Twitter Thread by Kate Klonick



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When you report a piece for two years & then write it up in 8000 words, there are obviously lots of things on the cutting room floor

But this ■ isn't about that

This thread is about something else not in the piece: what it was like to actually *do* this research & writing

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Let's start with the fact that my main paying-job is *not* ethnographic journalist on tech companies. It's being a law professor. I teach property, info privacy, and internet law.

It is a fantastic job, but it is full time, particularly in your first few years teaching.

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That means at the same time as I was traveling back and forth across the country on red-eyes to be at FB to do this work I was also giving 26 two hour speeches about adverse possession and eminent domain to 70+ 1Ls.

Would not recommend.

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But how did I even start doing that? How did I get access inside Facebook?

I will tell you the secret: *I asked.*

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I went to a PR person at FB & one of the people who does stakeholder engagement in early 2019 & I said:

"Listen, I think that this Oversight Board thing is going to be a big deal and you are telling people you are doing this transparently. So you should let me report it."

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"But if you let me do this, I have to do it on my terms. No NDA. All meetings recorded. Everything on the record."

Maybe they thought I was a ditzy young writer who could be manipulated into writing a puff piece. Maybe they thought I could legitimize them.

6/

But *I* knew I wouldn't do any of those things. And that if in fact the Oversight Board became something important to the world, it would be better that someone like me watched this happen from inside, & could tell people about it, then no one having that visibility at all.

7/

Here is the big thing that isn't obvious from this reporting: I didn't just take my time at Facebook and report it without nuance from my single perspective in a bubble.

Every single day for 2 years I was talking about what I was hearing and seeing with people outside FB.

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Academics, journalists, colleagues, judges, my parents, tech people, former FB people, former Google people, skeptics, critics, human rights leaders, people who hated the idea of the Board, people who loved it.

9/

This was beyond exhausting. I made dozens of presentations of the material to groups from Germany to London to LA to NYC. And I wrote all of those observations and thoughts and critiques up in a very lengthy piece in @YaleLJournal

https://t.co/Kbvlkda7MK

10/

I did this because I literally KNEW FROM DAY ONE that no matter what I ended up writing, I would be critiqued for access and accused of writing something insufficiently critical of Facebook.

And the best way to have unimpeachable work is to actually do ALL the hard work.

11/

Early on, I was talking to @JuliaAngwin about the project, & she gave me some absolutely critical advice on access journalism: the companies give it to you because they're getting something, so you really need to be aware of that in all your dealings and work to make it more

12/

I didn't write this thread to convince anyone. Frankly, I don't care. *I* know the piece isn't a puff piece. *I* know that I'm not in Big Tech's pocket. *I* know that I'm not a ditz who got manipulated. And I know that the work will stand on its own.

13/

I'm writing this because what sucks is I had the foresight to take this seriously, to be insanely scrupulous and try to create a record of something I thought would be important, and do ALL the hard work for that, and now the critique is: "you shouldn't have done it at all."

14/

And I have to say, that is just bonkers. If you're telling me that what is legitimizing a Board that is ABOUT TO DECIDE HOW TO CENSOR A WORLD LEADER is me and my research, I worry for you. Not even my dog takes me that seriously, and I feed her every day.

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Finally, one last thing. Imagine if I had done this work and hadn't published it where I did. And it was unknown and unreported. I can tell you what would be happening right now: I wouldn't be getting dragged, I'd be getting erased.

16/

There would be older more prominent more established legal and communications scholars "discovering" the importance of this new world court on speech, and my writing about it on Medium or in the West Louisiana Law Review would be papered right over.

17/

Thank you to everyone who has talked to me about this project, supported it, pushed back, doubted me, doubted it. You have made the work stronger and me stronger.

TL;DR: Haters gonna hate. Katers gonna Kate. This account will now return to bad puns & pictures of tomatoes

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