



NAACP



November 2, 2022

Mr. Elon Musk
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market Street
Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Musk,

As leaders of organizations that represent communities of color and religious minorities, we are alarmed by the rise in white supremacist propaganda and racial and religious hatred on the Twitter platform over the weekend. **To this end, we request a meeting with you to address our concerns and better understand your content moderation plan to protect our communities against abuse on Twitter by those who seek not simply to express controversial views, but who seek to harm us and undermine our democracy.**

As you must know, Twitter saw a nearly 500% spike in the use of the racial epithet “Nigger” in recent days.¹ This painful and shocking increase in hate comes on the heels of you becoming the new owner of Twitter, a platform that remains one of our nation’s most powerful communication tools.² In flippantly declaring that, “the bird is freed,” you might have unwittingly freed people to unleash the worst of human nature with communities of color and religious minorities bearing the greatest burden. And as we have seen over the last several years, online behavior has offline impact, including leading to violence and harassment online and otherwise.

Whether you realize it or not, as the new leader of Twitter, you have new responsibilities, and one of those responsibilities is to ensure your platform is not used to harm people and the nation as a whole. Another responsibility is to ensure your own words and behavior do not cause harm, especially to the communities of color and other underserved communities who have been long time users and who have made the company what it is today. You have not shown a willingness to meet these responsibilities thus far, but we have hope and are willing to work with you do so in the future.

¹ Network Contagion Research Institute, Twitter, https://twitter.com/ncri_io/status/1586007698910646272?ext=HHwWgMDUiazm0IIIsAAAA

² Drew Harwell, Taylor Lorenz, and Cat Zakrzewski. Racist tweets quickly surface after Musk closes Twitter deal, *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/10/28/musk-twitter-racist-posts/>.

In your October 27th statement directed at Twitter advertisers, you said that you acquired Twitter so that a “wide range of beliefs can be debated in a healthy manner, without resorting to violence.”³ We share those values and a belief in the importance of free speech as well, but the fact remains that online activities, particularly the spread of hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and users that post content with the intent of sowing social and political chaos, have grave consequences for our democracy, civil rights, and public safety. Therefore, you must have an affirmative strategy to ensure your platform is not used to further the ends of those who intentionally or recklessly promote violence. We need you to have strong content moderation standards that foster a safe and healthy online environment.

Upon your completed acquisition of Twitter last week, you announced that the platform will form a “content moderation council” that will have “widely diverse viewpoints.”⁴ Numerous reports simultaneously indicated that you plan to lay off a significant percentage of Twitter’s workforce.⁵ While it is unclear what impact this will have, we strongly urge you to maintain content moderation teams that are tasked with creating and implementing policies that provide a baseline for prohibiting content designed to threaten and harass people of color and religious minorities and suppress votes. Indeed, we encourage you to strengthen these policies as there has been a rise in dangerous rhetoric and violent acts that threaten our communities’ ability to vote and otherwise fully participate in our society without fear for our safety. This is especially concerning as we are only days from the midterm elections and have witnessed time and time again the negative impacts unchecked voter disinformation and threats have had on communities of color.⁶

Moreover, when we meet, in addition to ensuring that you are implementing and enforcing strong content moderation standards, we are also interested in your plans to employ a workforce and contract with suppliers that reflect the diversity of the nation at all levels of leadership and across all functions at Twitter.

Until then, we implore you to show immediate leadership by directly addressing the spike in hate speech that occurred over the weekend and to discourage vigorously and clearly those who would be influenced by your voice from using such speech in the future and from engaging in violence against anyone.

³ Elon Musk, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1585619322239561728>.

⁴ See *supra* n.1.

⁵ Elizabeth Dwoskin and Faiz Siddiqui, Elon Musk plans Twitter layoffs with new team, *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/10/31/elon-musk-twitter-layoffs/>.

⁶ See *A Growing Threat: The Impact of Disinformation Targeted at Communities of Color* Before the House Admin. Committee Subcomm. on Elections, 117th Congress (2022) (Testimony of Joi Chaney, Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy & Executive Director, Washington Bureau, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HA/HA08/20220428/114642/HHRG-117-HA08-Wstate-ChaneyJ-20220428.pdf>); See also *A Country in Crisis: How Disinformation Online is Dividing the Nation*, Before the House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcomm. on Consumer Protection and Commerce, 116th Congress. 4-5 (2020) (statement of Spencer Overton, President, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and Professor of Law, George Washington Law School), <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/110832/witnesses/HHRG-116-IF17-Wstate-OvertonS-20200624.pdf>.

To schedule a meeting with the signatories of this letter, please have your team contact the National Urban League's President and CEO, Marc Morial via his Chief of Staff Tina Pizzimenti at presidentoffice@nul.org.

Sincerely,

Marc. H. Morial
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Urban League

Derrick Johnson
President and Chief Executive Officer
NAACP

Reverend Al Sharpton
Founder and President
National Action Network