

# “Pay Close Attention to Those Calling for Censorship”

This article is from the “Edifying the Body” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website (churchofgodbigandy.com). It was posted for the weekend of Aug. 19, 2023.

**By Dave Havir**

BIG SANDY, Texas—Last week, I compiled a long article talking about the importance of “Free Speech” (in an article titled “Free Speech and Personal Responsibility”).

In my article, I posted two long articles that are not generally accepted by the gatekeepers of this country—the government institutions and the corporate media. My article was straight forward to show my support for the combination of free speech and the expectation for mature people to exercise personal responsibility in evaluating what they read.

This article is going to address the cousin of free speech—that being the subject of censorship.

The plan in this article is to post three items.

- First—I will post the complete letter to librarians by Barack Obama in July 2023 that shows his view about avoiding the censorship of books.
- Second—I will post a snippet of a speech given by Mr. Obama at Stanford University in xxxxx 2021 that discusses some his views about the need for censorship. (While I support you reading the entirety of his speech, I will only post a few paragraphs.)
- Third—I will post an article by xxxxx criticizing some of Mr. Obama’s views found in the 2021 Stanford speech.

The subject of censorship is a large subject with various tentacles. I recommend that you pay close attention to the different angles of the subject.



A letter by Barack Obama to American librarians was posted at xxxxx on July 17, 2023. Following is the letter.

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To the dedicated and hardworking librarians of America:

In any democracy, the free exchange of ideas is an important part of making sure that citizens are informed, engaged and feel like their perspectives matter.

It's so important, in fact, that here in America, the First Amendment of our Constitution states that freedom begins with our capacity to share and access ideas—even, and maybe especially, the ones we disagree with.

More often than not, someone decides to write those ideas down in a book.

Books have always shaped how I experience the world. Writers like Mark Twain and Toni Morrison, Walt Whitman and James Baldwin taught me something essential about our country's character. Reading about people whose lives were very different from mine showed me how to step into someone else's shoes. And the simple act of writing helped me develop my own identity—all of which would prove vital as a citizen, as a community organizer, and as president.

Today, some of the books that shaped my life—and the lives of so many others—are being challenged by people who disagree with certain ideas or perspectives. It's no coincidence that these "banned books" are often written by or feature people of color, indigenous people, and members of the LGBTQ+ community—though there have also been unfortunate instances in which books by conservative authors or books containing "triggering" words or scenes have been targets for removal. Either way, the impulse seems to be to silence, rather than engage, rebut, learn from or seek to understand views that don't fit our own.

I believe such an approach is profoundly misguided, and contrary to what has made this country great. As I've said before, not only is it important for young people from all walks of life to see themselves represented in the pages of books, but it's also important for all of us to engage with different ideas and points of view.

It's also important to understand that the world is watching. If America—a nation built on freedom of expression—allows certain voices and ideas to be silenced, why should other countries go out of their way to protect them? Ironically, it is Christian and other religious texts—the sacred texts that some calling for book bannings in this country claim to want to defend—that have often been the first target of censorship and book banning efforts in authoritarian countries.

Nobody understands that more than you, our nation's librarians. In a very real sense, you're on the front lines—fighting every day to make the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas available to everyone. Your dedication and professional expertise allow us to freely read and consider information and ideas, and decide for ourselves which ones we agree with.

That's why I want to take a moment to thank all of you for the work you do every day—work that is helping us understand each other and embrace our shared humanity.

And it's not just about books. You also provide spaces where people can come together, share ideas, participate in community programs, and access essential

civic and educational resources. Together, you help people become informed and active citizens, capable of making this country what they want it to be.

And you do it all in a harsh political climate where, all too often, you're attacked by people who either cannot or will not understand the vital—and uniquely American—role you play in the life of our nation.

So, whether you just started working at a school or public library, or you've been there your entire career, Michelle and I want to thank you for your unwavering commitment to the freedom to read. All of us owe you a debt of gratitude for making sure readers across the country have access to a wide range of books, and all the ideas they contain.

Finally, to every citizen reading this, I hope you'll join me in reminding anyone who will listen—and even some people you think might not—that the free, robust exchange of ideas has always been at the heart of American democracy. Together, we can make that true for generations to come.

With gratitude,

Barack



An transcript titled "Transcript: Barack Obama Speech on Technology and Democracy" was posted at [techpolicy.press](https://techpolicy.press) on April 22, 2022. Following are excerpts of a long transcript.

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Hello, Stanford. It is great to be in California and back in beautiful Palo Alto . . .

During some of the darkest days of World War II, American philosopher, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote the following, "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."

We're living through another tumultuous, dangerous moment in history. All of us have been horrified by Russia's brutal invasion of the Ukraine. A nuclear-armed despot's response to a neighboring state whose only provocation is its desire to be independent and democratic. An invasion of this scale hasn't been seen in Europe since World War II, and we've all witnessed the resulting death and destruction, and the displacement, in real time . . .

Autocrats and aspiring strongmen have become emboldened around the globe. They're actively subverting democracy, they're undermining hard-won human rights, they're ignoring international law.

Worse yet, democratic backsliding is not restricted to distant lands. Right here, in the United States of America, we just saw a sitting president deny the clear results of an election and help incite a violent insurrection at the nation's Capitol. Not only that, but a majority of his party, including many

who occupy some of the highest offices in the land, continue to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the last election, and are using it to justify laws that restrict the vote, making it easier to overturn the will of the people in states where they hold power.

But for those of us who believe in democracy and the rule of law, this should serve as a wake-up call. We have to admit that, at least in the years since the Cold War ended, democracies have grown dangerously complacent . . .

And that's why I'm here today, on Stanford's campus, in the heart of Silicon Valley, where so much of the digital revolution began, because I'm convinced that right now one of the biggest impediments to doing all of this, indeed, one of the biggest reasons for democracies weakening is the profound change that's taking place in how we communicate and consume information . . .

In the competition between truth and falsehood, cooperation and conflict, the very design of these platforms seems to be tilting us in the wrong direction. And we're seeing the results.

Take Covid. The fact that scientists developed safe, effective vaccines in record time is an unbelievable achievement. And yet despite the fact that we've now, essentially clinically tested the vaccine on billions of people worldwide, around 1 in 5 Americans is still willing to put themselves at risk and put their families at risk rather than get vaccinated. People are dying because of misinformation . . .

In Myanmar, it's been well-documented that hate speech shared on Facebook played a role in the murderous campaign targeting the Rohingya community. Social media platforms have been similarly implicated in fanning ethnic violence in Ethiopia, far-right extremism in Europe. Authoritarian regimes and strongmen around the world from China to Hungary, the Philippines. Brazil have learned to conscript social media platforms to turn their own populations against groups they don't like, whether it's ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community, journalists, political opponents. And of course, autocrats like Putin have used these platforms as a strategic weapon against democratic countries that they consider a threat.

People like Putin and Steve Bannon, for that matter, understand it's not necessary for people to believe this information in order to weaken democratic institutions. You just have to flood a country's public square with enough raw sewage. You just have to raise enough questions, spread enough dirt, plant enough conspiracy theorizing that citizens no longer know what to believe.

Once they lose trust in their leaders, in mainstream media, in political institutions, in each other, in the possibility of truth, the game's won. And as Putin discovered leading up to the 2016 election, our own social media platforms are well designed to support such a mission, such a project.

Russians could study and manipulate patterns in the engagement ranking system on a Facebook or YouTube. And as a result, Russian state sponsored trolls could almost guarantee that whatever disinformation they put out there

would reach millions of Americans. And that the more inflammatory the story, the quicker it spread . . .

Without some standards, implications of this technology, for our elections, for our legal system, for our democracy, for rules of evidence, for our entire social order are frightening and profound . . .

I'm pretty close to a First Amendment absolutist. I believe that in most instances the answer to bad speech is good speech. I believe that the free, robust, sometimes antagonistic exchange of ideas produces better outcomes and a healthier society.

No Democratic government can or should do what China, for example, is doing, simply telling people what they can and cannot say or publish while trying to control what others say about their country abroad. And I don't have a lot of confidence that any single individual or organization, private or public, should be charged or do a good job at determining who gets to hear what.

That said, the First Amendment is a check on the power of the state.

It doesn't apply to private companies like Facebook or Twitter, any more than it applies to editorial decisions made by The New York Times or Fox News. Never has.

Social media companies already make choices about what is or is not allowed on their platforms and how that content appears, both explicitly through content moderation, and implicitly through algorithms . . .

Any rules we come up with to govern the distribution of content on the Internet will involve value judgments. None of us are perfectly objective. What we consider unshakeable truth today may prove to be totally wrong tomorrow. But that doesn't mean some things aren't truer than others or that we can't draw lines between opinions, facts, honest mistakes, intentional deceptions.

We make these distinctions all the time in our daily lives, at work, in school, at home, in sports, and we can do the same when it comes to Internet content, as long as we agree on a set of principles, some core values to guide the work . . .

Tech platforms need to accept that they play a unique role in how we, as a people and people around the world, are consuming information and that their decisions have an impact on every aspect of society. With that power comes accountability, and in democracies like ours, at least, the need for some democratic oversight . . .

While content moderation can limit the distribution of clearly dangerous content, it doesn't go far enough. Users who want to spread disinformation have become experts at pushing right up to the line of what at least published company policies allow . . .

A regulatory structure, a smart one, needs to be in place, designed in consultation with tech companies, and experts and communities that are affect-

ed, including communities of color and others that sometimes are not well represented here in Silicon Valley, that will allow these companies to operate effectively while also slowing the spread of harmful content. In some cases, industry standards may replace or substitute for regulation, but regulation has to be part of the answer . . .

We do expect these companies to affirm the importance of our democratic institutions, not dismiss them, and to work to find the right combination of regulation and industry standards that will make democracy stronger. And because companies recognize the often dangerous relationship between social media, nationalism, domestic hate groups, they do need to engage with vulnerable populations about how to put better safeguards in place to protect minority populations, ethnic populations, religious minorities, wherever they operate . . .

Thank you very much, everybody. All right. Thank you, Thank you.



An article by Margaret Kimberley titled "Obama Wants Censorship" was posted at [blackagenda.com](https://blackagenda.com) on April 27, 2022. Following is the article.

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Barack Obama and his ruling class bosses are losing legitimacy with more and more people. They have decided that censoring information will resolve their problems.

On April 21, 2022 former president Barack Obama gave a speech at Stanford University on the subject of social media. In typical Obamaesque fashion, he didn't state his point plainly. He used a lot of time, more than an hour, to advocate for social media censorship. He only used that word once, in order to deny that it was in fact what he meant, but the weasel words and obfuscation couldn't hide what Obama was talking about.

In 2016 when Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump, the candidate she thought easiest to beat, Obama first presented his lament about "disinformation" and "fake news." His real concern was that Trump's victory proved that millions of people paid no attention to or even scorned, corporate media. No major newspaper endorsed Donald Trump, the television networks enjoyed the ratings increases he created, but ultimately believed that a second Clinton presidency was in the offing.

None of them knew that some 60 million people would go to polling places and give their votes to Trump. Hence the disquiet in November 2016, when Obama realized that having buy-in from establishment corporate media meant little if their narratives were rejected by people across the country.

Now Obama has to live with his handiwork in Ukraine. He and Joe Biden began the crisis when they partnered with right wing forces there in 2014 and overthrew the elected president. They are struggling to prop up the Ukrain-

ians with billions of dollars while also trying to keep the American people from asking why they don't have child tax credits, minimum wage increases, or student loan debt relief.

Obama's answer is to cut off debate.

It took him a long time to say he wants big tech to censor their social media platforms. Instead he trotted out the usual tropes of authoritarian strongmen, China, Russia, and Trump, as threats to democracy. Of course, the lack of democracy in this country has nothing to do with any one individual or foreign government, but they are useful targets and everyone is fair game. Lest anyone forget, Trump's Twitter account was removed while he was still in the white house.

The only way out for discredited liberalism is to shut down anyone who might utter inconvenient truths. They have been doing just that for quite some time, and while their targets are ostensibly right wingers such as Trump supporters who claim he didn't lose, it is radical Black and other leftists who bear the brunt of the attack. RT and Sputnik are branded "Russia state affiliated," and they have been disappeared from many platforms. Programs such as By Any Means Necessary, which present a Black left point of view, are disappeared along with them.

Obama's angst is proof that getting rid of RT and Sputnik won't be enough for him and the ruling class he still works for. Biden is in trouble, with low approval ratings, and the non-stop effort to give legitimacy to U.S. actions in Ukraine are proof that Obama has cause for concern.

While Facebook and Twitter are already arms of the state, and restrict access to anyone who strays from their narratives, Obama would like them to do more harm. He said: "But while content moderation can limit the distribution of clearly dangerous content, it doesn't go far enough."

The algorithms and opaque rules that kick accounts off of Twitter and Facebook won't do when wholesale censorship is being proposed. Obama openly talks about government regulation of big tech. ". . . these big platforms need to be subject to some level of public oversight and regulation."

Of course they should be regulated, but as public utilities which guarantee access to everyone. But that isn't what Obama wants. So he uses Vladimir Putin as the all-purpose villain, or China, which he excoriates for conducting the kind of censorship he now proposes.

Of course he still has friends in high places, as the European Union (EU) adopted a law, the Digital Services Act, which requires "illegal" content to be removed from online platforms. "Hate speech" is banned, as is "terrorist content."

But how are those criteria defined?

It is particularly troubling that an article was added regarding Ukraine: "In the context of the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the particular impact on the manipulation of online information, a new article has been added to the text introducing a crisis response mechanism."

The EU already banned RT and Sputnik. They cannot be accessed in any member nation. The war in Ukraine is definitely a crisis for nations which are lying to millions of people about why it is taking place and about the fact that it could end if the instigators wanted that to happen. They have to lie because they can't punish Russia with sanctions without harming people all over the world.

No wonder censorship is in such high demand.

Obama and the European Union and whomever else wants to limit our ability to speak and communicate freely will use every ruse that they can to get approval for undermining the free speech they allegedly respect so much. They will conjure up images of the January 6th mob at the capitol, or Putin, or Trump to get the public to agree to censor themselves.

They'll talk about freedom of speech while doing away with our ability to exercise it in public forums. These are very dangerous times, and former presidents and their partners in crime crawl out of the woodwork with evil intent, all the while claiming to work for our good.

Just know that whatever Obama and the EU want is not good for the public. Their goal is to silence those who oppose them, and long-winded speeches shouldn't fool anyone into thinking otherwise.