actually expelled. Is that accurate? And if you can't talk much about it, of course I understand.

GC: Yeah, that is accurate. I was an Ohio State University student and they expelled me under pressure from various Zionist groups, forces, and including people in our government, Ritchie Torres, Pam Bondi are some names that were involved during this time. And they all kind of came together at the same time this smear campaign was being launched to get me kicked out of their school, which they folded and violated, in the case, what the public filing says, is they violated, and it's true, they violated my First Amendment right and my right to due process.

GG: I mean, it's amazing, I don't know how much you followed it, but during the Biden administration, and I think you might have heard me say this when you were waiting, one of the biggest grievances, and I'm somebody who, as a lawyer, I became a lawyer in part because I was inspired by the ACLU. I did a lot of free speech cases. I have a big free speech opponent as a journalist. And I agree with the American right entirely on this that there was a huge controversy because the US government was picking up the phone under the Biden Administration, calling Facebook, calling Google, other social media platforms demanding they censor and remove people who are expressing dissent on COVID, on Ukraine, on the 2020 election, and the idea that the US government could censor private actors to punish people who were critics was such an offensive idea under the First Amendment, and now here you have members of the Trump administration, I mean, Pam Bondi is the Attorney General, Ritchie Torres is a member of Congress, calling your school publicly, privately, and demanding that you be punished, not for any crimes, not for anything remotely criminal on what you said constitutional protected speech, but because they dislike the content. It kind of is the silence of those same people in the conservative movement, to object to that is, is sort of deafening. Guy, can I ask you, again, as somebody who's been watching this for a long time, one of the things I think has shocked a lot of people, and I had Norman Finkelstein on my show, you know, I think a month ago, maybe a little longer. He's been, obviously, an outspoken Israel critic. He's suffered professionally. Alan Dershowitz got his tenure offer removed because of Israel criticism. And he's been a voice of gloom and doom for a long

time. Sort of like, look, Israel controls the United States. We're totally bankrupt and corrupt on this issue. And he even says, and he says as gloomy as it gets, that he kind of for the first time in a long time sees a cause of optimism. John Mearsheimer, who's also on our show a lot, he wrote the pioneering book, *The Israel Lobby* in 2006, was attacked more than I can describe, says the same thing, that look, no matter how bad things are, the major change here, that's a cause for optimism, is that people in your generation have turned against Israel, are questioning all of these issues openly and without fear for the first time for as long as anybody can remember. And that's certainly my view as well. Why is that happening? I mean, given all the ways that they can punish you and destroy you, they've shown not just their ability, but their willingness to do that, why has this become really the issue of your generation?

GC: Well, I think that number one, for the first time ever, social media has been used by most the people in the world where when Israel commits these crimes, they're documented, the footage is posted on social media platforms, especially TikTok, and young Americans who use these platforms are seeing them and recognising that what they're seeing is criminal, it's evil, and they should be opposed to that by their nature of being a human being. And I also think that it's because Zionism from the very beginning has the seeds of its own destruction within it. You can't take someone's land and spend the next hundred years denying their rights to return, self-determined, destroying their governments, putting them under occupation, apartheid, the whole nine yards, and expect that the world is going to support something like that. No oppressive ideology, no ethnostate or wannabe ethnocracy, like Israel is, has ever lasted permanently as we saw the collapse of Nazi Germany, apartheid in South Africa, Rhodesia as well. It's an untenable, it's an unwinnable proposition.

GG: You know, one of the critiques I think of activism from young people, and there's a long history, very rambunctious, sometimes even, you know civil disobedience driven activism on the part of young people, people your age, college age, students going back to the civil rights movement in Vietnam and the apartheid regime in South Africa of the 80s, you know people act like the protest movement in 2024 was some unique deviation from the American tradition when in fact it was an expression of it. But oftentimes, even going back then, there's this patronising idea that young people who question American foreign policy are thinking in very overly emotional, not very educated and informed ways about the issues that they're focused on. It's kind of an automatic reflex of empathy that's very unsophisticated, and doesn't have a lot of historical context to it. What have you done to inform yourself on what is, no matter what your view is, a long and complex history in this region between two people? I don't mean what's happening in Gaza is complex, but I mean the history is complex and it's important to understand for analysing today. What kind of things have you done as somebody who came to this without much knowledge to make sure that you're informed when you're talking to millions of people?

GC: Well, I was careful not to, I guess, speak with much authority when I was learning, first starting out and I was reading human rights reports, looking over the factual history of the conflict and the struggle. And then I started diving into the literature by the new historians

out of Israel, reading Rashid Khalidi, tapping into all the news reporting about the ongoing and unfolding events in Gaza, the genocide in Gaza. You know, my bookshelf over there is filled with books on this topic, which I've studied and there's notes all throughout. It's important that we're informed about this. And I guess what you were saying about the criticism that young people are just speaking out of our naive, foolish, emotional hearts is untrue because I believe we're the ones who are the most tapped in with the real news, the real side of the story versus all this baseless scientist propaganda that's on Fox and CNN that is given to the rest of the older adult population in the United States. We're hearing the actual truth about Israel's actions. We're hearing the truth about their history unlike other segments of the population and so I'm not saying that we're the most knowledgeable overall about foreign policy and geopolitics and the history of Israel and Palestine, but I think you have to give the young generation, Gen Z and millennials, a lot of credit here for being the ones who have pushed the student movement, these campus protests, despite repression under the Biden administration who arrested 3,300 of our students and our academics on our campuses to suppress us while making threats in the media and on the Senate floor. We stood up against this. And I think it was a big mistake that in 2020 – well in 2020 the democrats aligned with the popular protest movement at time, the Black Lives Matter movement but they did not take the same opportunity in 2024 to align with the popular pro palestinian movement and it ended up crippling them, undermining Harris's chances to win election; although there was a lot of problems. There's a polling that came out on, before and after the election, but the one I'm talking about was after, where they asked 19 million Americans, they pulled this group of people, who voted blue in 2020 but chose not to vote blue in 2024, so they either voted for Trump, third party, or did not vote, and their number one issue over the border, inflation, healthcare, number one issue for them was Gaza. They were upset with the Democrats' policy on Gaza, and that could have likely swung most if not all of the swing states for Harris.

GG: Yeah. You know, it's interesting, I think the Black Lives Matter movement and the Democrats support for it what we have seen, especially with more time, it's kind of an easy thing for Democrats, the Black Lives Matter movement ended up not really being a threat to power centres. The Democratic party obviously has a big Black activist base, how much it depends, it kind of didn't have a choice. Whereas the Israel issue is something that has been much more of a third rail for Democratic Party politics, given who their funders are. And that is about the distribution of power. That is about foreign policy and arms dealers and kind of everything that lies at the heart of imperial America. And so I think that was a much harder decision, I think, as much as seeing the true face of Israel, a lot of people like you saw the true face of the Democratic Party. All right, let me ask you, you said, which I agree with, look, in some ways, even though we're young, we're more informed. We haven't been imprisoned by Sean Hannity and Fox News and CBS News. We get information from a lot of different sources. In fact, we get to hear directly from people in Gaza, from Western doctors and organisations that have visited Gaza. We don't just hear from Benjamin Netanyahu and Lindsey Graham. We hear from a lot more diverse range of voices, and that is because of the internet and social media. It's one of the reasons why I've made a free internet and free speech on the internet probably my central cause over the past years, precisely because it allows a citizen that's informed. And that is conversely what makes this crackdown on the freedom of

information and free speech on platforms like TikTok so incredibly alarming and dangerous is it can transform the internet from this place of liberation and free information into this weapon of unprecedented control if you put it in the hands of a small number of people who wanna manage information for a particular political agenda. That's clearly what happened with Larry Ellison, with CBS and now with TikTok. Talk about, and I don't even think the deal with TikTok is complete yet, although they've been doing a lot to kind of placate the US government in order to stay, knowing that they had to. What have been some of the changes that you've seen? You do have the former IDF soldier in charge of censorship. You obviously have these political pressures. TikTok knows who's coming in and what their goals are with the platform. What have you seen in terms of changes in free speech in general and with Israel in particular?

GC: Yeah, so I know you talked about her, Erica Mindel, former IDF soldier, former State Department contractor. She's documented saying a few years ago that it's her number one goal to destroy the BDS movement. That's her words. And so like you said, the ADL lobbied social media platforms like TikTok and successfully placed her as the head of the hate speech policy and enforcement. And this was on August 13th of this year. The following day, TikTok pushed out an in-app pop-up for all of its users, explaining that in one month's time, they would be changing their free speech guidelines. And I saw this and I thought to myself, this is definitely going to serve the Zionist narrative. And lo and behold, September 13th rolls around one month later and in this new free speech update, they transform their hate speech policy. They mandate that people have to condemn terrorist groups designated by the US State Department when mentioned in any videos, even when mentioned in a neutral, reportive, investigative context. They opened the door to classifying anti-Israel speech as hate speech based on their new clause about national origin. They ban the reading of manifestos, they restrict videos from the feed that show videos from war, aka Gaza, and so I've been forced, and other people have been forced to stop showing real footage, real imagery from the destruction of the Palestinians and the Gaza Strip. And so as soon as these changes went into effect, my videos started getting banned or removed from the recommendation feed left and right. And to kind of put this in perspective: Almost two years before these changes, as I was posting consistently about Palestine every single day, there's only been a handful of videos that I've ever gotten removed. And I looked and over the last year prior to September 13th, there was one or two that you could even count. And so very quickly, I racked up about ten violations, either removed completely without any recourse to appeal, or they were either shadow banned, it would get like 100 views from people who only went directly to my profile to view it. And my fellow collaborators, fellow people in the movement on TikTok, I reached out to them and they reported back the same exact thing. I know you showed that Krystal Ball was being censored. I didn't know that, it's insane to me. And we also believe that more than what they explicitly tell us when they take down or delete our videos or shadow ban is that they're doing this secretly and suppressing our views across the board when we talk about certain topics. And there's certain topics that are particularly sensitive under this new free speech regime. It's talking about Charlie Kirk and Israel, every single video where I've spoken about those two issues connected to each other, I've had them entirely deleted off the platform immediately. When you talk about Palantir, when you talk

about AIPAC and their influence over our government, or when you talk about Larry Ellison. Now, these changes came in effect about halfway into September, and by the end of September, Trump had announced for the first time that Larry Ellison was poised to take control of Americans' TikTok. And Netanyahu, again at the end of September met with what was the next batch paid American influencers by the state of Israel's hasbara budget, which I think has about 190 million in total this year for their budget to pay people to post Zionist propaganda. These are the people who were getting paid \$7,000 a post. He met with them in America when he was visiting Donald Trump. And this is recorded. He is talking to them about their strategy of this 8th front of the war on the American's discourse about Israel, and he says that the number one most important thing happening for Israel's narrative right now is the sale of TikTok – number one. Number one, he says, he repeats it, making it very clear that his buddy, Larry Ellison, who once offered him a board seat at his company, Oracle, that's the number one donor to the IDF that lets Netanyahu vacation on the island he owns in Hawaii, that has data centres underground in Israel that process and store their surveillance data on Palestinians that fuel their apartheid system and their AI killing machines, that that is the most important thing that is about to happen for Israel. And what that tells us is that Larry Ellison, the reason he is taking control of TikTok and he's buying it is for Israel, it's for Netanyahu, it's to protect their narrative and it's frightening. Because this is aided and facilitated by the Trump regime, who is obviously under the thumb of other magazine billionaires like Miriam Adelson, and of course, Larry Ellison, who's always at the White House.

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