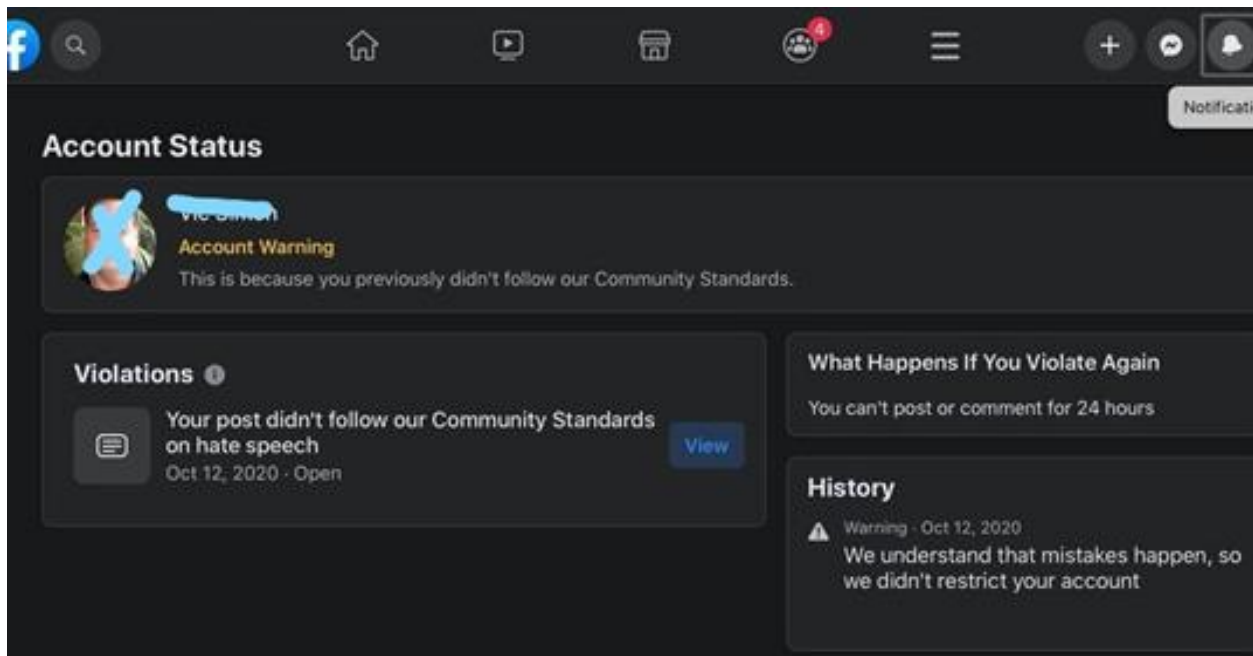


Technofascism

Would you buy a car from a manufacturer that decides where and when you drive? Or would you commission an architect or contractor to build you a house that dictates how you will live in it? The Post Office, or for that matter any carrier (FedEx, UPS, etc.) has no right to tell you what you write to your daughter or son, or to your friends. Except for what the law prohibits (firearms, body parts, inflammable materials, batteries, etc.), no carrier can decide what you ship and to whom. But Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and all other social media — what a misnomer! — decide on the message, and on who is entitled to send or receive it. Actually, the algorithm does it. Below is one example, as innocent as it can be.



The recipient of this message gave permission for making this public. The irony is that “Your post goes against our Community Standards on hateful speech” makes no sense. A book: *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* by Nancy Isenberg, openly discussed on National Public Radio and on the site of the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, triggered Facebook’s arbitrary reactions. Social media can cancel accounts or restrict accounts — in violation of the Constitution of the USA.

Remember Roland Barthes: “Language is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech.” Fascism is the illegitimate power that controls those who are forced to live under its terror. It proves that the people are not always right. The majority voted for Hitler. And people still vote for other dictators.

The billions of people on social media were not forced into accepting *technofascism*. It is their choice. But is this what they wanted, or hoped for? The virtual private networks are a proof that things went wrong on the medium celebrated for “information that wants to be free!”

Let's face it, technology opened opportunities, but also surreptitiously became a controlling factor. Digital technology progressively became part of the political game and the economic charade. Currently, under a situation of extreme crisis, it exercises its power to new extremes. And enjoys legal protection. Silicon Valley companies operate under conditions of asymmetrical benefits. First, they succeeded largely due to public money. And never paid back. Second: they treat the tethered public along the line of intellectual slave labor. Each keyboard stroke is profit for the slaveholders. Users — the world's population — were enticed into dependency, similar to drug addiction, on such technology. Not only does the tremendously successful (read: profitable) industry fail to protect users, but actually engages in controlling the world. "Security through obscurity" — part of the professional parlance — means "Let's hope nobody will notice it." The legalese cover-up for the industry is cynical: "We do not warrant that our products will meet your requirements." And indeed they don't. The auto industry was successfully sued for the failure of some models to prevent harm to drivers and passengers. Silicon Valley and its cohorts anchored a non-liability clause in law — like the pharmaceutical industry did. One example: They are shielded against digitally driven and controlled implants and prostheses that get hacked. Patients died or became crippled.

Social media's disastrous record of providing a platform for hate speech, and for those — domestic and foreign — who try to steal elections is infamous. Social media companies made the money and, at most, felt sorry for what happened — but only when caught. Can the world-wide public eventually do without Facebook? Or without Twitter? Or even without *Reddit*, with its karma points ("to help police the site")? It is time to disrupt social media. *Promoting the one-to-everyone (mass-media as it was called) algorithmic model* is reactionary. Empowering the individual is the alternative that the inventors of the technology hoped for.

To complain is not enough. It is time to legislate the distinction between the carrier and the message. Printing presses are not originators of messages. Nor are the cable operators and those who use the radio wave spectrum. Social media, too, should not be more than a properly secure conduit for interactions. Secure means: prevent the thieves from stealing the user's identity. Neither monetizing nor spying on people should be allowed. Actually, the cell phone — keeping track of your coordinates — does not dictate where you drive, or which restaurant to eat at. Not even which music you listen to. As worst, it facilitates making suggestions. The engine — mechanical or digital — should function properly, but not dictate how people drive or where they go, or how they interact over the internet. Social media's mission is to provide the equivalent of what the auto industry provides: reliability. PLUS: sustainability. This, of course, brings up the users. To burn energy for the message "Darling, I am around the corner" or for meaningless games is not really an example of awareness.

To suspend one or another person is a matter of judgment for which censorship, automated or not, is not acceptable. Indeed, guarding against those — foreign or local — who are dedicated to undermining democracy should be carried out by members of the community, independent of politics and of economic interests, not by machines. We need a different understanding of social media — not to be imposed by those driving technological advances but by innovators in thinking. Meaning, not data, should be the focus. Rights and responsibilities are intertwined.

Let's face it: As things stand, a conflict of interest undermines the role of digital technology in today's society. Stealing people's identity under the alibi of offering them free access to mediocrity is a business practice we can do without. Fascism is winning in the conflict with what we wish were an authentic democracy. This is what *technofascism* triggered. Where are the lawyers who *pro bono* will bring to the Supreme Court the case of whether social media are above the Constitution? Things will not improve if *We, the people*, do not put an end to the abuse of power. If not now, when the stakes are higher than ever, then when?

PS: Facebook literally prohibits me from taking care of the community of readers of my book, *Are You Stupid? A Second American Revolution Might Save America from Herself*. With over 6,000 members the site to which I have no access: <https://www.facebook.com/AreYouStupidUS> is doing fine without me.