

Inside the Delightful Suicide of Gawker

- Sister Scum: Gizmodo, targeted with twice as much punishment
- Nick Denton “*doesn’t deserve to exist*” say victims of Gawker/Gizmodo global attacks
- Every attack blogger for Gawker/Gizmodo under public surveillance “for life..”



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Good riddance.

In the history of giving a hostage to fortune, John Cook, a former editor of the former online poison party known as Gawker, merits a special place. He has this to say about his professional aims: “I wanted to write true things about bad people . . . being bad or obnoxious or cruel or unkind.” When enemies had been so identified, he says, “We could give ’em ‘what fer.’”

Unkind! Gawker saying its mission is to make war with the unkind is like the Queen of England decrying nepotism. Gawker’s very escutcheon was cruelty, obnoxiousness, unkindness. It published

stories too nasty and sleazy for tabloids, and wrote them up with sophomoric zeal for vulgarity and profanity. I happily worked at tabloids for many years, but I felt ashamed of myself every time I read Gawker. I can hardly imagine what it must have been like actually to work at such a flatulence farm, a scum ranch, an academy of pus.

Still, Gawker had every right to publish. Until it didn't. Everything it did was protected by the First Amendment. Almost. The flame merchants set fire to themselves when Gawker published, without the permission of either participant, a surreptitiously recorded sex tape that depicted the wrestler Hulk Hogan (real name: Terry Bollea) and the wife of his friend *in flagrante*. With his legal team secretly funded by the Silicon Valley entrepreneur and billionaire Peter Thiel — whom Gawker had “outed” in 2007, and who rightly considered killing Gawker to be a public service or perhaps an act of hygiene — Hogan sued Gawker and its founder Nick Denton into bankruptcy. Now Gawker is no more, having lived its surly life like a candle in the wind, or rather like a blowtorch that was incinerated by a much larger blowtorch.

There is much boo-hooing about all this in a new Netflix documentary on the matter, *Nobody Speak: Trials of the Free Press*, which strings together news footage and fresh interviews with talking heads, almost all of them arguing on the side of Gawker. One wonders about the logistics of filming this kind of documentary: Surely an on-site shower must be provided so that interviewees may go immediately into delousing mode after defending the rankest little squad of churls in this media century? Almost in passing we learn, from a lawyer for Hogan, that after the tape was posted, he requested merely that it be taken down in the name of decency, promising to walk away from the matter with no further ill will. Citing decency to Gawker turned out to be about as useful as requesting a dog stop sniffing the hindquarters of its colleagues.

Many of the interviewees huff about the First Amendment, and yet not one of them explains how “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press” applies to publishing a sex tape made without permission. A Florida jury was asked to consider the following questions: Was posting the video offensive to a reasonable person? Was it devoid of news value? Did Gawker founder Nick Denton participate in posting the video? The answers to the first and third questions are hardly debatable. As for news value: If Hogan's sex tape is fair game, whose isn't? Given that women are the usual targets of this sort of thing, it's surreal to hear so many members of the supposed Party of Women (™) say that there is a legitimate public interest in viewing any famous person's bedroom activities. Try to imagine liberals making the case that *Breitbart* has the First Amendment right to publish a covertly recorded sex tape involving, say, Tina Fey or Rachel Maddow simply because some sleaze merchant shopped it to them.

Asked in a deposition about what celebrity sex tapes he wouldn't publish, one Albert J. Daulerio, another former Gawker editor and the author of a snarky blog post accompanying the Hulkster's sex tape on the site, is seen saying, “If they were a child.” Under what age? “Four,” he says, and the jury that heard this could no longer entertain any doubts about the sort of people with whom it was dealing. With that single word of smug facetiousness, the company's doom was sealed. Live by the snark, die by the snark.

Daulerio, interviewed later for the film, adds that, “Clearly I’m kidding. Who would actually think that? And I was just reacting to a person that was sitting across from me who was doing everything possible to take away something that I loved. Which was Gawker. And harm them. And, you know, I reacted.” Well, I suppose Jeffrey Dahmer enjoyed his work too. What’s notable in the exchange is not that Daulerio made a tasteless joke but that, given the opportunity to prove he had some standards, he pointedly declined.

The late infusion of Thiel into the story made it irresistible. Gawker loathed Thiel even more than it hated Hogan. It learned to its chagrin that the new enemy whose privacy it had invaded was destroying it with the aid of an old enemy whose privacy it had also invaded, a man who in the bargain was a proponent of libertarian ideals that made the Gawker leftists furious. Gawker got a merciless tag-team karma-slapping.

Try to follow Denton’s logic about why he felt that outing Thiel was a kind of righteous duty: “The common perception among straight people is that one’s personal life is a personal prerogative. Except that pretty much every single married straight executive with kids will talk about their wife and will talk about their kids and will be asked about their wife and will be asked about their kids. That’s seen as being biographical detail. I’m a gay guy and to my mind it is simply insulting for different standards to be applied to gay people than are applied to straight people. I don’t see any reason why we should treat it as something shameful to be kept secret so I’ll push back very, very strongly against that.” In other words, any gay person who chooses to be quiet about it runs afoul of Denton’s zeal for proselytizing. All gay people must adhere to Dentonian dogma on this, or be punished. Who made him the pope of the gays?

The fulminating in the movie about the perniciousness of Thiel’s role is a bit hard to credit given that liberals generally adore the idea of deep-pocketed entities’ funding the shallow-pocketed ones who have been wronged by the powerful. Substitute “Sierra Club” for “Peter Thiel” and ask liberals if they remain suspicious of third-party lawsuits.

As for the First Amendment, it doesn’t extend into Hulk Hogan’s bedroom unless his actions there are newsworthy. Just because someone sends you a sex tape doesn’t give you the right to publish it. “Chilling effect”? No, merely the establishment of a very bright, clear line: Don’t publish people’s sex videos without permission.

Gawker was just about the only press outlet that would consider doing such a thing in the first place. Now it’s gone, and freedom of the press carries on.

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