



Episode 1,267: The Facebook Purge Continues

Guest: Jason Bassler and Matt Savoy

WOODS: I'd like to have one of you guys start off by telling us about the pages you ran on Facebook. What were they about? What kinds of posts did you put up there? And what kind of a following are we talking about here?

BASSLER: Sure, yeah, sounds good. Well, my name is Jason Bassler, and we had the Free Thought Project. We started that back in 2013. And I started Police the Police by myself in 2012. And police accountability mostly was the focus for Police the Police, as the name suggests. You know, we're trying to document police misconduct, abuse of authority, police brutality. The Free Thought Project focused on a number of things, mostly government accountability. And that page, before it was ended last week, had 3.1 million fans. Police the Police had 1.9 million fans, which actually made it the largest police accountability community anywhere on the internet. So we were reaching really great numbers. We were definitely getting information out there to a vast, wide array of people. On a good week, our numbers were up to 50 million people reached. We were bringing in close to 80,000 new fans in just one week.

So as you can imagine, Tom, that definitely kind of threatened them. And we were sharing information that was counterintuitive, destroying not only government narrative, but the mainstream media narratives. So we were targeted, like many other alternative news organizations. This is going to be a huge turning point for us. We've had to let go of a lot of our employees, which has been difficult for us. There was a point in time where we took a lot of pride in being able to employ writers and activists who were actually trying to hold the government accountable, to promote peace and liberty. So we're shifting our efforts now. They could delete our pages, they could erase our fans, but they can't delete the demand.

WOODS: Did they give you any kind of a warning?

BASSLER: No, but we've certainly dealt with everything with Facebook that you could even imagine, all the arbitrary censorship, have been throttled over the years. There's been points where we could only post text on our pages. They took away our ability to post memes or videos or articles. We've been shadow banned. I've had back-to-back multiple 30-day bans. So we've certainly been targeted over the years, and it feels like they're trying to kind of just push this type of information out of the complete spectrum of Facebook.

WOODS: Well, what they're trying to say is that, in this latest wave of purges, they were targeting pages that allegedly were in some way trying to manipulate or game the system. Now, can you say categorically that your pages were doing no such thing?

BASSLER: Yeah, so they said three different things: that we were engaging in inauthentic behavior, spam, and fake accounts. Now, inauthentic behaviors, it's kind of funny. It basically just means that we were doing our job too effectively. Like any other business or industry, page owners will often network with each other, find mutually beneficial arrangements to help each other. This was common practice. This is kind of the essence of grassroots, you know, so it in no way contradicts their claimed mission statement, and which is, quote, "Giving people the power to build community and bring the world closer together." Isn't this a site for networking and connecting and sharing information? In fact, I actually even networked with you back in 2012, Tom. I actually made a few graphics for your Liberty Classroom speaking tour, and I think you shared one of our pages to your audience back then. And, you know, how is that nefarious or wrong in any way? I would love to get an answer on that, but I'm not holding my breath. So basically, we're just being punished for being good at marketing and good at our job.

And then they also said, fake accounts. So I never had any fake accounts, but I did have a backup account, which used my real name, because we're a business, you know? We're dependent on ad revenue and clicks to survive, just like any other website, so if we just disappear for a 30-day ban over arbitrary, selective enforcement of a picture of ET, which I've been banned for [laughing], you know, just like any other halfway intelligent business owner, like you're prepared. You have to have some kind of backup. So once again, I used my real name. There was nothing I was trying to hide there.

And then they claimed spam, which I think is probably the weakest of their excuses, in my opinion. I always leave at least one or two hours between posts. We never post the same information repeatedly. And not to mention, these were posts to our pages for fans who asked for information and wanted to see our content. So Facebook is basically saying that the 6 million user fans that we had, these users don't know what's best for themselves when they followed our pages, and basically, they had to delete our pages because that makes Facebook a much more safe place and these people just didn't know what was best for them.

WOODS: Now, the things you're describing sounds pretty innocuous to me, and even if they wanted to be extremely fastidious about things, nevertheless, you would think almost anybody you would encounter in any relationship like this would approach you first and say: look, you've got 3 million likes on this page. Obviously, we don't want to see you go. Obviously, 3 million people think you're improving the experience around here, at the very least, so we just need to tell you the following couple of things. In fact, for example, the Amazon affiliate program — now, Amazon is every bit a giant as Facebook is, but it turns out I was in mild violation of the terms of their program, because you cannot actually say on your website, "Support my website by clicking here and ordering from Amazon." You're actually not allowed to do that. And so apparently, a bunch of us had been doing that. And they said you have to take that language down. So I did it. They didn't say, "We're shutting you down for vague reasons, and you can never come back," because what kind of a deranged lunatic would act that way? They told me what was wrong, I complied within 24 hours, not a problem since.

BASSLER: Yeah, that doesn't surprise me, Tom. You know, we were thriving in the free market of information exchange. Beginning with 2012 to 2015, we were doing great. And once they came in and started changing things and kind of trying to sculpt exactly what they want, as Facebook users, I guess we're supposed to know. So to me, it seems very, like I said, arbitrary. There's a lot of selective enforcement going on. But I do think there is something actually a little more ominous about this, and behind the scenes. And we definitely think that

the Atlantic Council has something to do with this. We think that there's some kind of push going on, because not only was this just happening on Facebook; the same day, Twitter actually removed our – well, "suspended" our accounts, both for Police the Police and the Free Thought Project. And to top it all off, we actually got a strike on our YouTube channel that same morning all this happened, as well. So you know, the fact that this is spam or we did something to trigger their algorithms, it doesn't add up, in our opinion.

WOODS: Yeah, it's far too coincidental for this to be cross-platform. And, of course, that's what happened with Alex Jones, cross-platform, all at the same time. And then the response in at least a chunk of the libertarian world was: Alex Jones is a goofball, so I'm not interested in what's going on. Whereas the rest of us thought: oh, wait a minute, something's cooking here, because they'll start with Alex Jones, precisely because they know people will respond that way. And then they'll go to the next tier, and then they'll go to the next tier until it's something that matters to you, but by that point, you're sort of compromised because you didn't really care about it happening to anybody else.

Matt, let's bring you into this conversation. What's your role with these pages, and what do you say to the argument that, after all, these are private companies, and so we have to let them do what they want to do?

SAVOY: So that's what makes Jason's and my partnership so effective, is that he handled the social media side, and I handled the website and the content that we would put out. And so, as Jason said, we found a niche in the market in 2013, and we just blew up right onto this scene. And, I mean, it was unprecedented. I'd never seen anything like it. The growth that we experienced was amazing. Because of that void in the information market, the Free Thought Project just went from 300,000 fans on there in one year to where we were, 3 million.

And the funny thing about it is that the censorship, the soft censorship and all the shadow bans like Jason explained, they weren't visible to us, but they were visible, like, on the back end in our analytics. So you could see where we'd have 300,000 fans and we'd put out a post and that that post would reach 40,000 people. Like we would get 40,000 clicks on that one link, and that was with 300,000 fans. And then fast-forward to 2017 and we'd put out a similar post – an even better, well-written, more researched post, because we had more employees and more talent on the Free Thought Project – and that would get way less. It would get 90% less interaction.

So we kind of saw this coming. There was a lot signs along the way. This started in 2016, where this group called Prop or Not put out a list of websites they deemed untrustworthy. Shortly after, like a few days after they put that out, *The Washington Post* actually ran a story on it and slandered the dozens and dozens of different alternative media sites, as well as I think there was a few mainstream media sites on there too. So Prop or Not added a few fake news sites. They were literally fake news, like this Sorcha Fall and Your News Wire, who – they literally make up lies about interviews with different people and put them out there – who coincidentally still have their Facebook pages.

So starting with that Prop or Not list, we kind of blew it off, because they couldn't do anything with it. It was lies we. We kind of tried to send them cease-and-desists, but they never responded. But that was like the beginning, and then more and more things started to happen. In 2017, documents were leaked from within Media Matters – David Brock, the founder of David Brock – and like these documents were pretty ominous. We predicted that

this was going to be used to crack down on us, and sure enough, it did. So these documents that he sent out to the high-level officials within Media Matters, he's quoted as:

"Over the next four years, Media Matters will focus on achieving the following outcomes: serial misinformers and right-wing propagandists inhabiting everything from social media to the highest levels of government will be exposed." And then they wanted they went further to note how they were going to use Facebook, Google, and Twitter to crack down on what they considered right-wing propagandists. And he says, "Internet and social media platforms like Google and Facebook will no longer uncritically and without consequence host and enrich fake news sites and propagandists."

This is like a direct outline for what's going on right now. They try to group everybody into these categories, and then use those categories to essentially wipe them from the internet. So Alex Jones was grouped into this, these misinformers and alt-right groups, and so he was easily dismissed. And then like you said, they broadened the scope the next time around, and then they take people out like us. And there were actually — so we're not left or right, you know? We're pro-liberty, and that's where we stand. But during this last purge, there were left and right-wingers. I'm in two different groups. Some of them are Trump supporters, and some of them are for like the left-wing and other alt media that got banned. So that stroke of the brush broadened this time. So who's to say it's not going to be even bigger next time?

And to show how crazy that is, there was, *The Guardian* finally reported on this, this week, about the Facebook purge. And one of the guys that they interviewed, his name was Matt Mountain, which is a pseudonym. And during his interview with *The Guardian*, he praised the fact that they banned Alex Jones, and at the same time, he was like: I couldn't imagine why they would come after me. It's like, that's what you were begging for. You beg for enough censorship, and then everybody's censored. We disagree with Alex Jones. Personally, I used to think that, like ten years ago when I started listening to Alex Jones, I was like, man, this guy's saying some awesome things. He was pro-liberty, he was an anti-xenophobe, antiwar, he was against the left-right paradigm. And then so all of a sudden, he turns into almost like a neo-con. You know, he's almost trying to justify the strikes in Syria that are on sovereign countries and stuff just because Trump's carrying it out. But so what? That's opinion. He can do that. I can disagree with him. But when you move to ban him, you open up the gateway, which is Pandora's box that kind of just included us in it as well.

WOODS: I can't imagine the work that goes into building up a following like that and then to find it just gone overnight. I'm sorry to kind of rub salt in the wound, but I cannot imagine how demoralizing that would be.

SAVOY: It's pretty upsetting. Jason and I are not these armchair, "sit back and put out some junk" and then expect it to go viral. Jason and I are dedicated. We work seven days a week, sometimes over 12 hours a day, and we poured our lifeblood into this. And it's so ironic too that this purge happened on our fifth-year anniversary. We started in October of 2013, and damned if they didn't shut us down in 2018 in October. And like I said, we've been predicting this for almost two years now. And we have like a cache of articles that show everything going down. And like Jason said earlier, we believe that the Atlantic Council, the Facebook partnership with the Atlantic Council had a lot to do with this, And I believe that they're also influencing Twitter. I mean, I don't have — that's speculation.

But so the for those that don't know — I don't know if your listeners would know about the Atlantic Council. In May of this past year, Facebook partnered with an arm of the Atlantic Council, the Digital Forensic Research Lab, and these people are essentially — they call themselves a think-tank, but in essence, they're whitewashing for NATO. They need to keep the Russian narrative alive: *the Russians are going to come get us and steal your children*. They need that in order to justify the promotion of their backers, which are companies like Lockheed Martin or Raytheon.

And so these people are funded, the Atlantic Council is directly funded — this is not a conspiracy theory. You can go to the Atlantic Council's own website and read about all their backers. And their backers consist of everybody from major pharmaceutical industry players to Google to the United States itself to the U.S. Army to Air Force, oligarchs across the planet like Ukraine's Victor Pinchuk and Saudi billionaire Bahaa Hariri. Like these people, they're tyrants and oligarchs, and they're being this company who Facebook partnered with to be their censorship arm. So there's no doubt that the Atlantic Council played a role in the removal of us, especially since Facebook said in their official statement that this was done before the election cycle to weed these people out like us, because our voice is apparently dangerous.

And these same people, the Atlantic Council in September, they put out a paper, they published this paper titled, "Whose Truth: Sovereignty, Disinformation, and Winning the Battle of Trust." The paper is designed to do exactly that, so they could censor social media networks to stop what they consider disinformation. These are the people that want to censor disinformation. They're claiming to be the arbiters of truth, but they're the same people who are funded by people who sell bombs to Saudi Arabia that blow buses full of children. The conflict of interests here is insane. And it also serves to completely negate the argument that Facebook is private and they have a right to ban whoever they want. The fact that the Atlantic Council is funded by the military industrial complex, mega banks, and then actual U.S. government interests, and the U.S. government itself negates any "Facebook is private claim."

WOODS: What comes next for you guys? Now, there are much, much smaller, but nevertheless, there are other social media outlets. Are you trying to get a foothold there?

BASSLER: Yeah, we definitely connected with Minds. I actually listened to your interview with Bill Ottman, what, maybe a month or so ago, and that kind of led us in that direction. They were kind enough to reach out to us after all this happened and kind of shared the platform, how it works with us. So we'll definitely be moving, shifting all of our efforts over there. We're still going to stay on social media, including Facebook. We already started our pages, just the 2.0 version, so if any of your fans are looking for us, please search for our names plus 2.0, and you should see our new pages. Something about it, kind of, I like the idea of staying on their sites, even though they don't want us there.

And of course, we are just trying to get the word out there. We're trying to plant seeds and get this information to the people who don't necessarily have access to it or aren't necessarily familiar with it. And unfortunately, a lot of these smaller alternative sites don't — you know, they have a lot of the similar types of mentality and mindsets and whatnot. So unfortunately, if we're targeting normies, we still have to stay with some of the bigger social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. But I would say if anything, Tom, this kind of backfired on them. We've reached way more, people we've done way more interviews, we're getting our own

names out there, we're getting connected with all types of people who are influential. And so in many ways, just like all censorship, this is kind of backfiring. And so, you know, this is a win in many ways. I mean, it hurts us, but at least some of these smaller but still influential, like RT, news outlets will have the chance to cover us, and they have been covering us, so I can't thank them enough for that support.

WOODS: It's crazier all the time. Now Twitter can't decide, that maybe it wants to ban, *ban* the NPC meme, which is about as harmless a thing as you could possibly ask for. One group is just saying that another group seems to repeat a lot of the same ideas over and over again. Look, a lot worse than that was said about me when I was in school, right [laughing]? A lot worse. And it never occurred to me that those people should somehow be disappeared from society, for heaven's sake. So it really is nuts. And I wonder if, as Michael Malice suggested in a conversation we had on the show not too long ago, if maybe where we're headed really is contrary to what some of us may prefer, kind of an ideologically segregated kind of social media so as to keep peace, that maybe it's not possible for everybody to be together, because there's so much crazy fighting and irrationalism, and then you have overzealous referees who are already — you know, they've got a foot on the scale anyway. They already have their sympathies, and then people get banned and get frustrated. Maybe we just decide that maybe this is a bad idea. What do you think about that?

SAVOY: Well, to interject, I think that before — like you said, these referees — before the referees actually started refereeing, I think that Facebook was a much more pleasant place to be, and then when the referees decided like this is who gets to see what, this is who gets to see this, and they started tailoring information for people that they thought that they wanted to see instead of just letting people like pages that they liked, so they would just show right-wing information to right-wingers and left-wing information to left-wingers — it was almost like a deliberate divide-and-conquer. And you can see that there's definitely a bias when it comes to the information that's allowed on these platforms.

And before the page got taken down for my Matt Agorist Facebook page, a guy sent me two screen shots that he took from a one of these Antifa pages. And he reported a picture on a meme that the Antifa page had uploaded that had a picture of a guillotine on it, and it said, "Kill all capitalists." Now, this is a direct call for the death of hundreds of millions of people in this country, right? Because we're a capitalist society. One would think that — we don't call for any information to be banned, but this information is a threat of causing harm and doing violence, which is a complete violation of the nonaggression principle. So anyway, this guy reported that to Facebook. Facebook responds back to him by saying that this image does not violate their terms and conditions. Meanwhile, Jason Bassler posts a picture of ET. *ET!* It's a picture ET, and he gets banned for 30 days and that picture's removed. So I believe that the referees are the ones causing this problem.

And I mean, I would hate to see the social media networks just become this big, massive segregation, like Facebook for the right and Facebook for the left or anything. I think that the problem is, because of the censorship, that that's leading to this divide. I see an opportunity for other companies, other social media companies to rise up in this time. And like there wasn't before a market demand for an alternative social media network, but now I think that the demand is going to rise so much that others will burst onto the scene. In fact, we've actually interviewed with a couple of these people who want us to come to their platforms and promote them. But it would suck to see people all get trapped in their own little

information circles and never come across information that might challenge their paradigm, because that would lead to just a pretty terrible place, in my opinion.

WOODS: Yeah, I agree. I mean, I would like to see things go the way you want to see them go. And I think of myself as being like you guys, as, even though I know that libertarians obviously are going to enjoy my material the most, I'm not writing off the rest of society. I'd like anybody to give my show a try. And I think I might get them to think in interesting ways about a variety of topics. And one of the nice things about YouTube for me has been, it's a way for people organically to discover new content creators, because you've got, in the right-hand column, all these recommended videos. So they watch some video, and then I'm one of the recommended videos, and so they start watching me. And then they look around for me, and my website's in the corner, and they go visit. And I have no control over that. I'm not actively marketing over there. It's just happening for free, organically. And I would hate to see that — and I'm sure that also happens on the other social media platforms, and I would very much hate to see that shut down. To both of you, first of all, tell me: you have a website for any of these pages? Were they associated with a website?

SAVOY: Yes, they were. It's TheFreeThoughtProject.com, which was at one point the 212th largest website in the country.

WOODS: Wow.

SAVOY: Which was only — it happened about a year after we started. Maybe a little less than that, right, Jason?

BASSLER: Yeah, that was when Facebook was still organic and there wasn't as much throttling and censorship, which, you know, at one point it was a beautiful place, kind of like what you're mentioning, Tom. And who knows how long you're going to be on YouTube? You could be next on the chopping block. But at one point, Facebook was great for getting information out there, networking, specifically in this niche, in libertarian circles. But yeah, all that's gone now. And not to mention Police the Police. That was the largest community for police accountability anywhere on the internet. So that conversation that was going on there is now officially muted and eradicated.

WOODS: You know, we all know about the problem with pages. Now, when you have 3 million likes, well, you're going to reach a lot of people regardless. But with me, I've stagnated at about 80,000 for probably three years now, because I just haven't put that much energy into building up the following. And then, as you know, in the past couple of years, the reach of pages has plummeted through obviously a deliberate effort. So now it's just demoralizing. I barely post on my main page. I do want to get back to it, because at the very — even if I do advertise on Facebook, I feel like, well, at least I've got a targeted group I'm advertising to. I know these are people who have opted in to hear from me, so it's valuable for me as a marketer. But if I just post an organic post with no boosting, it's shown to about 5% of my followers, and the excuse they have is, well, people really want to hear from friends and family when they're on Facebook. Well, you know what? Speak for yourself. Ask them what they'd like to hear from. If they click "like" on my page, maybe they want to hear from me.

SAVOY: Exactly.

BASSLER: Yeah, we spend money on boosting posts. We spend money on getting some likes. I mean, very small amount. I would say a very, very small percentage, but we kind of wanted to test it and see how it worked. And what, are we going to get a refund back on that now that our pages have been completely decimated? I mean, I doubt it. So, I mean, this in many ways, regardless of it being a private company, it's completely un-American. You know, we were American company, founded by Americans, sharing American news on American platform. And we were hard workers. We worked from scratch to build this, and so in many ways, let's just hope this backfires on Facebook. I mean, it looks like their stocks are already plummeting. We know users are abandoning ship left and right, so I wouldn't be surprised if it turns into the next MySpace here in the next few years.

WOODS: Well, I was just reading an article last week about a move to try to oust Zuckerberg. But they try this every now and again, and the trouble is his ownership share is so great, he can pretty much fend off any attack. But nevertheless, that doesn't mean it's worthless to try, because it does make clear that there is some unhappiness at the way he's handled a number of these scandals. I mean, the past year and a half has been pretty wretched for Facebook's PR in just example after example.

So all right, I want to see you guys succeed no matter what platform you're on, and I want to live in a just world where you get everybody back and then some. So I'm going to link to every place you are. You send me all the links, and I'll put them up at TomWoods.com/1267. And if you're listening to this, these guys put in so much work over so much time. And if you can just take a minute out of your day to help them out by checking it out, liking, following, whatever you can do, spreading the word. You've got to start somewhere when you're faced with a situation like this. So I'll leave it to each of you to say a final word.

SAVOY: Okay, thank you. I really appreciate all the kind words and you putting out our links, Tom. It's awesome, man. The support we've gotten from everybody in the last week has just been unprecedented. And I'm not going to say humbling, because I'm not humbled that people are supporting us. But I've been an entrepreneur for the last 20 years, and I've had businesses that failed because I messed up, and I've had businesses that failed because the market was different. This is the first time I can ever say that we were actually being successful and our business was shut down. That's the future if we don't actually stop and resist this and try to build something new out of these ashes that is becoming Facebook. It's imperative that we all seek new platforms and go to these uncensored platforms that will not shut up people that have peaceful, antiwar views who want to hold government accountable.

BASSLER: Yeah, and I also just want to say thanks, as well, Tom. I really appreciate you having us on. And thanks to our team. They've been working so hard over the past few years. And everybody who's supported us. We've got an outpouring across the globe with so many wonderful messages, people telling us about how we've helped them wake up to the police state, how they're no longer neocons who support war. So victory may have cost us everything, but we officially won the meme war. They had to get rid of us. They had to eradicate our information from their platforms. And you know, this really this equates to a modern-day book burning in the digital age. These big tech companies appointed themselves as political arbiters, so it's up to us to create. All anarchists, they don't destroy, they create if we want to see change. So that's what we're planning on doing, and we won't stop. They can't stop us. They can delete us, but they can't stop us.

WOODS: Jason Bassler and Matt Savoy, thanks for your time. And thank you gentlemen, for your service.

SAVOY: Thank you, Tom.

BASSLER: Thanks, Tom.