

# The Week Silicon Valley Killed Free Speech



Drew Angerer/Getty Images

by [Allum Bokhari](#)

**To those who followed the trajectory of Silicon Valley over the past few years, their abandonment of free speech last week would not have come as a surprise. Indeed, social media platforms like Twitter, which previously styled itself as “the free speech wing of the free speech party,” abandoned it long ago.**

Even so, the decision of first GoDaddy and then Google and then Cloudflare to cut off support for Neo-Nazi website The Daily Stormer – effectively banning them from the internet – came as a shock to many. To those who believe that all content, no matter how deplorable, should be able to exist on the web, it heralds nothing less than the end of free speech in cyberspace.

It is not just the right and far-right who have seen the danger. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, the most prominent defenders of digital rights, also raised the alarm last week.

“Protecting free speech is not something we do because we agree with all of the speech that gets protected. We do it because we believe that no one—not the government and not private commercial enterprises—should decide who gets to speak and who doesn’t.”

“We strongly believe that what GoDaddy, Google, and Cloudflare did here was dangerous.”

To underline the gravity of what happened last week, it is important to remember that up until this point, the web has hosted every form of speech, no matter how vile. Sites dedicated to the Islamic State, to serial killers, and to pedophiles are still in operation at this very moment. Indeed, [Cloudflare’s CEO once stood up to defend his platform’s right to offer their services to ISIS-linked websites.](#)

This is because, as the EFF points out, up until now, the platforms that facilitated access to the web — GoDaddy and Google, which manage domains, and Cloudflare, which protects sites from distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, have remained content-neutral.

*Up until now.*

If you’re looking for one sure-fire confirmation that web freedom as we know it is about to disappear, [it’s that even establishment conservatives have started to take notice.](#) To anyone concerned with web freedom, that should be frightening. Establishment conservatives frequently fail to spot the left’s creeping overreach until they wake up in one morning in a gulag.

Leftists and their allies in Silicon Valley boardrooms are now brazenly open about their war on free speech. Instagram CEO Kevin Systrom – and the *Wired* reporter who interviewed him – [all but admitted their contempt for the idea in a feature last week,](#) which heaped praise on Systrom for attempting to “clean up the internet,” and described Twitter’s founding commitment to free speech as a “moment of naive idealism... the creation of young men who didn’t understand the depths to which sexism, and maybe even fascism, lurk within the human id.”

It wasn’t just Neo-Nazis who felt their presence on the web threatened last week, (although to anyone seriously concerned about free speech, that should be enough to cause alarm. [The ACLU knows this.](#)) It was also Milo Yiannopoulos, Sargon of Akkad, and other conservative commentators. Milo was kicked off MailChimp, the web’s leading email marketing platform, and later had a book-signing event cancelled on EventBrite. Sargon was thrown off Twitter without explanation. Other right-wingers were thrown off Instagram, and still others found their access to PayPal suspended. Milo has called it “the great shuttering.”

Most tellingly of all, Gab.ai, a content-neutral platform committed to free speech for everyone, [lost their access to Google play,](#) on the grounds of “hate speech.”

In other words, [morons](#) who believe this begins and ends at Neo-Nazis have already been proven wrong.

Free speech is not meant to protect uncontroversial people. Their speech does not need protecting. It was created to protect the most despised and hated groups in society — the people whose speech is most at risk of suppression. There can be no question then, that Silicon Valley killed free speech on the web this week. The question now is, how might it be resurrected?