# Content Moderation Background/History

### Content Moderation is Hard

*The theme of the week: all platforms moderate, and moderation happens for conflicting, moving goals and ideals. Why is content moderation important, and why do we need an entire course to understand it?*

Introduce the giants of the field: Tarleton Gillespie, Robyn Caplan, [Danielle Citron](https://www.daniellecitron.com/), Sarah Roberts, Sarah Jeong

Resources: [Social Media Collective Content Moderation Reading List](https://socialmediacollective.org/reading-lists/content-moderation-reading-list/)

**Reading for Class:**

Tarleton Gillespie, Custodians of the Internet Chapter 1: All Platforms Moderate

Roberts, S. T. (2017). Content moderation. In Encyclopedia of Big Data. UCLA. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7371c1hf>

**In Class:**

The class is now a Content Quality Safety Comfort Assurance and Community Guidance Specialist Team at the newest monopolistic platform, Bookface. You just realized, as your daily user count passed 2 billion individuals, that you should probably attempt some form of transparency with your users about how content is governed. Write a content moderation policy among yourselves.

### Political Theories about Importance of Speech

*We all enter into the conversation around what should and shouldn’t be said online with assumptions and existing biases. Let’s explore those assumptions and deconstruct what the importance of speech really means. Is free speech a tool or an end goal? Both?*

Emerson, T. I. (1963). Toward a General Theory of the First Amendment. The Yale Law Journal, 72(5), 877. <https://doi.org/10.2307/794655>

Cacophony v. Order

Waldron, J. (2019, August 21). A Raucous First Amendment. Retrieved from Knight First Amendment Institute website: <https://knightcolumbia.org/content/a-raucous-first-amendment-1>

[Mary Anne Franks on the “Free Speech Black Hole”](https://knightcolumbia.org/content/the-free-speech-black-hole-can-the-internet-escape-the-gravitational-pull-of-the-first-amendment)

### History of Internet + Moderation

*Content moderation is not new. While the field of content moderation is rightfully under scrutiny lately because of the ill effects that digital networks have wrought upon society, it’s worth questioning the premise. Is the issue a balance of moderation goals and practices, or something deeper and harder to grasp than a policy decision?*

Driscoll, K. (2019). ["Thou Shalt Love Thy BBS": Distributed Experimentation in Community Moderation](https://www.chronos-verlag.ch/node/27097). In Computer Network Histories: Hidden Streams From the Internet Past, edited by Paolo Bory, Gianluigi Negro, and Gabriele Balbi, 15-34. Histoire et Informatique / Geschichte Und Informatik. Zürich, Switzerland: Chronos Verlag, 2019. ([PDF](http://blog.ahc-ch.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/GundI-Vol21-1-Driscoll.pdf))

[AOL Community Leaders Program](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AOL_Community_Leader_Program)

**Assignment to be completed before class:** find and profile one example of content moderation on a digital network / website that existed before 2000 (that isn’t AOL or BBSs in general). How long did the site/network last? Is it still around? What style of moderation occurred on the network? Starting points of reference:

Campbell-Kelly, Martin. Computer : a History of the Information Machine . 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014.

Rankin, Joy Lisi. A People’s History of Computing in the United States . Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, n.d.

<https://mediaarchaeologylab.com/>

### Creation Myths of the Internet

(Barlow + Cyberfeminism + why even when claims of “no gods no kings no borders on the internet” were first made they were false) →

# Current Issues in Content Moderation

### Platforms: Strategies of Moderation + Governance

Robyn Caplan. (2018). “[Content or Context Moderation: Artisanal, Community-Reliant, and Industrial Approaches.”](https://datasociety.net/output/content-or-context-moderation/) Data & Society Research Institute. Data & Society: New York, NY.

Read over several platforms normative guidelines:

[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/)

[Twitter](https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-rules)

In class activity / assignment: create a matrix of social media sites and how they moderate. How do we semantically organize and understand the field of platform governance?

### Pathetic Dot Theory + Section 230 (Law)

Undoubtedly, modern platforms like Facebook and Twitter have a massive impact on the speech that can occur in digital spaces. What factors impact the decisions and philosophies that create content policies at these giant companies? This week, we’ll start discussing different regulatory forces that push to shape digital speech on platforms, starting with law:

Lessig, L. (2006). Code: Version 2.0 (2. ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books

[[Section 230](https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/47/230)]

[“The Fight Over Section 230—and the Internet as We Know It” Matt Laslo - Wired](https://www.wired.com/story/fight-over-section-230-internet-as-we-know-it/)

Further Reading:

Kosseff, Jeff. The Twenty-Six Words That Created the Internet . Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2019.

### The New Governors of Speech (Norms)

*The legal boundaries of liability provide a lot of guidance to what platforms might allow, but another key element is the norms not online of the environments in which the content exists, but of those who craft the content moderation plans.*

Read introduction and sections I - III:

Klonick, Kate, The New Governors: The People, Rules, and Processes Governing Online Speech (March 20, 2017). 131 Harv. L. Rev. 1598, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2937985>

[Most Americans Think Social Media Sites Censor Political Viewpoints - Pew Research](https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/08/19/most-americans-think-social-media-sites-censor-political-viewpoints/)

[The myth of social media anti-conservative bias refuses to die](https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/platform-bias.php)

### Surveillance Capitalism + More (Markets)

[Shoshana Zuboff on surveillance capitalism | VPRO Documentary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIXhnWUmMvw)

[Cory Doctorow: How to Destroy Surveillance Capitalism https://onezero.medium.com/how-to-destroy-surveillance-capitalism-8135e6744d59](https://onezero.medium.com/how-to-destroy-surveillance-capitalism-8135e6744d59)

### Content Moderation as a Competition Issue

*Current content moderation discourse is dominated by the scale of monopolistic platforms on which most digital speech is moderated. What tools are available to deal with the issue of scale? Is antitrust a good solution for content moderation issues? What might some benefits of bigness be for issues of content moderation?*

[THE TECH GIANTS, MONOPOLY POWER, AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxPqQ3xrDZQ&feature=youtu.be)

[Panel 2: New (and old) approaches to shaping the online information environment](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxPqQ3xrDZQ&feature=youtu.be)

Slaiman, C. Decoding Antitrust Law: A Primer for Advocates, Public Knowledge, Antitrust

Primer, May 2019.

Brandom, R. (2018, September 5). How to break up Facebook, Google, and other tech giants.

The Verge. Retrieved from https://www.theverge.com/2018/9/5/17805162/monopoly-

Antitrust-regulation-google-amazon-uber-facebook

Tarleton Gillespie, Custodians of the Internet Chapter 4: Three Imperfect Solutions to the Problem of Scale

### Plausible “Solutions” to Content Moderation

-> Forced Interoperability /

<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2019/07/interoperability-fix-internet-not-tech-companies>

-> Platforms as a Public Utility /

<https://www.wired.com/story/calling-facebook-a-utility-would-only-make-things-worse/>

-> Content Cartels /

The Rise of Content Cartels, Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, Symposium on “Monopoly Power and Public Discourse” (2020) https://knightcolumbia.org/content/the-rise-of-content-cartels

### Human Labor + Content Moderation

*Ah, yet another instance in which the matter of scale comes crashing into the face of content moderation. The big, big platforms need a LOT of power to make sure their content chutes are clean and free of icky stuff like violence and … hate speech? Maybe? Content mod systems use algorithmic filtering for a large portion of this content, but that is an imperfect method when a platform operates globally and needs shifting levels of cultural contextual nuance in different markets. Enter: the human labor of content moderation. It’s not pretty.*

Tarleton Gillespie, Custodians of the Internet Chapter 5: The Human Labor of Moderation

[The Trauma Floor - The secret lives of Facebook moderators in America - Casey Newton @TheVerge](https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/25/18229714/cognizant-facebook-content-moderator-interviews-trauma-working-conditions-arizona)

<https://cogsandspanners.itch.io/sentry> - This is a game that simulates the working conditions of content moderators that work as contracted moderators for giant platforms. Note that it contains blurred depictions of plausibly disturbing content.

### Content Moderation in times of Crisis