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This is a guest post by Philadelphia-based archivist Jarrett Drake.

On Aug. 1, **Korryn Gaines** was shot and killed in her Baltimore County apartment by one or more police officers from the **Baltimore County Police Department**. The officers, whose names the Police Department withheld, also shot and wounded Gaines's five-year-old son, Kodi. Police officials stated that the officers went to the apartment to serve an arrest warrant for Gaines. But they said upon arrival they were met with a shotgun aimed at them and Gaines's verbal threats that she would kill them if they refused to leave, leading to an hours-long standoff.

To counter any narrative police might offer in the event they killed her, Gaines began to broadcast the encounter through Facebook Live and added select videos to her Instagram account.

That was, until Baltimore County police used Facebook's law enforcement portal to suspend Gaines's Facebook (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/03/488500830/during-fatal-standoff-police-asked-facebook-to-deactivate-womans-account>) and Instagram accounts and scrub most of the videos from her Instagram feed (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/03/488500830/during-fatal-standoff-police-asked-facebook-to-deactivate-womans-account>). This digital erasure foreshadowed her corporal erasure and prompted renewed questions about the extent and circumstances under which Facebook complies with law enforcement requests. The erasures also led several advocacy and activist organizations to publish an open letter to **Facebook** CEO **Mark Zuckerberg**, demanding, among other things, that he "institute a policy regarding the censorship of content and video that protects individual civil liberties and is transparent and accountable to the public."

There's a steep societal risk in demanding a for-profit company play the role of conscious curator and social servant.

The letter, which is worth a full read, explains that Facebook is a key venue for citizens to share accounts and videos of police brutality they have suffered or seen. The letter expresses concern that the tech company will set an ominous precedent whereby it dances to whatever tune of censorship police departments orchestrate. The letter concludes its critique of this erasure within the larger **Movement for Black Lives** and calls on Zuckerberg to add action behind his public support of the Movement with the addition of an anti-censorship policy.



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Facebook's ultimate decision on the creation of such a policy is a moot point. Gaines was violently erased as her young son watched and was wounded. All of this took place moments after her social media presence was similarly vanquished. No policy will rectify those two facts, and given a similar situation in the future, we have no evidence to suggest Facebook will act any differently, regardless of its stated policy.

But the public should be concerned not with the creation of the policy but with the request for the creation of the policy. We've seen this happen more recently with critics calling on Facebook to embrace what they call its moral obligation as the "world's most powerful editor." These requests highlight the steep societal risk in demanding a for-profit company play the role of conscious curator and social servant. This is an ask befitting of a benevolent benefactor and not that of multi-billion private corporation with headquarters in the most gentrifying region of the country.

What's more, the request, which itself stems from an unearned and unexamined privilege afforded to Silicon Valley tech companies on matters of social and racial justice, asks yet another private company to perform yet another role — fighting government censorship — that an existing public entity — the library — already performs.

While the privatization of public functions is decades old, the apparent embrace of this trend by these social justice and advocacy organizations, especially those working with poor and Black communities, stands at odds with the Movement's criticisms of neoliberal power structures. Perhaps paradoxically, the authors of the letter asked Facebook, in essence, to become a library, and as a librarian, that concerns me because Facebook knows as much about librarianship as I know about building the world's largest social media site.

Why, instead of turning to Facebook to fight government censorship, we should turn to libraries.

The request that Facebook fight censorship, hold itself accountable to the public for removal decisions and become the courageous curator of conscience obscures the salient fact that there are tens of thousands of librarians and libraries that profess these to be their creeds. This is spelled out quite clearly in the Library Bill of Rights (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>): "Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment."

The striking structure and tone of this statement when compared with the demand to Zuckerberg is overwhelming, if not overt. It is worth stating that many libraries and librarians fall short of this aspiration every single day, a reality not unconnected to the unbearable whiteness and homogeneity of librarians. Libraries are not the oozing oases of opportunity that they imagine themselves to be, yet despite this, the public's ability to hold them accountable for their shortcomings, their exclusions and their mistakes is significantly higher than it will ever be a tech company; or any company, for that matter. Rather than ask Facebook, Twitter or Reddit to become conscious curators of contentious content, we should ask the curators we already employ with public funds to become conscious curators of contentious content.

And if, or rather, when they fall short, we should demand accountability and be prepared to do the hard work of creating new, alternative digital spaces that are not driven by likes, shares or shareholders but driven by a commitment to host, share and preserve content that portrays even, or especially, the most violent or vile abuses of American state power.

These alternative spaces — a people's archive of sorts — can include the creation of new technologies or the maximization of existing open-source ones. They cannot, however, include relying on one of the great capitalist empires of the information age to become a curator with a conscience. This expectation betrays the nature of for-profit tech companies and it betrays logic. Moreover, it has the potential to betray the legacy of Korryn Gaines, whose digital erasure was feasible because of Facebook's nature, not in spite of it.

When corporations, like people, show you who they are, believe them the first time around.

Jarrett M. Drake is an archivist, educator and liberatory memory worker. His interests include the intersections of race, gender, technology, archives, human rights and state violence.



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