
It's Time for Twitter To Ban Donald Trump

11/01/2017



He's the commander-in-chief of trolls, an angry toddler who uses Twitter to exact petty revenge on his enemies and who can send the United States into a tailspin in 140 characters. It's time to shut his primary mode of communication down for good.

Author's Note: *I wrote this in the morning and by evening there's already [an entirely new scandal](#) the incoming Trump administration is dealing with. Get used to it, folks. This is how it's going to be for the next four years: There will be so much corruption coming at so fast a rate that the news cycle will turn over every couple of hours rather than every day or so.*

Two nights ago, Meryl Streep used her Cecil B. DeMille Lifetime Achievement Award acceptance speech at the Golden Globes to speak out in favor of kindness, decency and the arts. Maybe you heard that what she really did was indirectly attack incoming president and walking constitutional crisis Donald Trump. Well, yeah, she did, but that's largely because he's proven himself unkind, indecent and a strident opponent of the arts and all they typically stand for to an extreme that's difficult to put into words. Some people are praising Streep's public stand while others are predictably telling her that Hollywood types should stick to being entertainers and not burden America with their political opinions. (Many in this latter group, without a hint of irony, voted to make a reality TV star president, but that's for another time.)

Streep's statement was a bit of a surprise. [The instantaneous reaction](#) to it from both sides of the political divide wasn't. Neither, of course, was the 100% inevitable response from Donald Trump, remember, the man who will be inaugurated as President of the United States in ten days and who you'd presume would have better things to do than get into a tiff with an actress. A little while later, the relentless stream of pea-brain farts that is Trump's Twitter feed was turned in the direction of Streep. [Film critic Richard Roeper](#) had, not long after Streep's speech, predicted that Trump would call her "overrated," and that's exactly what he did (although he unnecessarily hyphenated the word, because he's an illiterate idiot). "Meryl Streep, one of the most over-rated actresses in Hollywood, doesn't know me but attacked last night at the Golden Globes," he wrote, as if she'd taken the stage and burned him in

effigy.

To reiterate -- because even after so many instances of this kind of crap it's still shocking -- the president elect, who's less a serious adult than he is an angry toddler without an ounce of self-control, felt the need to respond to perceived criticism from a *movie star* with juvenile name-calling. He wasn't holding a press conference to react to, say, a threat made by a hostile entity against the United States. No, he was firing off a tweet at three in the morning -- he was awake dwelling on what the mean lady from Hollywood had said about him at three in the fucking morning -- because he felt that he absolutely had to "defend himself" against someone who made a plea for civility from his soon-to-be-office. That's the behavior, again, of a child, not of someone who's about to become, unthinkable, the second most powerful person on the planet (after Vladimir Putin).

Trump's Twitter feed has become so inextricably linked to his public persona that it's difficult to imagine what he'd do without it. He desperately needs that particular form of expression for a couple of reasons. First, because Twitter is simplistic, it allows someone with Trump's lack of any discernible ability to form a lengthy coherent thought a tool to blurt out his various brain droppings and *non sequiturs* and to do it in and instant. Second, it lets him bypass the editorial restrictions and pesky questions of the mainstream media, linking him directly to the idiot rabble that hangs on his every word. Unfortunately, Trump's missives aren't confined to his army of red hat-wearing zombies, especially since he'll soon be president and every off-the-cuff proclamation he makes can send the stock market into a spiral or alter the geopolitical landscape. He's not some dimwit tweeting -- well, not just some dimwit -- he's the incoming President of the United States.

In the past up to now, Trump has self-weaponized his Twitter account, using his immense popularity and influence on the platform to respond to controversies by lying outright or offering willful misinformation, to settle petty grudges and by attacking those he perceives as his enemies, and to publish threats [both veiled and blatant](#) in an attempt to silence dissension. More than that, a tweet from Trump has the ability to mobilize a seemingly bottomless reservoir of sycophantic, like-minded trolls -- reliably armed with "deplorable" in their screen names and Pepe-the-Frog in their avatars -- who quickly descend upon the target of their idol's ire like locusts. We've seen that manifest in serious threats against female journalists who've drawn Trump's wrath, people [like Megyn Kelly](#) and [NBC's Katy Tur](#), as well as general racist, misogynist and xenophobic frenzies triggered on the so-called alt-right by Trump's outbursts. [Trump retweets accounts from white supremacists](#), spreading bigoted lies and disinformation simply because it either bolsters his worldview or because the person behind the account stroked Trump's fragile ego.

Put simply, Donald Trump is a Twitter troll. The biggest and most powerful in the world. While he's not as obviously toxic as a Milo Yionnopoulos, who was banned when he specifically directed his minions from the depths of Reddit and 8chan to harass SNL's Leslie Jones, so much more is at stake every time Trump tweets. Again, he can, through his thin-skinned penchant for bullying, indirectly set followers of the President of the United States against his enemies. He can, through his lack of impulse control combined with his arrogant ignorance about national and world affairs, disrupt both. His Twitter feed is, in other words, very, very dangerous, particularly as of January 20th. Which is why now is the time for Twitter to do the right thing and shut it down. The service should suspend Donald Trump permanently.

Now, is it going to? Of course not. There's little doubt that Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey knows that if he were to suspend Trump the ground would likely open up underneath him, given that Trump is notoriously vindictive and would use the federal government to make life very difficult for him and his business. But he could if he truly wanted to, offering no other justification than the fact that Trump has likely crossed the line and violated Twitter's rules against harassment, or at the very least the facilitation of it on a grand scale. Trump is, for all intents and purposes, the leader of the alt-right. And that group's repugnant footprint on Twitter is massive and indisputable at this point. The alt-right and the various subgroups that make it up represent the epicenter of racist, sexist and generally troll-ish harassment of innocent Twitter denizens, making the site a noxious swamp of abuse.

Dorsey knows this, and he seems to be clamping down harder these days on problem users, but there's no doubt that he feels he has to balance concerns about harassment against the need to keep Twitter a forum where free speech is a consideration. The thing is, free speech isn't a consideration. Twitter is a private company. Anyone on the platform is there at the pleasure of the service. They're not owed a damn thing by Twitter because it's not a government agency and therefore isn't bound by the Constitution not to restrict speech. This is why, theoretically, Twitter could ban Trump tomorrow morning and cite nothing more than a responsibility to what's good for the country and the world as reason for the action. Would it stir up trouble for the stockholders and could it lead, again, to retaliation from the Trump administration? Sure. And, again, is Dorsey unlikely to take such a step? Absolutely. But it can be done, there are grounds for it, and it would be beneficial to every single one of us.

Imagine a Donald Trump forced to think before he spoke. Imagine Trump potentially having no choice but to go through standard channels when addressing the public, channels maintained by fact-checkers who could hold him accountable for his statements. It would be a game-changer in the best possible way. Trump isn't entitled to a Twitter account. He doesn't have a right to it. Always keep that in mind.

On Sunday, Jack Dorsey finally, mercifully -- although maybe only temporarily -- banned disgrace pharmaceutical executive and guy whose face cries out for a fist [Martin Shkreli from Twitter](#). In spite of being a raging tool on the site for a long time now, Shkreli finally crossed the line by harassing *Teen Vogue* reporter Lauren Duca, hitting on her privately, proclaiming his "crush" on her publicly, and even adjusting his profile to include a creepy collage of images of Luca and her husband with the husband's face replaced by Shkreli's smirking mug. Duca complained to Dorsey and, surprise, Shkreli got bounced. Shkreli's a pretty prominent troll and he's got exactly the kind of following that Milo and even Trump have. Now no one's reported on this yet, but if you don't think these people aren't descending on Luca's feed at this very minute -- insulting her, doxing her, threatening her and her family -- you really don't know how the underbelly of Twitter works these days.

And Trump is the top of that underbelly. He's the highest-ranking troll there is, the racist, misogynist, white nationalist movement's commander in chief, literally.
