



Written by [James Murphy](#) on March 9, 2023

“Digital McCarthyism”: Taibbi/Shellenberger Testify Before Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government

Sparks flew during a hearing of the House of Representatives’ Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government on Thursday. Liberal journalist Matt Taibbi, formerly of *Rolling Stone* magazine, noted in a fiery opening statement that the making of lists by state actors and online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook was akin to “digital McCarthyism.”

“[McCarthyism](#),” of course, is leftist shorthand for the political practice of publicizing accusations of disloyalty or subversion with insufficient regard to evidence. However, readers of [The New American](#) are well aware that the claims of Senator Joseph McCarthy, a Wisconsin Republican, were backed by plenty of evidence concerning the communists who attempted to infiltrate the American government in the 1950s.

But while the real McCarthy was not even close to the label ascribed to him by Democrats and many Republicans, Taibbi’s point that big tech and big government were widely committing censorship against competing voices was made clear.

“We learned Twitter, Facebook, Google, and other companies developed a formal system for taking in moderation ‘requests’ from every corner of government: the FBI, DHS, HHS, DOD, the Global Engagement Center at State, even the CIA. For every government agency scanning Twitter, there were perhaps 20 quasi-private entities doing the same, including Stanford’s Election Integrity Project, Newsguard, the Global Disinformation Index, and others, many taxpayer-funded,” Taibbi said in his opening [statement](#).

“A focus of this fast-growing network is making lists of people whose opinions, beliefs, associations, or sympathies are deemed ‘misinformation,’ ‘disinformation,’ or ‘malinformation.’ The latter term is just a euphemism for ‘true but inconvenient,’” Taibbi added. “Undeniably, the making of such lists is a form of digital McCarthyism.”

Taibbi and fellow journalist Michael Shellenberger, who ran for governor in California as a Democrat in 2018, took turns being grilled by the new subcommittee. Both of them, along with Bari Weiss, Lee Fang, David Zweig, and Alex Berenson, were the primary reporters releasing the so-called Twitter files beginning in October of 2022.



AP Images
Michael Shellenberger



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Democrats went quickly into attack mode against the two journalists. Ranking member of the committee Stacey Plaskett (D-V.I.) started [throwing](#) rhetorical bombs even prior to questioning the witnesses.

“Mr. Chairman, I’m not exaggerating when I say that you have called before you two witnesses who pose a direct threat to people who oppose them,” Plaskett said to committee chairman Jim Jordan (R-Ohio). “This is unacceptable. I’m ready for it — I don’t know if a lot of other people are.”

“This a new Republican playbook apparently. Risk American safety and security to score political points,” Plaskett angrily added.

Jordan blasted Plaskett’s rant. “I don’t think they’re here to help us politically. I believe they’re here to tell us the truth,” Jordan blurted. “You’re saying they’re here to help [Republicans], they’re here to tell their story. And, frankly, I think they’re brave individuals for being willing to come after they’ve been named in a letter from the Biden FTC.

Committee fireworks aside, Taibbi, in particular, seemed to have a handle on exactly what was going on in 2020 vis-à-vis the government and Big Tech collusion to silence dissenting opinions.

“You can’t have a state-sponsored system targeting ‘disinformation’ without striking at the essence of the right to free speech,” Taibbi said. “The two ideas are in direct conflict.”

Texas Democrat Slyvia Garcia [badgered](#) Taibbi about revealing his source but Taibbi wouldn’t budge. Garcia asked Taibbi when it was that Elon Musk first contacted him regarding the so-called Twitter files.

“I can’t give it to you, unfortunately, because this is a question of sourcing, and I’m a journalist. I don’t reveal my sources,” Taibbi said.

It is widely believed that new Twitter owner Elon Musk released the files to select journalists, including Taibbi. Musk has never confirmed this, although he has actively shared the release of the stories as they have come out.

Democrats, it seems, are very upset that their barely-hidden censorship scheme with Big Tech is receiving the disinfectant of daylight. Taibbi, who in his statement described himself as “someone who grew up a traditional ACLU liberal,” laid out the constitutional reason for not allowing such Big Tech censorship.

“The First Amendment, and an American population accustomed to the right to speak, is the best defense left against the Censorship-Industrial Complex,” Taibbi said. “If the latter can knock over our first and most important constitutional guarantee, these groups will have no serious opponent left anywhere.”

“If there’s anything the Twitter Files show, it’s that we’re in danger of losing this most precious right, without which all other democratic rights are impossible,” he concluded.



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