

The Post-Journal

Neil Young – Capitalist Sellout, Freedom Fighter Or Simply A Grumpy Old Man?

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From the moment he began playing the role of generational freedom fighter, many like me have since revered Neil Young as the provocative folk lyric hero of the hippie revolution.

Yet today, he has instead been thrust into debate for how one goes from being said freedom-fighter under the First Amendment to using free speech as the stage of reform to bid silencing another's freedom to speak.

My daily run this morning was rather melancholy. I listened to Neil Young and his imposing ensemble for what may be the last time on Spotify, and began to reflect on what may have brought us to this decision. Almost all of Neil's songs have already been stripped from Spotify. For this one hour of exercise, the lyrics and intense guitar riffs of "*Down by the River*", "*Helpless*", "*Ohio*", "*Heart of Gold*", and "*Needle and the Damage Done*" continued to loop as I could only shake my head in disbelief. Realizing that as of tomorrow, when Neil Young's music will be absent from Spotify, I will find myself faced with a new dilemma. Should I choose to listen to Neil's music further, I'll have to sign up with a new music platform and agree to their terms and conditions, all while paying yet another price of admission. It reminds me of Neil's song lyrics, "*I've seen the needle and the damage done*" comparing the covid vaccine disinformation and being ousted from Spotify. Hmmmm, ironic I would say.

Does anyone find it odd that Neil, who once used his freedom ballads to help shape progressive culture and open debate, is now trying to close the doors and silence guest speaker opinions from The Joe Rogan Experience? Could you imagine the huge uproar if this approach were taken in the attempt to silence daytime programs such as The View?

Neil, a Canadian from Toronto, became a U.S. naturalized citizen in 2020 and has lived in California since the 1960s. He is one of the most influential songwriters of all time with nearly

50 studio albums and more than 20 live albums. Of these numerous albums, 18 have been certified gold, seven platinum and three multi-platinum. In January 2021, Neil sold nearly 50% of his music rights or 1,180 songs to a London Exchange Listed company known as Hipgnosis for an estimated \$150m USD. His estimated net worth today exceeds more than \$70m USD and has shifted Neil from being “*Out of the Blue and into the Black*”. Hey, Hey, My, My.

This does bring up an uncomfortable question: Did Neil’s recent decision to terminate his arrangement with Spotify signify that he too, has become another capitalist sellout and is no longer a freedom fighter of the First Amendment? We have observed this phenomenon for about the past decade or two, where famous artists, musicians, and politicians (you know who they are) believe they know better than the rest of us and wield their money, icon culture status, and influences to sway popular belief. Did Neil just engage in an arrogant construct that predicates he knows better? Perhaps? Was the act really for the good of humanity? Maybe the purpose lay elsewhere, either to encourage discord with Spotify in a squeeze-play of notoriety, or to better position himself for something still to come. Only time will tell.

By his side in this recent debate is Joni Mitchell, perhaps Neil’s original Cinnamon Girl. Mitchell, whom in case you didn’t know wrote the lyrics for the song “*Woodstock*”, performed by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young – an incredible hit during the hippie revolution. The most famous lines go, “*Well, I came upon a child of God, He was walking along the road, And I asked him, Tell me, where are you going, This he told me, Said I’m going down to Yasgur’s farm, Gonna join in a rock and roll band, Got to get back to the land and set my soul free.*” This, of course, references Max Yasgur and the farm he provided the freedom fighters like CSNY, Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, and Country Joe and the Fish (mentioned for my Boss) to play their music in protest of the Vietnam war and other US Government debacles of the time.

Having been born in the Jamestown area in 1969, the year of Woodstock, my older siblings of nearly a decade always had 60’s and 70’s music playing in the background. As a result, it became the basis of who I am today. Music continued to shape my character and I have always been a folk spiritual music devotee of the Woodstock era. Now, I have been living outside the US for nearly 20 years and I often spectate from abroad as the US rapidly moves toward a society that no longer encourages debate, discussion, tolerance or even cooperation, but has rather deepened in disagreement and engaged in a “*my way or the highway*” clan mentality. Did Neil Young just exhibit this behavior? Yes, he did, and Spotify showed him the door. So much for tolerance, cooperation or freedom of speech.

This clan mindset of what's right vs. wrong is deeply established throughout media megaliths that control both information and the pace of its publication, and directly feeds in the formation of opinions.

Main media actors like CNBC, MSNBC, FOX, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, BBC, and C-Span, as well as the newer social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit, all supply relevant information to their clan or herd. They all come with agendas to sway opinion and are funded by billionaires like the Koch brothers or George Soros and from Political Think Tanks such as The Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, Lincoln Project and the Brookings Institute. What have we become when the news can no longer be labeled 'news'? Today we are continually assailed with bastardized versions of current events with opinionated angles designed to foster support from the clan. It makes one wonder. Is there a secret James Bond lair where credible journalists like Walter Conkrite, Peter Jennings, or the much younger prowess of Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather have gone? News credibility doesn't seem to exist anywhere we turn. Wouldn't it be refreshing to turn on the tube, read an article online, or a newspaper article, that simply told the news as the news occurred without manipulative language? Spotify has now joined the list and forever been placed as an apparently detestable weapon of disinformation just like the rest.

I've been fortunate to have had the opportunity to see Neil's brilliance on stage three times, along with my school mates from Frewsburg, and have adored his music since I was very young. As time passes, Neil has reached 76 years young and remains full of piss and vinegar as I often heard the old timers say. I sat back today in Hong Kong reminiscing all of this and thought, "*Has Neil reached Maslow's pyramid pinnacle of self-actualization from all his notoriety, financial success, all while living the American dream under the First Amendment, or is his behavior simply because time has caught up to him and he's just become a grumpy old man?*" Either way, it will remind me not to become like him. Free speech is sacred regardless of your own or others' beliefs. The lyrics from Neil's famous song "*Old Man*" from the 1972 album Harvest goes like this, "*Old man, Look at my life, I'm a lot like you were*". I think not Neil. Sorry.

"*Keep on Rocking in the Free World*" Neil. You're a hell of an artist and musician with the talent of more than ten thousand people. It's a shame that your monthly 6 million faithful listeners on Spotify won't be able to follow you.