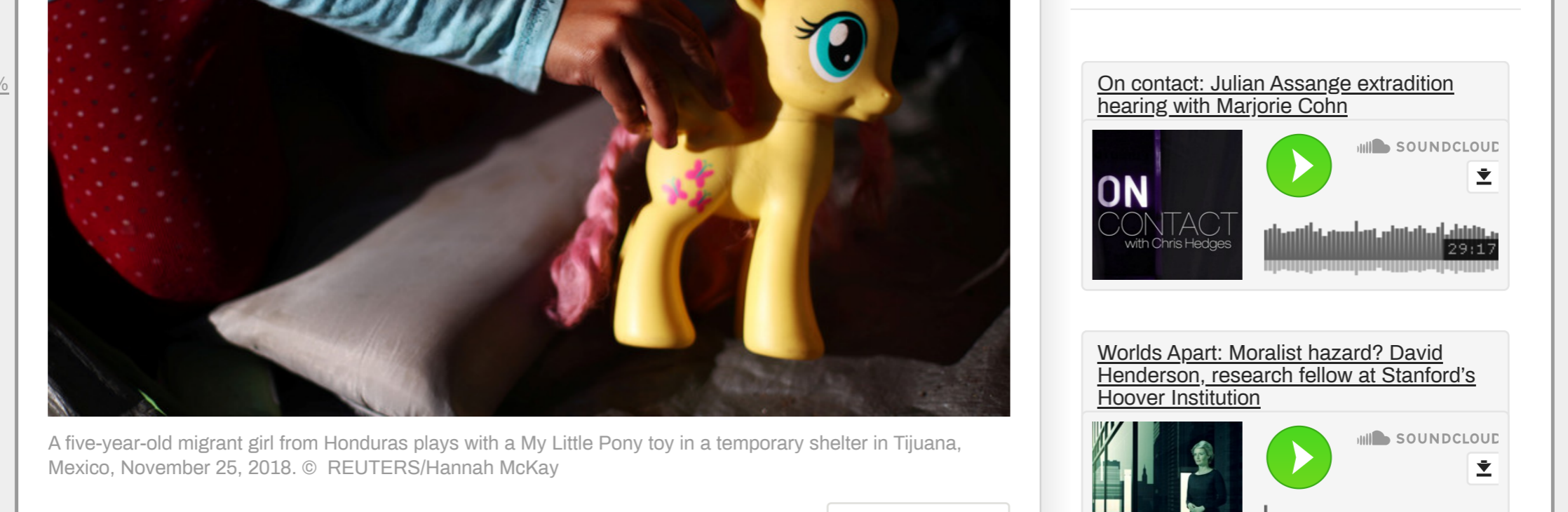


Censors come for 'NAZI' bronies: 'Hate speech' thought police won't rest until even My Little Pony has bent the knee

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A five-year-old migrant girl from Honduras plays with a My Little Pony toy in a temporary shelter in Tijuana, Mexico, November 25, 2018. © REUTERS/Hannah McKay

Online forums for "bronies," adult male fans of My Little Pony cartoons, are infested with Nazis! Quick, censor them before it spreads! So says the media establishment, threatened by the continued existence of free speech online.

One could be forgiven for questioning why the Atlantic would devote a lengthy feature to the internal squabbles of a My Little Pony fan site called Derpibooru, which hosts "millions" of fan-drawn artworks celebrating, exploring, and interpreting the wholesome, brightly-colored world of the cartoon ponies. But the piece has vanishingly little to do with an escapist paradise in which "Friendship is Magic" – the official name of the series, and the defining ethos of the pony universe – and where we all can, in fact, just get along.

Instead, it's all about censorship – the need for even these supposedly warm and fuzzy "bronies" to constantly police themselves, lest "white supremacy" take root among them.

Derpibooru, it turns out, was founded with an anti-censorship ethos. Users were discouraged from complaining about content, instead told to use filters to hide material they found offensive. The Atlantic admits the vast majority of the site's users disdain political art – what good is an escapist paradise if the real world keeps jamming its nose in? In the past few weeks, however, a tiny fraction of users for and against the Black Lives Matter protest have apparently been making political art to express their views and down-voting their ideological opponents' posts en masse.

When a faction of anti-BLM users steeped in 4chan's pointedly-offensive troll-humor posted their own pony-fications of popular "white nationalist" memes, the pro-BLM bronies reportedly struck back, convincing Derpibooru's owners to not only tweet a statement in support of Black Lives Matter but also to scrap the board's no-censorship rule.

Now that the censors have gotten an inch, of course, they want a mile.

"They banned uploading images that were created for no reason other than to incite controversy, and removed images making fun of the protests. They did not ban expressions of racism," the Atlantic sniffed, echoing the concerns of users posting on social media begging the moderators to "remove all the racist s*** now or 'purge all of that racist bulls** imagery that people post on there.'" So ends another experiment in free speech on the internet – not with a bang, but with a whinny.

Racism is obviously repugnant, and one can argue it has no place on a My Little Pony message board, but it's important to keep the problem in perspective. Out of millions of uploaded artworks, the Atlantic claimed Derpibooru had 900 tagged as "racist," less than a tenth of one percent. On top of that, making art that explores a controversial political viewpoint doesn't necessarily equate to supporting that political viewpoint.

The Atlantic may marvel at the bronies "totally nonsensical hodgepodge of values," clutching its pearls at the notion that forum users could simultaneously admire "Aryanne, a fan-invented Nazi pony with a pink swastika on her hip" and appreciate the Black Lives Matter-themed art, but expecting devotees of cartoon ponies to march in lockstep with any political ideology is ridiculous.

Romanian artist Linda Barasz, perhaps the first to slap a swastika on a My Little Pony over a decade ago, became a star in the art world for the controversial piece. But the world has changed a lot since then (including, apparently, the definition of racism).

That bronies have become such a cultural phenomenon at all can arguably be traced to that strain of militant political correctness that told a generation of men it wasn't their actions but "toxic masculinity" itself that was oppressive to women. These men grew up being told that their mere existence constituted a form of assault on womankind unless they constantly negated what they were told was unconscious misogyny and were praised for "calling out" men who did not broadcast a healthy shame at being born male.

Many who populate brony forums and other fantasy fandoms – or 4chan, for that matter – have opted to give the dating pool and sexuality itself a wide berth, reasoning it's better to escape into their preferred alternate universe than risk being crucified for violating one of the many unspoken rules of the 21st-century sexual minefield.

Similarly, in 2020, it is no longer enough to simply not be a racist. The definition of the term has expanded to include all white people who are not constantly and consciously engaged in "working on" the "systemic racism" that they are told infects every aspect of western society. White people are expected to debase themselves – to literally get on their knees and apologize, or polish the shoes of black people (who, it must be said, didn't ask for this either) to compensate for centuries of oppression. Better yet, they should hunt down and expose "racists" – using the new, expanded definition. Only then are they fit to call themselves allies.

Intentionally or not, this approach marginalizes a large swath of people – especially white people, especially men. The Atlantic quotes a media studies professor marveling that bronies take pride in "the idea that they can make the mainstream uncomfortable." But how many of these people were rejected by a society whose values categorically excluded them before they made the conscious choice to reject that society's values? When only so-called "extremists" will unconditionally accept a large segment of western society for who they are, the problem is not with the extremists, but with a mainstream as intolerant as the bigots it claims to see under every rock.

It's easy to mock the trials and tribulations of the bronies, forced to undergo a political reckoning they neither wanted nor, to be fair, needed; indeed, that's the aim of much of the media coverage of groups like them. But this thought-policing ethos – jamming an ultra-rigid form of political correctness into spaces that have become safe havens from it – is never satisfied with anything short of total control.

Before you laugh at the grown men drawing pictures of pretty ponies, remember: first, they came for the bronies. Next, they came for you.

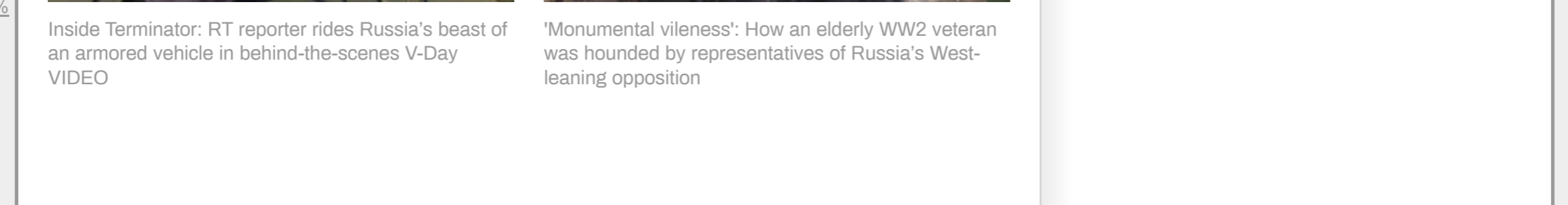
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