



# An Ugly Truth

Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang

Inside  
Facebook's  
Battle for  
Domination



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# Dedication

*To Tigin, Leyla, Oltac, 엄마, 아빠*  
*To Tom, Ella, Eden, אבא, אמא*

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# Authors' Note

This book is the product of more than a thousand hours of interviews with more than four hundred people, the majority of whom are executives; former and current employees and their families, friends, and classmates; and investors in and advisers of Facebook. We also drew on interviews with more than one hundred lawmakers and regulators and their aides; consumer and privacy advocates; and academics in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, South America, and Asia. The people interviewed participated directly in the events described or, in a few instances, were briefed on the events by people directly involved. Mentions of *New York Times* reporters in certain scenes refer to us and/or our colleagues.

*An Ugly Truth* draws on never-reported emails, memos, and white papers involving or approved by top executives. Many of the people interviewed recalled conversations in great detail and provided contemporaneous notes, calendars, and other documents we used to reconstruct and verify events. Because of ongoing federal and state litigation against Facebook, nondisclosure agreements in employment contracts, and fears of reprisal, the majority of interviewees spoke on the condition of being identified as a source rather than by name. In most cases, multiple people confirmed a scene, including eyewitnesses or people briefed on the episode. Therefore, readers should not assume the individual speaking in a given scene provided that information. In instances where Facebook

spokespeople denied certain events or characterizations of its leaders and scenes, multiple people with direct knowledge verified our reporting.

The people who spoke to us, often putting their careers at risk, were crucial to our ability to write this book. Without their voices, the story of the most consequential social experiment of our times could not have been told in full. These people provide a rare look inside a company whose stated mission is to create a connected world of open expression, but whose corporate culture demands secrecy and unqualified loyalty.

While Zuckerberg and Sandberg initially told their communications staff that they wanted to make sure their perspectives were conveyed in this book, they refused repeated requests for interviews. On three occasions, Sandberg invited us to off-the-record conversations in Menlo Park and New York, with the promise that those conversations would lead to longer interviews for the record. When she learned about the critical nature of some of our reporting, she cut off direct communication. Apparently the unvarnished account of the Facebook story did not align with her vision of the company and her role as its second-in-command.

Zuckerberg, we were told, had no interest in participating.

# Prologue

## At Any Cost

**M**ark Zuckerberg's three greatest fears, according to a former senior Facebook executive, were that the site would be hacked, that his employees would be physically hurt, and that regulators would one day break up his social network.

At 2:30 p.m. on December 9, 2020, that last fear became an imminent threat. The Federal Trade Commission and nearly every state in the nation sued Facebook for harming its users and competitors, and sought to dismantle the company.

Breaking news alerts flashed across the screens of tens of millions of smartphones. CNN and CNBC cut from regular programming to the announcement. The *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* posted banner headlines across the tops of their home pages.

Minutes later, New York State Attorney General Letitia James, whose office coordinated the bipartisan coalition of forty-eight attorneys general, held a press conference in which she laid out the case, the strongest government offensive against a company since the breakup of AT&T in 1984.<sup>1</sup> What she claimed amounted to a sweeping indictment of Facebook's entire history—and specifically of its leaders, Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg.<sup>2</sup>

"It tells a story from the beginning, the creation of Facebook at Harvard University," James said. For years, Facebook had exercised

a merciless “buy-or-bury” strategy to kill off competitors. The result was the creation of a powerful monopoly that wreaked broad damage. It abused the privacy of its users and spurred an epidemic of toxic and harmful content reaching three billion people. “By using its vast troves of data and money, Facebook has squashed or hindered what the company perceived as potential threats,” James said. “They’ve reduced choices for consumers, they stifled innovation and they degraded privacy protections for millions of Americans.”

Cited more than one hundred times by name in the complaints, Mark Zuckerberg was portrayed as a rule-breaking founder who achieved success through bullying and deception. “If you stepped into Facebook’s turf or resisted pressure to sell, Zuckerberg would go into ‘destroy mode’ subjecting your business to the ‘wrath of Mark,’” the attorneys general wrote, quoting from emails by competitors and investors. The chief executive was so afraid of losing out to rivals that he “sought to extinguish or impede, rather than outperform or out-innovate, any competitive threat.” He spied on competitors, and he broke commitments to the founders of Instagram and WhatsApp soon after the start-ups were acquired, the states’ complaint further alleged.

At Zuckerberg’s side throughout was Sheryl Sandberg, the former Google executive who converted his technology into a profit powerhouse using an innovative and pernicious advertising business that was “surveilling” users for personal data. Facebook’s ad business was predicated on a dangerous feedback loop: the more time users spent on the site, the more data Facebook mined. The lure was free access to the service, but consumers bore steep costs in other ways. “Users do not pay a cash price to use Facebook. Instead, users exchange their time, attention, and personal data for access to Facebook’s services,” the states’ complaint asserted.

It was a growth-at-any-cost business strategy, and Sandberg was the industry’s best at scaling the model. Intensely organized, analytical, hardworking, and with superior interpersonal skills, she was the perfect foil for Zuckerberg. She oversaw all the departments that didn’t interest him—policy and communication, legal, human resources, and revenue creation. Drawing on years of public

speaking training, and on political consultants to curate her public persona, she was the palatable face of Facebook to investors and the public, distracting attention from the core problem.

“It’s about the business model,” one government official said in an interview. Sandberg’s behavioral advertising prototype treated human data as financial instruments bartered in markets like corn or pork belly futures. Her handiwork was “a contagion,” the official added, echoing the words of academic and activist Shoshana Zuboff, who a year earlier had described Sandberg as playing “the role of Typhoid Mary, bringing surveillance capitalism from Google to Facebook, when she signed on as Mark Zuckerberg’s number two.”<sup>3</sup>

With scant competition to force the leaders to consider the wellbeing of their customers, there was “a proliferation of misinformation and violent or otherwise objectionable content on Facebook’s properties,” the attorneys general alleged in their complaint. Even when faced with major impropriety such as Russia’s disinformation campaign and the data privacy scandal involving Cambridge Analytica, users didn’t leave the site because there were few alternatives, the regulators maintained. As James succinctly described, “Instead of competing on the merits, Facebook used its power to suppress competition so it could take advantage of users and make billions by converting personal data into a cash cow.”

**W**hen the FTC and states came down with their landmark lawsuits against Facebook, we were nearing completion of our own investigation of the company, one based on fifteen years of reporting, which has afforded us a singular look at Facebook from the inside. Several versions of the Facebook story have been told in books and film. But despite being household names, Zuckerberg and Sandberg remain enigmas to the public, and for good reason. They are fiercely protective of the images they’ve cultivated—he, the technology visionary and philanthropist; she, business icon and feminist—and have surrounded the inner workings of “MPK,” the shorthand employees use to describe the headquarters’ campus in Menlo Park, with its moat of loyalists and culture of secrecy.

Many people regard Facebook as a company that lost its way: the classic Frankenstein story of a monster that broke free of its creator.

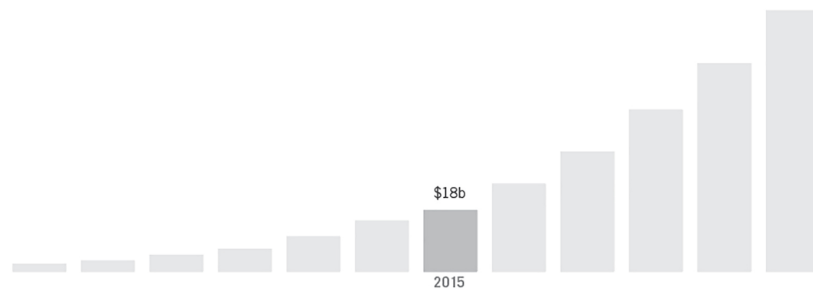
We take a different point of view. From the moment Zuckerberg and Sandberg met at a Christmas party in December 2007, we believe, they sensed the potential to transform the company into the global power it is today.<sup>4</sup> Through their partnership, they methodically built a business model that is unstoppable in its growth—with \$85.9 billion in revenue in 2020 and a market value of \$800 billion—and entirely deliberate in its design.<sup>5</sup>

We have chosen to focus on a five-year period, from one U.S. election to another, during which both the company's failure to protect its users and its vulnerabilities as a powerful global platform were exposed. All the issues that laid the groundwork for what Facebook is today came to a head within this time frame.

It would be easy to dismiss the story of Facebook as that of an algorithm gone wrong. The truth is far more complex.

# Chapter 1

## Don't Poke the Bear



It was late at night, hours after his colleagues at Menlo Park had left the office, when the Facebook engineer felt pulled back to his laptop. He had enjoyed a few beers. Part of the reason, he thought, that his resolve was crumbling. He knew that with just a few taps at his keyboard, he could access the Facebook profile of a woman he had gone on a date with a few days ago. The date had gone well, in his opinion, but she had stopped answering his messages twenty-four hours after they parted ways. All he wanted to do was peek at her Facebook page to satisfy his curiosity, to see if maybe she had gotten sick, gone on vacation, or lost her dog—anything that would explain why she was not interested in a second date.

By 10 p.m., he had made his decision. He logged on to his laptop and, using his access to Facebook's stream of data on all its users, searched for his date. He knew enough details—first and last name, place of birth, and university—that finding her took only a few minutes. Facebook's internal systems had a rich repository of information, including years of private conversations with friends over Facebook Messenger, events attended, photographs uploaded (including those she had deleted), and posts she had commented or clicked on. He saw the categories in which Facebook had placed her for advertisers: the company had decided that she was in her thirties, was politically left of center, and led an active lifestyle. She had a wide range of interests, from a love of dogs to holidays in Southeast Asia. And through the Facebook app that she had installed on her phone, he saw her real-time location. It was more information than the engineer could possibly have gotten over the course of a dozen dinners. Now, almost a week after their first date, he had access to it all.

Facebook's managers stressed to their employees that anyone discovered taking advantage of their access to data for personal means, to look up a friend's account or that of a family member, would be immediately fired. But the managers also knew there were no safeguards in place. The system had been designed to be open, transparent, and accessible to all employees. It was part of Zuckerberg's founding ethos to cut away the red tape that slowed down engineers and prevented them from producing fast, independent work. This rule had been put in place when Facebook had fewer than one hundred employees. Yet, years later, with thousands of engineers across the company, nobody had revisited the practice. There was nothing but the goodwill of the employees themselves to stop them from abusing their access to users' private information.

During a period spanning January 2014 to August 2015, the engineer who looked up his onetime date was just one of fifty-two Facebook employees fired for exploiting their access to user data. Men who looked up the Facebook profiles of women they were interested in made up the vast majority of engineers who abused their privileges. Most of the employees who took advantage of their



access did little more than look up users' information. But a few took it much further. One engineer used the data to confront a woman who had traveled with him on a European vacation; the two had gotten into a fight during the trip, and the engineer tracked her to her new hotel after she left the room they had been sharing. Another engineer accessed a woman's Facebook page before they had even gone on a first date. He saw that she regularly visited Dolores Park, in San Francisco, and he found her there one day, enjoying the sun with her friends.

The fired engineers had used work laptops to look up specific accounts, and this unusual activity had triggered Facebook's systems and alerted the engineers' managers to their transgressions. Those employees were the ones who were found out after the fact. It was unknown how many others had gone undetected.

The problem was brought to Mark Zuckerberg's attention for the first time in September 2015, three months after the arrival of Alex Stamos, Facebook's new chief security officer. Gathered in the CEO's conference room, "the Aquarium," Zuckerberg's top executives had braced themselves for potentially bad news: Stamos had a reputation for blunt speech and high standards. One of the first objectives he had set out when he was hired that summer was a comprehensive evaluation of Facebook's current state of security. It would be the first such assessment ever completed by an outsider.

Among themselves, the executives whispered that it was impossible to make a thorough assessment within such a short period of time and that whatever report Stamos delivered would surely flag superficial problems and give the new head of security some easy wins at the start of his tenure. Everyone's life would be easier if Stamos assumed the posture of boundless optimism that pervaded Facebook's top ranks. The company had never been doing better, with ads recently expanded on Instagram and a new milestone of a billion users logging on to the platform every day.<sup>1</sup> All they had to do was sit back and let the machine continue to hum.

Instead, Stamos had come armed with a presentation that detailed problems across Facebook's core products, workforce, and company structure. The organization was devoting too much of its security

efforts to protecting its website, while its apps, including Instagram and WhatsApp, were being largely ignored, he told the group. Facebook had not made headway on its promises to encrypt user data at its centers—unlike Yahoo, Stamos’s previous employer, which had moved quickly to start securing the information in the two years since National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the government was likely spying on user data as it sat unprotected within the Silicon Valley companies.<sup>2</sup> Facebook’s security responsibilities were scattered across the company, and according to the report Stamos presented, the company was “not technically or culturally prepared to play against” its current level of adversary.

Worst of all, Stamos told them, was that despite firing dozens of employees over the last eighteen months for abusing their access, Facebook was doing nothing to solve or prevent what was clearly a systemic problem. In a chart, Stamos highlighted how nearly every month, engineers had exploited the tools designed to give them easy access to data for building new products to violate the privacy of Facebook users and infiltrate their lives. If the public knew about these transgressions, they would be outraged: for over a decade, thousands of Facebook’s engineers had been freely accessing users’ private data. The cases Stamos highlighted were only the ones the company knew about. Hundreds more may have slipped under the radar, he warned.

Zuckerberg was clearly taken aback by the figures Stamos presented, and upset that the issue had not been brought to his attention sooner. “Everybody in engineering management knew there were incidents where employees had inappropriately managed data. Nobody had pulled it into one place, and they were surprised at the volume of engineers who had abused data,” Stamos recalled.

Why hadn’t anyone thought to reassess the system that gave engineers access to user data? Zuckerberg asked. No one in the room pointed out that it was a system that he himself had designed and implemented. Over the years, his employees had suggested alternative ways of structuring data retention, to no avail. “At various times in Facebook’s history there were paths we could have taken, decisions we could have made, which would have limited, or even

cut back on, the user data we were collecting,” said one longtime employee, who joined Facebook in 2008 and worked across various teams within the company. “But that was antithetical to Mark’s DNA. Even before we took those options to him, we knew it wasn’t a path he would choose.”

Facebook’s executives, including those in charge of the engineering ranks, like Jay Parikh and Pedro Canahuati, touted access as a selling point to new recruits on their engineering teams. Facebook was the world’s biggest testing lab, with a quarter of the planet’s population as its test subjects. The managers framed this access as part of Facebook’s radical transparency and trust in its engineering ranks. Did a user enjoy the balloons on the prompt to wish her brother a happy birthday, or did an emoji of a birthday cake get a higher response rate? Instead of going through a lengthy and bureaucratic process to find out what was working, engineers could simply open up the hood and see for themselves, in real time. But Canahuati warned engineers that access to that data was a privilege. “We had no tolerance for the abuse, which is why the company had always fired every single person found to be improperly accessing data,” he said.

Stamos told Zuckerberg and the other executives that it was not enough to fire employees after the fact. It was Facebook’s responsibility, he argued, to ensure that such privacy violations never happened to begin with. He asked permission to change Facebook’s current system to revoke private data access from the majority of engineers. If someone needed information on a private individual, they would have to make a formal request through the proper channels. Under the system then in place, 16,744 Facebook employees had access to users’ private data. Stamos wanted to bring that number down to fewer than 5,000. For the most sensitive information, like GPS location and password, he wanted to limit access to under 100 people. “While everyone knew there was a large amount of data accessible to engineers, nobody had thought about how much the company had grown and how many people now had access to that data,” Stamos explained. “People were not paying attention.”

Parikh, Facebook's head of engineering, asked why the company had to upend its entire system. Surely, safeguards could be put in place that limited how much information an engineer accessed, or that sounded alarms when engineers appeared to be looking up certain types of data. The changes being suggested would severely slow down the work of many of the product teams.

Canahuati, director of product engineering, agreed. He told Stamos that requiring engineers to submit a written request every time they wanted access to data was untenable. "It would have dramatically slowed work across the company, even work on other safety and security efforts," Canahuati pointed out.

Changing the system was a top priority, Zuckerberg said. He asked Stamos and Canahuati to come up with a solution and to update the group on their progress within a year. But for the engineering teams, this would create serious upheaval. Many of the executives in the room grumbled privately that Stamos had just persuaded their boss to commit to a major structural overhaul by presenting a worst-case scenario.

One executive was noticeably absent from the September 2015 meeting. Only four months had passed since the death of Sheryl Sandberg's husband. Security was Sandberg's responsibility, and Stamos technically fell under her purview. But she had never suggested, nor been consulted about, the sweeping changes he was proposing.

Stamos prevailed that day, but he made several powerful enemies.

**L**ate in the evening on December 8, 2015, Joel Kaplan was in the business center of a hotel in New Delhi when he received an urgent phone call from MPK. A colleague informed him that he was needed for an emergency meeting.

Hours earlier, Donald J. Trump's campaign had posted on Facebook a video of a speech the candidate had made in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. In it, Trump promised to take a dramatically harder line against terrorists, and then he linked terrorism to immigration. President Obama, he said, had treated illegal immigrants better than wounded warriors. Trump would be different, the presidential candidate assured the crowd. "Donald J.

Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on," he announced.<sup>3</sup> The audience exploded with cheers.

Trump had made inflammatory positions on race and immigration central to his presidential bid. His campaign's use of social media threw gas on the flames. On Facebook, the video of the anti-Muslim speech quickly generated more than 100,000 "likes" and was shared 14,000 times.

The video put the platform in a bind. It was unprepared for a candidate like Trump, who was generating a massive following but also dividing many of its users and employees. For guidance on this, Zuckerberg and Sandberg turned to their vice president of global public policy, who was in India trying to salvage Zuckerberg's free internet service program.

Kaplan dialed into a videoconference with Sandberg, Head of Policy and Communications Elliot Schrage, Head of Global Policy Management Monika Bickert, and a few other policy and communications officials. Kaplan was thirteen and a half hours ahead of his colleagues at headquarters and had been traveling for days. He quietly watched the video and listened to the group's concerns. Zuckerberg, he was told, had made clear that he was concerned by Trump's post and thought there might be an argument for removing it from Facebook.

When Kaplan finally weighed in, he advised the executives against acting hastily. The decision on Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric was complicated by politics. All those years of financial and public support for Democrats had dimmed Facebook's image among Republicans, who were growing distrustful of the platform's political neutrality. Kaplan was not part of Trump's world, but he saw Trump's campaign as a real threat. Trump's large following on Facebook and Twitter exposed a gaping divide within the Republican Party.

Removing the post of a presidential candidate was a monumental decision and would be seen as censorship by Trump and his supporters, Kaplan added. It would be interpreted as another sign of liberal favoritism toward Trump's chief rival, Hillary Clinton. "Don't poke the bear," he warned.<sup>4</sup>

Sandberg and Schrage weren't as vocal on what to do with Trump's account. They trusted Kaplan's political instincts; they had no connections to Trump's circle and no experience with his brand of shock politics. But some officials on the conference line that day were aghast. Kaplan seemed to be putting politics above principle. He was so obsessed with steadying the ship that he could not see that Trump's comments were roiling the sea, as one person on the call described it.

Several senior executives spoke up to agree with Kaplan. They expressed concern about the headlines and the backlash they would face from shutting down comments made by a presidential candidate. Trump and his followers already viewed leaders like Sandberg and Zuckerberg as part of the liberal elite, the rich and powerful gatekeepers of information that could censor conservative voices with their secret algorithms. Facebook had to appear unbiased. This was essential to protecting its business.

The conversation turned to explaining the decision. The post could be seen as violating Facebook's community standards. Users had flagged the Trump campaign account for hate speech in the past, and multiple strikes were grounds for removing the account entirely. Schrage, Bickert, and Kaplan, all Harvard Law grads, labored to conjure legal arguments that would justify the decision to allow the post. They were splitting hairs on what constituted hate speech, right down to Trump's use of grammar.

"At one point, they joked that Facebook would need to come up with a version of how a Supreme Court Justice once defined pornography, 'I know it when I see it,'" recalled an employee involved in the conversation. "Was there a line they could draw in the sand for something Trump might say to get himself banned? It didn't seem wise to draw that line."

Facebook technically barred hate speech, but the company's definition of what constituted it was ever evolving. What it took action on differed within nations, in compliance with local laws. There were universal definitions for banned content on child pornography and on violent content. But hate speech was specific not just to countries but to cultures.

As the executives debated, they came to realize that they wouldn't have to defend Trump's language if they came up with a workaround. The group agreed that political speech could be protected under a "newsworthiness" standard. The idea was that political speech deserved extra protection because the public deserved to form their own opinions on candidates based on those candidates' unedited views. The Facebook executives were creating the basis for a new speech policy as a knee-jerk reaction to Donald Trump. "It was bullshit," one employee recalled. "They were making it up on the fly."

This was a critical moment for Joel Kaplan in terms of proving his value. Though unpopular to some on the call, he was providing crucial advice on a growing threat coming from Washington.

When Sandberg arrived at Facebook in 2008, the company had been neglecting conservatives. It was a critical oversight: where regulation over data collection was concerned, Republicans were Facebook's allies. When the House of Representatives flipped to a Republican majority in 2010, Sandberg hired Kaplan to balance the heavily Democratic ranks of the lobbying office and to change the perception in Washington that the company favored Democrats.

Kaplan came with sterling conservative credentials. A former deputy chief of staff to President George W. Bush, he was also a former U.S. Marine artillery officer and Harvard Law School graduate who had clerked for Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia. He was the antithesis of the typical Silicon Valley liberal techie and, at forty-five, a couple of decades older than much of the staff at MPK. (He and Sandberg had met in 1987, during their freshman year at Harvard. They dated briefly and remained friends after their relationship ended.)

Kaplan was a workaholic who, like Sandberg, prized organization. At the White House, he had kept a trifold whiteboard in his office with lists of all the hot-button issues facing the administration: the auto bailout, immigration reform, and the financial crisis. His job was to manage complex policy issues and prevent problems from reaching the Oval Office. He occupied a similar role at Facebook. His mandate was to protect the business model from government interference, and to that end, he was an excellent employee.

In 2014, Sandberg had promoted Kaplan to lead global policy in addition to Washington lobbying. For the past two years, Facebook had been preparing for a possible Republican administration after Obama. But Trump threw them off course. He was not of the Republican establishment. Kaplan's political capital seemed worthless when it came to the former reality TV star.

And while Trump was creating new headaches for Facebook, he was also a power user and important advertiser. From the start of Trump's presidential campaign, his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and digital manager, Brad Parscale, put the majority of their media funds into the social network.<sup>5</sup> They focused on Facebook because of its cheap and easy targeting features for amplifying campaign ads. Parscale used Facebook's microtargeting tools to reach voters by matching the campaign's own email lists with Facebook's user lists. He worked with Facebook employees who were embedded in Trump's New York City campaign headquarters to riff on Hillary Clinton's daily speeches and to target negative ads to specific audiences.<sup>6</sup> They bought thousands of postcard-like ads and video messages. They were easily reaching bigger audiences than on television, and Facebook was an eager partner. Trump became an inescapable presence on the platform.<sup>7</sup>

The 2016 U.S. presidential election would stamp out any doubts about the importance of social media in political campaigns. By early 2016, 44 percent of all Americans said they got their news about candidates from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.<sup>8</sup>

**F**or nearly a decade, Facebook held an informal, company-wide meeting at the end of each week, known as "Questions and Answers," or Q&A. Its format was simple, and fairly standard in the industry: Zuckerberg would speak for a short time and then answer questions that had been voted on by employees from among those they'd submitted in the days ahead of the meeting. Once the questions that had received the most votes had been addressed, Zuckerberg would take unfiltered questions from the audience. It was more relaxed than Facebook's quarterly, company-wide meeting known as the "all-hands," which had a more rigid agenda and featured programs and presentations.



A couple hundred employees attended the meeting in Menlo Park, and thousands more watched a livestream of the meeting from Facebook's offices around the world. In the lead-up to the Q&A following Trump's Muslim ban speech, employees had been complaining in their internal Facebook groups—known as “Tribes”—that the platform should have removed Trump's speech from the site. In the broader forums where more professional discussions took place—known as “Workplace groups”—people asked for a history of how Facebook had treated government officials on the site. They were angry that Facebook's leaders hadn't taken a stand against what they viewed as clearly hate speech.

An employee stepped up to a microphone stand, and people grew quiet. Do you feel an obligation to take down the Trump campaign video calling for the ban on Muslims? he asked. The targeting of Muslims, the employee said, appeared to violate Facebook's rule against hate speech.<sup>9</sup>

Zuckerberg was used to fielding hard questions at Q&As. He had been confronted about ill-conceived business deals, the lack of diversity in company staff, and his plans to conquer competition. But the employee in front of him posed a question on which his own top ranks could not find agreement. Zuckerberg fell back on one of his core talking points. It was a hard issue, he said. But he was a staunch believer in free expression. Removing the post would be too drastic.

It was a core libertarian refrain Zuckerberg would return to again and again: the all-important protection of free speech as laid out in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. His interpretation was that speech should be unimpeded; Facebook would host a cacophony of sparring voices and ideas to help educate and inform its users. But the protection of speech adopted in 1791 had been designed specifically to promote a healthy democracy by ensuring a plurality of ideas without government restraint. The First Amendment was meant to protect society. And ad targeting that prioritized clicks and salacious content and data mining of users was antithetical to the ideals of a healthy society. The dangers present in Facebook's algorithms were “being co-opted and twisted by politicians and pundits howling about censorship and miscasting content

moderation as the demise of free speech online,” in the words of Renée DiResta, a disinformation researcher at Stanford’s Internet Observatory. “There is no right to algorithmic amplification. In fact, that’s the very problem that needs fixing.”<sup>10</sup>

It was a complicated issue, but to some, at least, the solution was simple. In a blog post on the Workplace group open to all employees, Monika Bickert explained that Trump’s post wouldn’t be removed. People, she said, could judge the words for themselves.