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Amazon Removes Free Speech ‘Exercise’ Featuring 3-D Printed Gun Code Book

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Amazon has removed a book from its platform containing little more than computer code.

While details about why Amazon removed the book are limited, the function of the code, to 3-D print a plastic gun that fires real bullets—called The Liberator—appears to be the most likely cause.

What we know for sure about the decision is that the “book was removed for violating our content guidelines,” as an Amazon spokesperson confirmed. But the spokesperson declined to elaborate on which guidelines the book violated.

As a U.S district judge in the state of Washington is in the final days of deciding whether to remove an injunction preventing the creator of the code, Cody Wilson, from publishing it online, the removal of the book could have far-reaching consequences.

“The scope of the injunction is to prevent Cody Wilson and Defense Distributed from publishing the files online,” said Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow in constitutional studies at the Cato Institute. “If the files are available in hard copy or book it is different.”

Included in the Amazon terms provided by the spokesperson are pornography, offensive content, illegal and infringing content, the use of certain public domain materials and poor customer service experience.

For his part, Wilson further clarified that the 3-D-printed gun code was “committed to the public domain under an express open source license in 2013” and added that he has “no problems at all” with the book being published on Amazon.

The \$20 book, titled *The Liberator Code Book: An Exercise in the Freedom of Speech*, received a mere seven reviews on Amazon before being removed from the site. But one of the reviews, written by a “verified user,” describes the potential implications of the book:

“It doesn’t really matter which side you fall on when it comes to guns. The fact that this book exists forces you to think about how far are we willing to go with gun control as it strays into suppression of free speech.”

Published by a C J Awelow, the book follows in a tradition of releasing in book form code deemed dangerous by the U.S. government. In June 1995, MIT Press published a book containing the code written by Phil Zimmermann for PGP email encryption—then considered a munition.

As specifically relates to the Liberator code book, while the software version of Zimmermann’s code was deemed a munition and legally prevented from export for years, the book version was able to freely circulate. Even today, as the software version of the PGP code is one of the most widely used email encryption tools, Amazon’s own website makes the book available at collector’s prices.

In an interview with *Forbes*, Zimmerman shared his thoughts on Cody Wilson’s code: “I reluctantly concede that he should be able to publish his blueprints. If he were publishing blueprints for body armor I would enthusiastically endorse him for doing this.”

Offering a less measured stance is Andrew Patrick, media director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. Patrick called 3-D-printed firearms “assassination guns,” that are not covered by either the Second Amendment protection of the right to bear arms or the First Amendment protections of free speech.

“You cannot yell ‘fire’ in a crowded theater because it endangers the general public,” he said. “Undetectable, untraceable 3-D-printed guns are equally—if not more—dangerous.”

Further caution regarding the potential dangers of the 3-D-printable gun files came from Zimmermann himself, who protested nuclear armament in the 1980s and is concerned that legally permitting the proliferation of the files could set a dangerous precedent.

“There’s a tendency for people to try to adhere to a purist set of principles,” said Zimmermann, warning about the potential of files that encode rapidly improving gene editing techniques called CRISPR to create a disease that can’t be cured.

“If you take the position that anything should be publishable under free speech, then when everybody dies of some exotic manmade virus we can all take deep satisfaction that we adhered to our truest principles of free speech.”