

Alex Jones, Bigotry, Falsehoods, and “Censorship”

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Paranoid conspiracy theorist and reactionary polemicist Alex Jones has been banned from Apple, Facebook, YouTube and Spotify. Jones, through his website Info Wars and other outlets over the past 20 years, has promoted such conspiracy theories as the following:

- Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. and is not a U.S. citizen
- Hillary Clinton headed a sex trafficking ring with the D.C.-based Comet Ping Pong Pizza establishment (aka, Pizzagate)
- The terrorist attacks on 9/11 were inside jobs
- Hitler and Mussolini were leftists that influenced the Left in the U.S.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is forming concentration camps to brainwash Americans
- The Sandy Hook massacre, in which 20 children were murdered, was a hoax

However, as cruel and bizarre as these beliefs are, they are not why Jones has been barred from so many social media outlets. He was barred because these non-governmental businesses have standards against hate speech, which Jones repeatedly violated. The pressure from anti-bigots had become so great that the social media giants had to react.

This is simply not an issue of censorship. The government had nothing to do with any of this. More importantly, Jones is free to peddle his bigotry and falsehoods on his website and in many other ways. Jack-booted government thugs are not coming after him and his ilk.

Still, Jones, predictably, has turned this into a First Amendment issue. Not surprisingly, Jones is in “good” company. The paranoid conspiracy theorist-in-Chief, President Donald Trump, complains that Google is biased against conservatives, as does Jones. Jones claims that he is advising Trump in his opposition to social media. (Trump has appeared on Jones’ show and has even stated that Jones is worthy of a Pulitzer prize!)

This is a baseless claim against Google. Google prioritizes credible original sources over paranoid conspiracy theories and “real” fake news. However, how does one reason with a paranoid conspiracy theorist? In the convoluted logic of the conspiracy theorist, strong evidence against the theory is viewed as *part* of the conspiracy! As someone once said, “once fanaticism gets inside you, nothing else can.”

Ironically, the conservatives that whine about “fake news” are Jones’ biggest supporters. Like Trump, most of these conservatives seem to believe that anything with which they disagree must be fake news. Meanwhile, Trump tells an estimated seven lies per day, which his gullible followers eagerly accept.

To his credit, Jones has his share of progressive supporters. They embrace the slippery slope common logical fallacy, or the idea that Jones was unjustly banned from social media, and that anyone with unpopular ideas could also be banned.

Indeed, I first became fascinated with Jones’ banning from social media as I was listening to a radio program I used to appear on regularly as a guest. The talk show host, Mary Davis, asked her guests about anything in the news they wanted to discuss. Frank Gist, another regular guest, brought up the Alex Jones story. Much to my horror and disgust, Gist said that “some conspiracy theories are true,” and started to defend the idea that 9/11 was an inside job. He said he would gladly debate anyone on any number of conspiracy theories. Thankfully, there was a professor that was also a guest on the show who was able to show how crazy and dangerous these kinds of ideas are.

It is sad that otherwise rational commentators can destroy their credibility by promoting paranoid conspiracy theories. However, should people be censored because they promote conspiracy theories?

Conspiracy theories can cause widespread panic, rage, violence and death throughout populations. Blacks and Jews have been historically victimized by conspiracy theories and rumor mongering. Is this any different than shouting fire in a crowded theater when there is no fire? It seems that if conspiracy theories lead to violence, the conspiracy theorists should in some way be held accountable for his or her words. They could certainly be held legally accountable if they were found to be inciting to riot.

It is amazing how comfortable Trump supporters are with a paranoid conspiracy theorist in the White House. They do not understand – or care – what it means to have a sitting president that is divorced from reality. What does this say to the rest of the world?

There certainly will not be any support for reason in this regard coming from most of Trump's fellow Republican politicians. He succeeded in terrorizing them way back during his run for the Presidency. Republicans seem to stand for nothing but naked political power by any means necessary. They have shown repeatedly that they are willing to put the pursuit of political power before the best interests of their country, while hypocritically wrapping themselves in the flag. Though they obviously do not care, history will judge them harshly for their greed, duplicity and cowardice.