

Mark Zuckerberg, Founder and CEO  
Facebook, Inc.  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, California 94025

September 30, 2020

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write to ask that Facebook do some serious soul-searching and identify why it has become a core tool for those that want to spread bias, racism, and disinformation including that which undermine science and the common understanding of facts upon which policy (on such pressing matters as climate change) is made and civil society may function. The Facebook platform has evolved to be less about people, its users, and their personal connections, and much more about Facebook prioritizing “engagement” – even if that looks like hate – to secure Facebook’s leading role as a marketing and communications tool and turbo-charge its profits, at society’s expense.

We know that over the last several years, Facebook has become a key source of information for many of its users. The failure to better manage – including removal of - false media stories and outright disinformation is deeply damaging to our society and democracy. A recent outgrowth of this is the increased racist activity on the platform following the killing of George Floyd. Clearly you need to be better with scrutinizing activity and setting and enforcing policy and standards of care.

As conservationists, we are seeing the impact of hate and racism in our work. As the nation struggles to control the pandemic, nature has provided a valuable and safe respite. But, as we have seen with the racism behind the Christian Cooper incident in New York City, the benefits of nature are not available for all. The pandemic has also made the impacts of systemic racism abundantly clear. Those living in areas where air pollution has historically been the worst---communities where predominantly Black and Brown people live---have a higher likelihood of dying due to COVID-19 than those breathing less air pollution. We will not succeed as a nation until nature and a healthful environment are truly available to all. Facebook has to recognize its role in fostering an environment that perpetuates the culture of racism and hate that puts nature out of bounds.

Facebook simply needs to do more to stop racist engagement. Starting with remedying the algorithmic lean to boosting racist posts, we ask that Facebook take the step and become anti-racist. It is not enough to say that you are committed to “free speech” and to use that as a shield to look the other way on racism. As a public company, you have the power, ability and responsibility to root out racist behavior. Now is the time to say no more, we will not allow racist actions and speech on our platform. We don’t accept that you are constrained by a commitment to free discourse. Nothing could be more in the interest of civil society and free discourse than stopping hate from flourishing.

As Facebook moves to become anti-racist, it should also recognize and address other forms of hate that have found a foothold on the platform. There are myriad ways in which Facebook has become distorted by algorithms that spreads hate, prejudice, and disinformation:

- [CNN reports](#) that there are as many as 125 million fake profiles on the Facebook platform. It is clear that a significant portion of these exist primarily to seed and spread hate and lies (e.g., hundreds of recently [removed “Boogaloo Boys” accounts](#)).

- Your own monitoring tool, [CrowdTangle](#), makes clear that most of the regularly top performing daily posts are on a narrow spectrum of bias. And that tool doesn't pick up private group sharing or amplification, which you've heavily prioritized as a business matter over the last few years.
- Regarding disinformation and disregard of science, your refusal to (for example) tackle the [anti-vaccination movement's deployment of your platform](#) to dangerous ends will harm millions just as we need the public to embrace widespread future vaccinations to stop the COVID-19 health crisis. And your treatment of distortions of climate change science, tagging this disinformation as "opinion" and not subject to fact checking, deeply undermines the ability of our communities and our governments to effect the necessary robust response to this global crisis.
- Your [acknowledgment in late July](#) that a "bug" in Instagram systematically favored Donald Trump in terms of shared hashtags is but the latest example that all is not right – and certainly not fair – in your algorithmic calculations.
- Finally, your independent civil rights audit released in July was unambiguous in its findings that decisions made in the last nine months alone have led to "real world consequences that are serious setbacks for civil rights."

We respectfully ask that you reflect on the role Facebook has played in further dividing Americans at this pivotal moment in our nation's history. Please, abandon your current defensive and ineffective approach, and embrace reasonable change in your practices to prioritize facts and civil discourse and help foster a society built on truth, respect, and democratic values.

Collin O'Mara, President and CEO  
National Wildlife Federation, Washington

Doug Bechtel, President  
New Hampshire Audubon, Concord

Howard Penn, Executive Director  
Planning and Conservation League Sacramento

Eric Stiles, President and CEO  
New Jersey Audubon, Bernardsville

Moana Bjur, Executive Director  
Conservation Council for Hawaii, Honolulu

Peter Iwanowicz, Executive Director  
Environmental Advocates of New York, Albany

Brian Brooks, Executive Director  
Idaho Wildlife Federation, Boise

John Bradley, Executive Director  
North Dakota Wildlife Federation, Bismarck

Elliot Brinkman, Executive Director  
Prairie Rivers Network, Champagne, IL

Jacquelyn Bonomo, President and CEO  
Penn Future, Harrisburg, PA

Emily Wood, Executive Director  
Indiana Wildlife Federation, Indianapolis

Jason Budsan, President  
Virgin Islands Conservation Society, St. Thomas

Ward G. Wilson, Executive Director  
Kentucky Waterways Alliance, Louisville

Mitch Friedman, Executive Director  
Conservation Northwest, Seattle, WA

Frank Szollosi, Executive Director  
Montana Wildlife Federation, Helena

Angie Rosser, Executive Director  
West Virginia Rivers Coalition, Charleston

Lisa Pohlmann, CEO  
Natural Resources Council of Maine, Augusta

Dwayne Meadows, Executive Director  
Wyoming Wildlife Federation, Lander