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KILLING OFF THE SICKO VC OLIGARCHS OF SILICON VALLEY

Who are the criminal mobsters of Silicon Valley's democracy manipulation millionaires and billionaires? Who are the elitist tax evader, sex freak, money-laundering, Senator bribing, off-shore cash hiding, election rigging insiders who manipulate the system for their own insider trading schemes: **Reid Hoffman, Larry Page, Sergy Brin, Elon Musk, Dustin Moskovitz, Mark Zuckerberg, Eric Schmidt, Laurene Powell Jobs, Steve Spinner, Steve Westly, Vinod Khosla, Andy Bechtolsheim, Brian Goncher, Cheryl Sandberg, David Drummond, Andy Rubin, David Plouffe, Tim Draper, Jeffrey Epstein, Gilman Louie, Ira Ehrenpreis, Tim Cook, McKinsey Consulting, Deloitte, Goldman Sachs, Jerry Brown, Richard Blum, James Breyer, John Podesta, Joe Lonsdale, John Doerr, Keith Rabois, Marc Andreessen, George Soros, Mario Rosatti, Martin LaGod, Michael Moritz, Viktor Vekselberg, Larry Summers, Pierre Omidyar, Tom Steyer, Steve Jurvetson, Steve Rattner and their CARTEL! They have *"command and control and exclusive beneficiary positions in ongoing, coordinated, criminal and anti-trust activities involving government and stock market funds..."*. The sex crime victims of Cartel member Jeffrey Epstein reported him to the DOJ a decade ago, yet nothing was done. We reported this Cartel in 2008, STILL, nothing has been done! These people are Ponzi-Scheming State and Federal funds "stimulus" after "stimulus"! They use free government**

money, stock valuation pump-and-dump and black-lists to make certain that no competitor can ever operate against them in any market. How much of this will the public stand for?...

Silicon Valley, Clubhouse, and the cult of VC victimhood

By [Zoe Schiffer](#) and [Megan Farokhmanesh](#)

On July 1st, a group of venture capitalists and well-known tech elites logged on to the invite-only social platform Clubhouse to discuss a pressing issue in Silicon Valley: journalists canceling CEOs. “When it comes to our industry, specifically how the tech industry is covered, there’s a really, really toxic dynamic that exists right now,” said Nait Jones, a venture capitalist at Andreessen Horowitz. While some harsh tech coverage was warranted, he said, “there has been kind of an influx of takedowns.”

At another point in the discussion, multiple sources tell *The Verge* that Figs co-founder and co-CEO Trina Spear said she didn’t understand what gave the reporters the right to investigate private companies. Instead, she suggested the “markets” should decide.

Spear denied saying this in a statement given to *The Verge*. “This quote is inaccurate and is being falsely attributed to me. I did not make this statement nor do I agree with its sentiments.” Spear did not respond to follow-up questions.

"To many tech executives and investors, this was cancel culture going too far"

The Clubhouse discussion was sparked by a tweet from *New York Times* journalist Taylor Lorenz regarding the CEO of the luggage company Away. The executive, Steph Korey, had been railing against the media on Instagram. [Lorenz posted screenshots of the tirade](#), writing, "Steph Korey, the disgraced former CEO of Away luggage company, is ranting on IG stories about the media. Her posts are incoherent and it's disappointing to see a woman who ran a luggage brand perpetuate falsehoods like this abt an industry she clearly has 0 understanding of."

The post exploded on Twitter, prompting a wave of harassment from venture capitalists and other tech executives who felt Lorenz was being unfair. A "cancel Taylor Lorenz" Twitter account popped up, and a parody website resurfaced. "Every CEO, founder, investor, and engineer in tech sees the vitriolic tweets these employees of media corporations put out," [wrote](#) Balaji Srinivasan, an angel investor who previously worked at Andreessen Horowitz. "Then they turn around and feign neutrality by writing passive voice articles. We get it: you hate us. And you're competitors."

Investors had been defending Korey since December 2019, when *The Verge* published a series of investigative articles detailing employee complaints about the CEO's management style. The articles, which drew wide attention, were followed by a fresh wave of reports about working conditions at venture-backed startups like [Outdoor Voices](#), [Bird](#), and [The Wing](#).

"Overall, it seems like cancel culture has become this really easy thing to deflect to."

To many tech executives and investors, this was cancel culture going too far. "100% of companies could have a negative article

written about them, and without any fishing at all. All the reporter has to do is decide he wants to write a negative article," [tweeted venture capitalist Paul Graham](#) after the first Away report was published.

Away employees felt Korey's defenders were missing the point. "Overall, it seems like cancel culture has become this really easy thing to deflect to, instead of needing to say there's a solid issue here I need to pay attention to," says a current member of Away's leadership team. "The default has become 'this is a hit piece, this is a snarky journalist trying to get clicks.' I think there's a genuine group of people who haven't had the first hand experience that sources in these stories have had."

If the venture capitalists' rhetoric feels familiar, it's because the tactics aren't new. In 2014, under the banner of "ethics in games journalism," an [online mob](#) attacked outspoken women and progressive figures within the game industry for months. Eron Gjoni penned a [vengeful screed](#) about his ex, developer [Zoe Quinn](#), in August 2014, which Gamergate supporters used to create a narrative about the games media at large. In addition to doxxing and harassing Quinn, Gamergaters coordinated harassment against several other prominent women with vicious online attacks; figures like Brianna Wu fled their homes out of concern for personal safety. Gamergaters also [badgered advertisers](#) in an effort to silence voices they disagreed with.

Despite Gamergaters' best efforts to push a narrative about paid-for coverage and collusion in the industry, no such corruption ever came to light. In the time since, the Gamergate crowd has shown little interest in actual ethical concerns in games, such as exploitative labor practices and sexual

harassment and abuse perpetrated by powerful figures at the top.

This strategy has resurfaced elsewhere, marking [the emergence of a culture war](#) that has [shaped the internet](#) and [even American politics](#). In Silicon Valley, harassers have latched on to “ethics in journalism” to legitimize their attacks and turn the conversation away from the larger issue: a conflict between tech workers and executives.

Venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz — [which invested \\$10 million in Clubhouse](#) directly and bought up an additional \$2 million of previous investors’ shares — was early to tap the power of media to raise the profiles of its startups.

“Unlike established venture firms such as Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers and Sequoia, which let the press come to them, Andreessen Horowitz has gone on the offensive, pitching stories about its startups, leaking news to reporters, and planting itself right in the middle of the technology news churn,” [Bloomberg News wrote in 2014](#).

The firm’s co-founder, Marc Andreessen, “loves Twitter because ‘reporters are obsessed with it. It’s like a tube and I have loudspeakers installed in every reporting cubicle around the world,’” according to [a May 2015 New Yorker profile](#).

But Silicon Valley’s relationship with the media began to change in October 2015, when *The Wall Street Journal* [published the first](#) of a series of blockbuster stories that exposed high-flying blood-testing startup Theranos as a scam. [The news embarrassed](#) journalists who’d written glowing profiles of Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes and inspired a fresh generation of investigative

reporting on the tech industry. Andreessen defended Holmes throughout, blocking Twitter users who [questioned his remarks](#), though he hadn't invested in the startup.

The sources of *The Wall Street Journal's* reporting were current and former employees of Theranos. In the 2018 Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal, employees of that company also revealed that millions of users had their data harvested without consent, another turning point for how the media covered tech companies. In the past few years, [story after story has](#) been driven by employees and contractors at tech companies disillusioned by their working conditions and their products' effects on society.

""What they're trying to do is destabilize the ability to be critical about tech CEOs.""

This shift posed something of a problem for founder-centric VCs. "I think the Andreessen marching order, which is a great one, is to defend the founders at any cost," Upstream co-founder Alex Taub says. He adds that while it's good for founders, it gets complicated when those people are accused of abuse or fraud.

Similarly, unquestioningly backing the founder while dismissing worker concerns isn't good public relations, but refusing to stand by the founders could inhibit future investments. The answer, when it presented itself, was simple: [go after the media instead](#).

"There's sort of this larger project going on where they are trying to transmute accountability for CEOs, and the rising worker movements with values they don't agree [with], into what they are going to reframe as part of the 'cancel culture' problem, because that's the thing that has larger purchase, that there's

pushback on," one well-known tech CEO tells *The Verge*. "What they're trying to do is destabilize the ability to be critical about tech CEOs."

"I am convinced that most people in the tech world do not understand the role of a free media in a liberal society," [Can Duruk, a product manager at Very Good Security, wrote](#) in his newsletter, *The Margins*, in January. "The media is not there to be your friend. It's there to inform the public, and make you feel self-aware."

Andreessen Horowitz did not respond to a request for comment on this story.

The tension between tech journalism and venture capital was at the heart of the discussion that took place on Clubhouse on July 1st. In an hour-long audio clip obtained by *The Verge* and [first reported by Vice](#), some speakers painted CEOs as the victims and questioned why the industry needed journalists.

"I believe in standing up for people who do not have a voice, who cannot stand up for themselves," said Srinivasan when asked during the discussion about defending Steph Korey, the CEO of Away, who *New York Times* journalist Taylor Lorenz had tweeted about. On the recording, Felicia Horowitz, the founder of the Horowitz Family Foundation and wife of a16z founder Ben Horowitz, added: "You can't fucking hit somebody, attack them and just say, 'Hey, I have ovaries and therefore, you can't fight back.'"

""The New York Times company is not the free press.""

Srinivasan also pushed his belief that the industry needed to move away from professional journalists. “*The New York Times* company is not the free press. You are the free press. You the citizen,” he said. “As citizens it’s your responsibility and mine to hold every institution accountable.” Later, he added that the reason media companies won’t issue retractions is that “their business model is literally marketing themselves as the truth ... They are not the truth, mathematics is the truth.”

The next day, Srinivasan issued [a \\$1,000 bounty](#) (to be paid in bitcoin) for a retraction or correction to a February 13th *Recode* article about Silicon Valley’s early response to the coronavirus. The story, entitled “[‘No handshakes, please’: The tech industry is terrified of the coronavirus](#),” opens with an anecdote: “Andreessen Horowitz recently put up a sign on its door, cautioning eager startup founders and business partners who walk into its offices: ‘Due to the Coronavirus, no Handshakes please. Thank you.’”

The first sentence is supported by a photograph of the sign in question; the rest of the piece is about the tech industry’s early response to the virus, which was substantially more aggressive than the state and federal response at the time. (*Recode*, like *The Verge*, is owned by Vox Media.)

Asked about these bounties and whether they lead to harassment, Srinivasan replied: “Do you think attacking female founders for profit, till they get fired, constitutes harassment?” He then began tweeting about *The Verge*’s coverage of Away, saying our strategy was to “pretend cancel culture isn’t real” and then to “crash a company’s stock price, making everyone poorer,

while pretending to care about employees.” (Away is not a publicly traded company.)

””You’re making some boogeyman about journalists rather than talking about the real situation.””

The tenor of the Clubhouse discussion didn’t sit well with some of the listeners. “It felt fairly one-sided,” says a woman who was listening to the call and requested anonymity because she currently works in tech and does not want to face retaliation. “There were a couple people who’d worked in comms before and tried to even it out. But there wasn’t a lot of active dissent. And the moderators never asked for dissent to come forward. With a large audience you have to actively ask people.”

An app builder who was listening in agreed. “They’re all under the premise that running a company as CEO is very, very hard, sometimes stuff goes on. We should get a pass. You’re making some boogeyman about journalists rather than talking about the real situation. Or being held accountable.”

After the main discussion died down, a group of younger tech workers moved to another room in Clubhouse (a process called “rerooting”). There, they rehashed the debate — and why some had felt it was unproductive. “It was mostly women talking,” the app builder said. “It almost became a therapy session talking about how painful the first discussion was made.”

Clubhouse co-founder Paul Davison joined and asked the group for feedback on how the app could make discussions more productive or inclusive. The talk then shifted to a product feedback session, where people brought up the need for more moderation.

A spokesperson for Clubhouse declined to comment for this story.

AA preview of the tech industry's animosity toward the *Times* occurred on Twitter the week before the Lorenz kerfuffle erupted, when Scott Alexander — a pseudonym — deleted his blog, SlateStarCodex, which centered on rationalist thought. [In a final post](#), Alexander claimed *The New York Times* was going to “dox” him by revealing his real name in an article — an article he believed couldn't be written if the blog was taken down. He directed people to contact *Times* tech editor Pui-Wing Tam, who subsequently received thousands of emails and tweets, some of which were “toxic” in nature, a source familiar with *Times'* reporting says. Srinivasan named the reporter on Twitter, who was subsequently harassed as well.

“Alexander, whose role has been to help explain Silicon Valley to itself, was taken up as a mascot and a martyr in a struggle against the Times, which, in the tweets of Srinivasan, Graham, and others, was enlisted as a proxy for all of the gatekeepers—the arbiters of what it is and is not O.K. to say, and who is allowed, by virtue of their identity, to say it,” wrote Gideon Lewis-Kraus [in an article about the campaign in *The New Yorker*](#).

Ultimately, these efforts ran out of steam, as nothing about Alexander or SlateStarCodex has yet been published by *The New York Times*. The source familiar with the *Times'* reporting says “not a word” of the SlateStarCodex story had been written when Alexander deleted his blog. But the tenor of the discussion had been set.

At the heart of the tech backlash to the media is a fear of getting “canceled” — a nebulous term that’s often used to refer to those who get called out online and may subsequently lose power in real life as a result. For investors and CEOs, the idea that one damning article can throw a whole company into turmoil is infuriating: it often feels like only part of the story is being told — and that part is often unflattering.

But hidden in the discussion is the fact that workers are also at risk of getting “canceled” — and they often have much more to lose. “We don’t have a lot of money or the name recognition that the founders and venture capitalists do,” says a former Away employee. They added that no CEO, male or female, should be able to treat workers poorly — a reference to the argument that male leaders aren’t held to the same standards. “It’s white feminism,” the employee adds. “[The CEO] got to where they were by playing the game and now they’re getting called out for mistreatment. So yes, for years men have been doing the same things. But what makes it okay for men to do this? That was the ‘girl boss’ promise. That women would do it better. But they didn’t.”

"Now that the tech industry has grown to be a major cultural force, workers are wondering why they aren’t treated better"

“Cancel culture” aside, it seems like there *has* been a major cultural change in both the tech industry and tech reporting. Ten years ago, tech employees were excited to do something that might change the world for the better. Now that the tech industry has grown to be a major cultural force, workers are wondering why they aren’t treated better. They want to know why their platforms require armies of moderators [who](#)

[frequently_get PTSD](#). Or why their cloud platforms are [being used by the military](#). Or why their [facial recognition systems appear to be openly racist](#).

As a result, tech reporting has focused less on founders and CEOs and more on the hundreds of thousands of workers who power their businesses. For founders and CEOs, that means public calls for their accountability. Some of those are bound to appear on major media outlets.

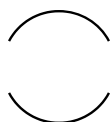
As Marc Andreessen pointed out in that 2015 *New Yorker* profile, the future changes in ways one can't necessarily predict. It is no longer 1999; a founder-focused culture has been the norm in Silicon Valley for at least a decade. This particular reckoning may erode media credibility among some members of the tech community. It's also possible that founders and CEOs learn to listen to their employees *before* they go to the press. After all, workers wouldn't have to leak their stories to the media if companies responded to their concerns.

Who knows? It might even be good business.

With reporting by Nilay Patel.

Inside Big Tech's Years-Long Manipulation of American Op- Ed Pages

Why you should probably read opinion pieces supporting the tech giants with skepticism



 [Alex Kantrowitz](#)

[Alex Kantrowitz](#)

Photo illustration. Image: scanrail/Getty Images

For years, the tech giants and organizations they fund have pushed op-eds from small-business owners, think tanks, and academics into US newspapers without disclosing their involvement.

The op-eds, which advance the tech giants' policy positions, make it seem like they have more public support than they actually do — and that's exactly the point. Their aim is to persuade lawmakers and regulators that the people they purportedly hurt prefer the status quo. And perhaps some do. But when no one knows you're behind an article, it's easier to press the case.

"It's common practice," one former Google communications professional told Big Technology. "The way democracy is supposed to work is you pay less heed to a corporation. But a

local small business that has ten employees? That goes much further.”

In the policy world, planting op-eds from “independent” third parties is so common it has a name: “Grasstops,” a word derived from grassroots. Grasstops advocacy is not limited to the tech giants, but these companies and their allies are especially adept at using the practice to fight off regulation. As antitrust inquiries against them build in the U.S., it’s worth reading op-eds supporting their positions with healthy skepticism.

“It was always baffling to me that this was so natural,” the ex-Googler said. “By 2012, I couldn’t open an op-ed page without being like — Okay, who’s actually behind that?”

A second tech giant communications pro described the process: “They’re always written by the company, edited by whomever they’re affixing the name to, and sent back and forth,” the person said. “Eventually they get it to where they want, and the company places the article.”

The ex-Googler said they provided substantial guidance on a 2015 *Wall Street Journal* article headlined “[Some Things Should Not Be ‘Forgotten,’](#)” which advocated against the “right to be forgotten,” a policy that allows people to force search engines to remove certain personal links. “It was a successful op-ed,” the ex-Googler said. The *Journal* article does not mention Google’s involvement. Its author, Jason Wright, declined to comment.

More recently, a Phoenix-based boot maker named David Espinoza blasted Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich for his antitrust investigation into Google via the *Arizona Capitol Times*. Espinoza’s opinion piece [contains his byline](#), but the Connected

Commerce Council (3C) — a small business trade organization that's accepted funding from Google, Amazon, and Facebook — wrote it and placed it. The *Washington Post* [first reported](#) the connection. The *Arizona Capitol Times* declined an interview request.

"When they approached me, I had no idea what they were talking about or why they wanted to see me," Espinoza told Big Technology. "I don't think they did anything wrong, but maybe it was a little bit deceptive."

Jake Ward, president of 3C, told Big Technology his organization would no longer submit op-eds without disclosing its members' association with the group. "It was an oversight that needed to be fixed," Ward said. "It's been fixed."

The Kansas City Star Mystery

Sometimes, multiple opaque layers can obscure the entities backing an op-ed. An extremely strange example might be a *Kansas City Star* op-ed that ran earlier this month (buckle up for this one). Kimberly Vincent, a local vegan bakery owner, [wrote a July 5 op-ed](#) in the *KC Star* supporting CDA Section 230. This law gives internet services like Facebook and Google broad immunity for what's posted on their sites. Conservative politicians, in an attempt to intimidate these platforms into keeping their hands off right-wing content, have threatened to amend it.

Vincent, in her op-ed, pushed back on these Republican lawmakers. "For some elected officials — like our own Sen. Josh Hawley, who has introduced legislation to amend Section 230 — these internet laws are about politics," she said. "But for me, this is about my business."

Vincent told Big Technology she did not work with an outside group on the op-ed. 3C's Jake Ward said that a consultancy his organization sometimes works with, Alaris Strategies, did help Vincent on the op-ed, though not in its work for 3C. After further inquiry from Big Technology, Alaris partner Chris Grimm called to talk. "The Kansas City op-ed you asked about, we did not pitch for 3C, we pitched for another client," he said.

Asked to name the client, Grimm declined. "We don't disclose our clients," he said.

Vincent did not respond to further inquiries. The *Kansas City Star* did not respond to multiple emails. Senator Hawley's office did not respond. Facebook, Google, and Twitter all said they do not work with Alaris. The Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA), a trade group that lists Google, Facebook, and Amazon among its members, did not respond to a request for comment.

So, who knows who's behind that *KC Star* article. If anyone is at all. And that's the crux of the problem. Unlike traditional lobbying, companies working to wield influence on politicians through op-eds are not required to disclose they're involved, ensuring the practice will continue.

"There's no existing regulation," another person who's worked on these campaigns inside the tech giants said. "It's entirely outside of lobbying disclosures. So if they disclosed it, it would seem like excessive disclosure. It's not even in the realm of what's being required."

Until lawmakers require disclosure, it will fall on news publishers to press for it themselves, and the tech giants and their associated industry groups may also want to act with integrity here too.

"News publishers should be disciplined in asking where financial backing, or communications backing came from, and disclosing that," David Chavern, the head of the News Media Alliance, an industry group that is itself [seeking an antitrust exemption](#) so its members can negotiate together against the tech giants, told Big Technology. "It doesn't mean you don't run it. it means you disclose to the public exactly what's going on."

For longtime political operatives, this story may seem like a rundown of a common practice. But for the general public, there's reason to believe it's surprising. Even the small business owners involved, like Espinoza, can be confused by how it works. So it's time to stop looking at this as simply "part of the business" and to take some real steps to end the deception.

Twitter's Inside Threat

Once Twitter admitted its employees helped facilitate yesterday's A-List user hack, it felt like a step into a recurring nightmare. The FBI previously accused Twitter employees of [accessing Saudi dissidents' private data](#) and passing it along to people connected with the Saudi Royal Family. Now, Twitter's employees were involved again.

For Twitter, another inside job is not surprising. But this episode makes you wonder how much Twitter actually locked down its internal systems after the Saudi incident. Whatever the answer, it was not enough.

Some employees must always have access to a company's innermost areas, but there's no excuse for not building safeguards to detect this abuse. Imagine what else could've happened in a slightly darker scenario. Now, all manner of questions about Twitter's security practices will come to the fore: Can you trust Twitter to protect your messages? (I'm glad I've moved mostly to Signal.) Also, will Twitter's industry-leading commitment to remote work last?

It appears this was simply a case of hackers playing a joke and walking away with some cash. Yet we're all crossing our fingers and hoping there's nothing more nefarious at play. If Twitter's direct message database leaked, for instance, it would be an instant global scandal. This episode may simply be a case of a few people getting bored and deciding on some reckless fun. Anything more, and we could be looking at one of the most serious stories of 2020.

See you next Thursday.

Links:

[Are the Tech Giants really getting bigger?](#) *(Bradley Tusk podcast)*

[Two entrepreneurs and a journalist walk into a podcast](#) *(Talk Therapy podcast)*

['It's like telling a reporter he can't have a Twitter account': Reporters are starting their own newsletters outside of their employer](#) *(Digiday)*

[Always Day One](#) *(My book)*
