

# America, the Single-Opinion Cult

Narrowing permitted ideas on both left and right, one unsuitable voice at a time

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## AOC Calls for Journalists To Be Taken Off Air



That interview says it all, doesn't it?

Not long ago I was writing [in defense](#) of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. When she first entered Congress as an inner-city twenty something who'd knocked off longtime insider Joe Crowley with a Sandersian policy profile, her own party's establishment ridiculed her as a lefty Trump. Nancy Pelosi scoffed that her win just meant voters "[made a choice in one district](#)," so "let's not get carried away." Ben Ritz, director of the Progressive Policy Institute, an offshoot of the old Democratic Leadership Council, groused, "Oh, please, she just promised everyone a bunch of free stuff."

This was before AOC decided to be the next Pelosi, instead of the next Sanders. The above sit-down on MSNBC shows the transformation. Having shed the mantle of an outsider who shook the old guard with online savvy, she appeared in soft light for a softball “interview,” by a literal Biden official ([Inside With Jen Psaki](#) is as close as you can get to a formal dissolution of the line between White House and media). In it, she seemed to [argue](#) for the outlaw of Fox News. “We have very real issues with what is permissible on air,” she said, adding people like Tucker Carlson are “very clearly” guilty of “incitement to violence,” a problem in light of “federal regulation in terms of what’s allowed on air and what isn’t.”

I was attracted to liberalism as a young person precisely because it didn’t want to ban things. Every liberal morality play in the seventies, eighties and nineties featured a finger-wagging moralist who couldn’t stomach an obscene joke ([Jerry Falwell](#), over a *Hustler* parody), “obscene” art (Cincinnati’s [Contemporary Arts Center](#), over Robert Mapplethorpe’s photos), “objectionable” music ([Tipper Gore](#), in the now-seems-tame record-labeling furor), or unpredictable humor (NBC, in its attempts to put Richard Pryor on tape delay for *Saturday Night Live*). Pryor’s favored writer Paul Mooney objected so much to all the hoops they had to jump through to be allowed on air, he ended up writing a parody “job interview” skit that sent *SNL*’s ratings soaring, though ironically it would probably never air today:

## SNL Richard Pryor and Chevy Chase Job Interview HD QTCC



Hollywood made self-congratulating feature films about nearly every one of those speech clashes, from *The People vs. Larry Flynt* to *Dirty Pictures* (starring James Woods, about the Cincinnati episode!) to *Parental Advisory*. The movie *Field of Dreams* features Ray Kinsella's wife Annie telling off "IRATE MOTHER" in a school library debate about banning writer Terrence Mann, with Annie saying after: "Fascist. I'd like to ease her pain!" (The actual book *Shoeless Joe* featured J.D. Salinger, one of America's most-censored authors). From *To Kill a Mockingbird* to *Dead Man Walking* liberalism celebrated the belief that truth, tolerance, and forgiveness are the way to reach closed minds. I mentioned this before, but Rob Reiner's *The American President* — a naked hagiography of Clintonian politics — came to a climax with "President Andrew Shepherd" defending his flag-burning girlfriend's honor, saying:

*You want free speech? Let's see you acknowledge a man whose words make your blood boil, who's standing center stage and advocating, at the top of his lungs, that which you would spend a lifetime opposing...*

That scene, which sounds like it should apply to any Democrat thinking about someone like Carlson, would become ironic later. Back to AOC and Fox: like so many other things in America, the marketplace of ideas is no longer a market. Voices with

organic appeal are artificially restricted. Watching “approved” news these days is like watching scab baseball: you know most of the players the crowds really want to see aren’t even in the dugout. By no means is this phenomenon confined to the right.

As far back as the spring of 2017, when Google [introduced “Project Owl,”](#) a new tool designed to “surface more authoritative content,” outlets like the *World Socialist Web Site*, *Alternet*, *Truthdig*, *Democracy Now!*, and *Consortium News* reported dramatic drops in audience. *Wikileaks* traffic plummeted (that site’s content is extremely [difficult to access](#) for a variety of reasons now). Years later, the *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) that Google employed “maintainers” to tend to an “‘anti-misinformation’ blacklist” to prevent sites from “appearing in Google News and other products.”

The next big event was the removal of Alex Jones [from Apple, Facebook, Twitter, and Spotify](#). No fan of Jones, I was struck by how quickly critics moved to looking around for the next targets. Rob Reiner, the “acknowledge a man whose words make your blood boil” *auteur*, [said](#) on MSNBC, “You have *Fox*, *Breitbart*, *Sinclair*, and *Alex Jones*, which has now been taken off of Facebook, thank God...” Senator Chris Murphy said Jones was just the “tip of a giant iceberg” and “companies must do more than take down one website”:



**Chris Murphy**   
@ChrisMurphyCT



Infowars is the tip of a giant iceberg of hate and lies that uses sites like Facebook and YouTube to tear our nation apart. These companies must do more than take down one website. The survival of our democracy depends on it.

5:26 PM · Aug 6, 2018

**2,404** Retweets   **3,555** Quotes   **8,461** Likes   **19** Bookmarks

Apple CEO Tim Cook insisted the Jones episode was not coordinated with the other firms, saying, “I’ve had no conversation. And to my knowledge, no one at Apple has.” Later stories like the [Apple-Amazon squeeze](#) of Parler ended the ruse that the major distribution platforms were not working together to create private agreements on speech, and the #TwitterFiles showed countless episodes of supposedly independent companies engaging in seeming anticompetitive behavior, coordinating on everything from election “misinformation” to pandemic messaging and holding regular “industry meetings” with government to discuss moderation issues.

The attendees of the call below include Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Twitter, Reddit, Pinterest, Wikimedia, even Medium, gathering to hear the “USG” list “watch-outs” and other threats:

SS Saleela Salahuddin May 12, 2020 at 1:43 PM  
 Reminder & Final Agenda: Monthly USG | Industry Call [Details](#)  
 To: yoelr@twitter.com, Diana Patel & 30 more

Hello Everyone –

We are looking forward to the monthly USG/Industry Call tomorrow from 2-3:30PM EST. Below is the agenda and dial in information – moments ago USG confirmed they are onboard with the agenda, which we went over at our prep session last Friday – looking forward to a more discussion-focused convening tomorrow, and thanks for joining.

2:00-2:10 - Dial In/Opening  
 2:10-3:10 - Deep Dive Topic (Industry/USG Moderated Discussion)

- Changes to voting, campaigning, & threat landscape due to COVID-19 and migration online
- Ensuring the public has reliable voting information (locations, dates, etc.)

3:10-3:20 - Highlights & Upcoming Watch Outs (Moderated)  
 3:20-3:30 - Foreshadow Next Agenda Topic & Wrap-Up

Please do not forward or share this invitation. If you feel someone should be added, please contact [smainzer@fb.com](mailto:smainzer@fb.com).

**USG-Provided Webex meeting link (please do not forward)**

In the six years since “Project Owl,” think about how many voices have been fully or partially removed from public view. True-blue “progressives” won’t mourn many, from Jones to Donald Trump to Carlson to RT and Sputnik to former weapons inspector Scott Ritter and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Add the deamplification or algorithmic blacklisting of sites like Truthdig, Wikileaks and third-party candidates like Jill Stein, the removal under government pressure of [content from people like Joe Rogan](#),

and the seemingly endless advertiser boycotts of various other classes of badthinker, and the field of view has been drastically narrowed.

The one undeniable fact about Carlson's show is that it was materially different from other Fox content. The product was not the same as what you heard in the *Hannity* slot. As was the case with Donald Trump, you don't need to cheer the message, or believe it's sincere, to recognize that this differentiation exists. For instance, the *Washington Post* this week cited "people familiar with" Rupert Murdoch's thinking in saying Carlson's ongoing eye-rolling about the war in Ukraine, and [use of terms like "pimp" to describe Volodymyr Zelensky](#), had "drawn furious blowback from powerful Republicans who see U.S. support for Ukraine as a bulwark in a fight for freedom and democracy — some of whom had Murdoch's ear."

Removing Carlson from Fox makes the rest of conservative media more homogeneous. The constant policing of content in blue media accomplishes the same. When the *American Prospect* ran a feature about Carlson that merely had a sarcastic headline ("[The Smuggest Man On Air](#)") and was only critical roughly every second or third paragraph, filling in the rest of the space with detached analysis of what made Carlson's show successful (e.g. a willingness to "mock ruling elites"), the magazine was hit with [the usual grab-bag of Scanners-style head-exploding from a handful of reporters](#). This immediately caused two *Prospect* editors to [roll over](#), throw [their writers overboard](#), and replace the mildly different piece with the usual wire-to-wire bloodcurdling diatribe against Carlson as a "[neofascist](#)" "[threat to democracy](#)."

I like and respect editor David Dayen, but a sequence like this sends a message to every writer that you'd better come at topics in a certain way if you want to be bylined. Liberals in the Bush years used to mock the metronome predictability of Fox, but the same kind of thing has been going on on what used to be my side of the aisle for so long, most mainstream media products are basically identical. Everyone with a noticeably different point of view gets moved out, even if they're obvious audience assets, with Glenn Greenwald ([pushed out](#) of the *Intercept* for [wanting to publish](#) what turned out to be the correct angle on the Hunter Biden laptop story) and Lee Fang being notable examples.

It doesn't take a genius to see where this is going. To paraphrase Mencken, you don't have to think Carlson's motivations were noble to see that his rhetoric on Ukraine stood out in the current TV environment like a wart on a bald head. The rest of the corporate press, be it left or right, will now be a parade of generals and security experts whose argument won't be about whether or not the U.S. should be involved in Ukraine, but [which party is most committed](#) and [whose strategy](#) will lead to Putin's defeat faster. We are moving back toward an era of two homogeneous messaging landscapes that will intersect on national security issues, with the beaten antiwar left a fading memory and the isolationist right fired, under indictment, or banned.

People like AOC can couch these moves in terms of prevention of violence all they want, but it's just too conspicuous that what's left of major commercial media also happens to be much engaged in the trumpeting of government messaging, to the point where the people reading the news are government officials. It was once considered healthy for the press to play to mass audiences and position itself as a skeptical thorn in the side of officialdom.

There is no institution like that left in American life. What we have instead is an increasingly pissed-off population that needs to look about eighty results down in every Google search to find its point of view represented. Who thinks that situation is going to hold?



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## 1,078 Comments



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**Feral Finster** Apr 27

Remember, kids, authoritarianism is something that ever always only happens in other countries!