



DELIVERING HATE:

How Amazon's Platforms Are Used

to Spread White Supremacy,

Anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia

and How Amazon Can Stop It

JULY 2018



About the Authors



PARTNERSHIP
for
Working Families

The Partnership for Working Families is a national network of 19 affiliate organizations driving a progressive agenda to harness the power of cities for change in our regions, and leverage that up to the state and national level. Our powerful coalitions of community groups, labor unions, faith networks and environmental organizations are building governing tables with a grassroots base of power to advance a vision of just, sustainable, equitable and democratic communities.



The **Action Center on Race & the Economy (ACRE)** is a campaign hub for organizations working at the intersection of racial justice and Wall Street accountability. We provide research and communications infrastructure and strategic support for organizations working on campaigns to win structural change by directly taking on the financial elite that are responsible for pillaging communities of color, devastating working class communities, and harming our environment. The Action Center on Race & the Economy (ACRE) is a campaign hub for organizations working at the intersection of racial justice and Wall Street accountability. We provide research and communications infrastructure and strategic support for organizations working on campaigns to win structural change by directly taking on the financial elite that are responsible for pillaging communities of color, devastating working class communities, and harming our environment.

Executive Summary

Amazon has been called the “everything store,” but today it is much more than just a store, with publishing, streaming, and web services businesses. Its reach and influence are unparalleled: Most U.S. online shopping trips begin at Amazon,⁴ Amazon dominates the U.S. e-book business,⁵ and the company’s web services division has over 60 percent of the cloud computing services market.⁶ All this adds up for Amazon and its owners. The company posted record profits of \$1.9 billion in the last three quarters of 2017,⁷ and CEO Jeff Bezos’s wealth soared to \$140 billion in 2018, largely because of the value of Amazon stock.⁸

A close examination of Amazon’s various platforms and services reveals that for growing racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic movements, the breadth of Amazon’s business combined with its weak and inadequately enforced policies provides a number of channels through which hate groups can generate revenue, propagate their ideas, and grow their movements. We looked at several areas of Amazon’s business, including its online shops, digital music platform, Kindle and CreateSpace publishing platforms, and web services business.

Our key findings:

- ▶ Amazon enables the celebration of ideologies that promote hate and violence by allowing the sale of hate symbols and imagery on its site, including Confederate and anti-Black imagery, Nazi and fascist imagery, and the newly adopted imagery of the modern white nationalist movement. Additionally, a number of these products are targeted at children.
- ▶ As a publisher of media in e-book, print book, and streaming formats, Amazon facilitates the spread of hate ideologies, including white supremacy, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and homophobia. Amazon provides a platform for openly racist writers, musicians, and activists, including some who advocate for violence against Black people, Muslims, Jewish people, and LGBTQ people.
- ▶ These uses of Amazon’s platforms are made possible by what appear to be inadequate and poorly enforced policies. Amazon has a policy against “products that promote or glorify hatred, violence, racial, sexual or religious intolerance or promote organizations with such views”⁹ and reserves its right to remove any listing it deems inappropriate.¹⁰ Its Kindle Direct Publishing and CreateSpace businesses reserve the right to reject “offensive” content,¹¹ while its web services division (AWS) forbids users from using AWS “to transmit, store, display, distribute or otherwise make available” offensive content.¹² Either Amazon does not find the materials outlined in this report offensive or otherwise contrary to

⁴ Jason Del Rey, “55 Percent of Online Shoppers Start Their Product Searches on Amazon,” *Recode*, September 27, 2016, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.recode.net/2016/9/27/13078526/amazon-online-shopping-product-search-engine>.

⁵ Nick Wingfield, “Amazon’s Profit Swells to \$1.6 Billion, Lifted by Its Cloud Business,” *New York Times*, April 26, 2018, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/technology/amazon-prime-profit.html>.

⁶ Jordan Novet, “Amazon Lost Cloud Market Share to Microsoft in the Fourth Quarter: Keybank,” *CNBC*, January 12, 2018, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/12/amazon-lost-cloud-market-share-to-microsoft-in-the-fourth-quarter-keybank.html>.

⁷ Jason Del Rey, “Amazon Has Posted a Profit for 11 Straight Quarters—Including a Record \$1.9 Billion During the Holidays,” *Recode*, February 1, 2018, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.recode.net/2018/2/1/16961598/amazon-jeff-bezos-record-profit-11-quarter-q4-2017-earnings>.

⁸ Brad Tuttle, “Jeff Bezos Net Worth 2018: Amazon CEO Has Made \$40 Billion,” *Time*, June 5, 2018, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://time.com/money/5301812/jeff-bezos-net-worth-2018-amazon-worker-salary/>.

⁹ “Offensive and Controversial Materials,” Amazon, accessed June 18, 2018, https://sellercentral.amazon.com/gp/help/external/200164670?language=en-US&ref=mpbc_200277420_cont_200164670.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Content Guidelines,” Kindle Direct Publishing, Amazon, accessed June 18, 2018, https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G200672390; “Content Guidelines,” CreateSpace, Amazon, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.createspace.com/Help/Rights/ContentGuidelines.jsp>.

¹² “AWS Acceptable Use Policy,” Amazon, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://aws.amazon.com/aup/>.

its policies, or it does not consistently enforce its own policies.

- ▶ Amazon has been reactive, not proactive, in its response to use of its site by peddlers of hate. Amazon has a history of responding slowly—or not at all—to public pressure on this front rather than effectively preventing hate groups from using its platforms in the first place.

Amazon has enabled hate organizations and ideologues to spread their ideas and generate resources to support their operations, and Amazon itself gets a cut of this revenue in turn. This report details the findings summarized above and makes several recommendations for how Amazon can take action to correct its failures and ensure that it is not a tool for the growth of racist hate movements.

Our recommendations for how Amazon should take responsibility:

- ▶ Amazon must take a clear public stand against hate movements and their ideologies and publicly pledge not to profit from hate.
- ▶ Amazon must develop more robust policies for all of its platforms in consultation with experts who study hate movements and symbols, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). These new policies must be consistent and transparent, and evolve appropriately as hate movements and their symbols evolve.
- ▶ Amazon must stop letting its platform be used to sell items featuring hate symbols.
- ▶ Amazon must destroy any merchandise displaying hate symbols currently in Amazon-controlled warehouses and distribution centers.
- ▶ Amazon must not facilitate the publication and distribution of hate movement propaganda. This means that Amazon should:
 - Stop providing web content delivery services to identified hate groups,
 - Remove electronic books by racist propagandists and authors connected to hate groups from its Kindle Store,
 - Stop allowing hate literature to be published via Kindle Direct Publishing, and
 - Stop making white power and “hatecore” music available on its streaming platform.
- ▶ Amazon must develop and resource transparent enforcement mechanisms to ensure that Amazon and its users and clients are adhering to its policies.

Hate movements are resurgent in the U.S. and around the globe. Amazon must take a public stand against hate and violence, and take action to ensure that it is not profiting from hate or enabling others to profit from hate. Across its platforms, Amazon has the right to determine what it sells, publishes, and helps to deliver online. As a wealthy corporation, it has the resources to ensure its policies are enforced. Amazon has an ethical and moral responsibility to stop delivering hate to the world.