



Notes on a Friday Night

Description

Sitting in a hotel bar in San Francisco, going through what's become a nightly "remembering to eat" ritual. As readers here know, this has been a crazy month, during which time I lost track of a lot of things. I've been an absentee father during the holidays, which is contemptible, and also remiss when it comes to responsibilities to subscribers to this site, omitting to even take time to explain basic things, which I'll try to do now.

Once again today we did not publish the written *America This Week*, which frankly will have to stay on hold for at least a little while longer. Also once again, I've abused the patience of podcast partner Walter Kirn, who's been a great friend during this time and deserves better. We will do another makeup episode early next week, and I'll announce the details as soon as I can.

The reason for all this of course is the Twitter Files story. This last week saw the FBI describe Lee Fang, Michael Shellenberger and me as "conspiracy theorists" whose "sole aim" is to discredit the agency. That statement will look ironic soon, as we spent much of this week learning about other agencies and organizations that can now also be discredited thanks to these files. Selfishly I may release some of that information in the morning, to be done with it so I can be fully-present Dad on the actual holiday.

A group of us spent the last weeks reading thousands of documents. For me a lot of that time was spent learning how Twitter functioned, specifically its relationships with government. How weird is modern-day America? Not long ago, CIA veterans tell me, the information above the "tearline" of a U.S. government intelligence cable would include the station of origin and any other CIA offices copied on the report.

I spent much of today looking at exactly similar documents, seemingly written by the same people, except the "offices" copied at the top of their reports weren't other agency stations, but Twitter's Silicon Valley colleagues: Apple, Facebook, Microsoft, LinkedIn, even Wikipedia. It turns out these are the new principal intelligence outposts of the American empire. A subplot is these companies seem not to have had much choice in being made key parts of a global surveillance and information control apparatus, although evidence suggests their Quislingian executives were mostly all thrilled to be

absorbed. Details on those “Other Government Agencies” soon, probably tomorrow.

One happy-ish thought at month’s end:

Sometime in the last decade, many people — I was one — began to feel robbed of their sense of normalcy by something we couldn’t define. Increasingly glued to our phones, we saw that the version of the world that was spat out at us from them seemed distorted. The public’s reactions to various news events seemed off-kilter, being either way too intense, not intense enough, or simply unbelievable. You’d read that seemingly everyone in the world was in agreement that a certain thing was true, except it seemed ridiculous to you, which put you in an awkward place with friends, family, others. Should you say something? Are you the crazy one?

I can’t have been the only person to have struggled psychologically during this time. This is why these Twitter files have been such a balm. This is the reality they stole from us! It’s repulsive, horrifying, and dystopian, a gruesome history of a world run by anti-people, but I’ll take it any day over the vile and insulting facsimile of truth they’ve been selling. Personally, once I saw that these lurid files could be used as a road map back to something like reality — I wasn’t sure until this week — I relaxed for the first time in probably seven or eight years.

Something tells me the coming year is going to be a better one. Happy Holidays, everyone. Enjoy your loved ones, ignore the rest, and see you all again soon.

by Matt Taibbi

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