

Yes, Twitter Actually Blocked Me for This

On Tuesday morning, when I went to use my Twitter account, I was greeted by a different screen than normal. It contained one single tweet of mine, beneath which was a large red button labeled "Remove." I had violated Twitter guidelines, because of which I was blocked from using my account. The two options were to remove the offending tweet or to appeal. I chose to appeal.

To give the relevant background, over the weekend, I posted a comment on both Twitter and Facebook, saying, "To those who are outraged over the fact that many Americans still choose not to be vaccinated, do you honestly believe that if those people were convinced the vaccines were perfectly safe in the long term and would save lives that most of them would not be vaccinated immediately?" (This is the Facebook link; I would give you the Twitter link except that, well, I can't, since I'm blocked from accessing my account.)

I had first posted the comment on Twitter, where it generated a lively discussion, after which my wife, Nancy, said to me, "You should post it on Facebook and see what happens."

She suggested this because she has noticed how Facebook has largely strangled the distribution of my articles and posts on cultural and political topics, to the point that we've seen a reduction of as much as 90% (if not more at times).

What would happen, she wondered, if I posted this same comment on Facebook?

To our pleasant surprise, the post generated about 1,400 thousand likes and 1,200 comments and, to this moment, has not been removed. (Of course, the ubiquitous Facebook public service announcement is attached to the post: "Visit the

COVID-19 Information Center for vaccine resources. Get Vaccine Info.”)

I also made my own public position clear on Facebook: “For the record, I have encouraged everyone to do the research and make informed decisions for themselves. I have not advocated a particular position for others to take.”

Back over at Twitter, a pastor with the last name Mather, making him a distant descendant of the early American Christian leader Cotton Mather (1663-1728) responded to my tweet. He pointed out that Cotton Mather believed in the integration of science and faith, getting vaccinated himself. (I would supply the direct quote with a link to the tweet except that, well, I can’t, since I can’t access my account.)

In response I tweeted, “@jjmather Interestingly, Jonathan Edwards died in 1758 as a result of the smallpox vaccine he received.”

That was it. Nothing about COVID (obviously). Nothing about vaccines today. No misinformation. No conspiracy theories. Nothing in violation of Twitter guidelines at all. Not a word.

I simply related an interesting and relevant historical fact in response to the comment about Cotton Mather. (To be specific, Edwards died of a smallpox inoculation rather than vaccine. As explained on the Historical Horizons website, “Edwards embraced the new science of his day, especially new techniques being used to combat diseases. When smallpox swept into Princeton, New Jersey during the winter of 1757-58, Edwards, the local college’s newly minted president, got a shot from a reputable doctor. Thirty-seven days later Jonathan Edwards was dead from the shot.” And, “Actually it was not a shot. The accepted procedure involved rubbing matter removed from a pustule into a small incision made between the thumb and index finger.”)

What, then, was my crime?

Clicking on the link provided by Twitter, I was directed to a page explaining that, among many other potential violations, posting misleading information about COVID-19 was a violation of Twitter policy. When I clicked on the link supplying more detailed information, I was brought to this page, stating, "As the global community faces the COVID-19 pandemic together, Twitter is helping people find reliable information, connect with others, and follow what's happening in real time."

There, under the heading, "Protecting the public conversation," the following nine bulleted items were listed:

- Clarifying how we assess misleading information.
- Updating our approach to misleading information.
- Broadening our guidance on unverified claims.
- Our ads policy for COVID-19.
- Broadening our definition of "harm."
- An update on our content moderation work.
- Automated technology and what to expect if you file a report.
- Additional triage, quality assurance and ongoing review of Twitter's rules.
- Our zero-tolerance approach to platform manipulation.

Can anyone tell me how posting a factual comment about the death of Jonathan Edwards in 1758 is in violation of any of these terms? Would any rational human being assume that I was saying, "I'm warning you not to get the COVID vaccine in 2021 seeing that Edwards died 263 years ago from a failed vaccination attempt"? (Does anyone think that medicine and technology have not advanced dramatically since 1758?)

But today, it appears that even posting historical facts that

are deemed inconvenient is a challenge to Big Tech's iron grip.

Perhaps the cause of Edwards' death will now be scrubbed from our history books too? (The History Extra website ran an April 2020 article titled, "Rewriting the past: the history that inspired Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.")

Because I only have 42,800 Twitter followers, it was not urgent that I was able to access my account again. And so, for sake of principle (and as a teachable moment), I chose to appeal the ruling. (As I write, about 12 hours later, there has been no response from Twitter, other than to acknowledge my appeal.)

That being said, because the tweet in itself was not vitally important to me, should Twitter drag its feet in responding, I'll likely remove the tweet and reactivate my account. For me, this tweet is not a hill worth dying on.

But unless Twitter fails to apologize to me in writing, saying that this was an error on their account, we now have yet another example of the degree to which dangerous lines are being crossed.

Not only are dissenting opinions unwelcome. Inconvenient historical facts are banned as well.

To quote Orwell's 1984, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." {eoa}

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