



# UNITY FOR EQUALITY

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## April Issue

Photo by Durkhanai Ayubi

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# Is Tik Tok Really That Bad?

By Lucas Giordano

There is swelling international concern regarding the social media platform TikTok. In particular, the company that founded TikTok, ByteDance, stands repeatedly accused of providing their plentiful supply of customer data to the Chinese government.

As a former user of TikTok and a longtime skeptic of the legitimacy behind datapocalypse doomsaying, the current conversation around the hugely popular video app is cause for any social media user to give some serious consideration to the collection and dissemination of personal information.

The issue with TikTok data-harvesting is not only the violation of privacy it incurs, but the implications it has on the international stage of diplomacy and competition. The proliferation of Chinese industry and economic imperialism has made China the United States' fiercest contemporary competitor. ByteDance, a Chinese company, exists as a potential reservoir of data for over 100 million Americans who use or have downloaded the application.

If ByteDance is in close collaboration with the Chinese government, the United States would be supplying its greatest global competitor with detailed personal information on around a third of its population.

Take India for instance, a long-time rival of China in the international arena due in large part to border disputes in the Kashmir Mountains. In 2020, India imposed an international ban on TikTok over suspicions that the application was collaborating with the Chinese government, further fortifying national security on the digital front given the ongoing conflict.



Ban measures have been adopted around the globe, with many European countries prohibiting the installation of TikTok on government devices. Similar bans exist in the United States but are primarily focused on government devices and do not currently exist en masse, with the only other organizations banning TikTok apart from the government being certain universities. As recently as March 1, 2023, a bill passed the US House that would allow President Biden to implement a national ban on TikTok, essentially killing the app's presence in America.

This bill exists as a component of the DATA Act (Deterring American Technological Adversaries), a government initiative to insulate America from the newfound threat posed by technological manipulation.

The justification for such a ban, national security, is offset by what many Americans might deem a violation of their First Amendment rights. By banning TikTok, the US government is preventing citizens from a widely-used and familiar avenue of creativity, self-expression, and social exchange.





To forgo a national reverence for free speech and expression, there would need to be a definitive case showing the immediate danger posed by TikTok's data harvesting and its collaboration with the Chinese government, which does not necessarily exist at the moment. A 2020 research study found that, compared with other social media platforms, TikTok allows itself the most permissions on your device, giving TikTok deeper access to your phone and its data profile than popular competitors like Instagram and Snapchat. Furthermore, the study raises concerns over Chinese government computer science engineers having access to private customer data in select instances. However, the curtain has yet to be drawn on a large-scale scandal that would be enough to cement American public opinion in favor of the app's removal.

The TikTok issue, while unique in its diplomatic implications, serves as a theoretical microcosm for the data industry at large as far as regulation goes. The internet's abrupt genesis and exponential growth in size and scope have far outpaced the government's ability to digest and thoughtfully regulate it. Data harvesting is just one appendage of the digital space overdue for a closer look from a regulatory and ethical standpoint.

The removal of TikTok could serve as a watershed moment for the regulation of the data industry and the internet at large, or it could never come to pass. Regardless, it is paramount that we begin to consider the current and lasting impacts the gathering and sale of personal data has on society and the economy, particularly when it holds dire implications for international security

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# Who are the Karo Tribe?

Ethiopia is home to more than 90 distinct ethnic groups, all of which share similar customary languages, rituals, religious faith, etc. Dwelling on the east banks of the Omo River is the Kara tribe, popularly the Karo tribe, the smallest ethnic tribe with approximately 1,000–2,000 people. The Karo people are closely interrelated to the Harmar and Banna tribes because they all speak within the Omotic language group, specifically known among many tribes residing in Ethiopia. Interestingly, there are no conventional dialects in Africa, so the Karo tribe, among others, embrace numerous self-made, unclassified languages.

Karo villages are established with thatch houses made with straw, heather, palm branches, and other dried plants. They are settled right near the Omo River because its seasonal floods are vital for fertile land and continue their practice of recessional cultivation, where irrigation is key for growing crops such as maize, beans, and sorghum grain. Because the Karo tribe are nearby

more dominant tribes such as the Mursi tribe, the men and women are prohibited from forming intermarriages for the sole purpose of maintaining a solid ancestry.

Appearance is significant to the Karo people to indicate beauty. The tradition of painting their faces and bodies using natural resources such as white chalk, colored ochre (an earthy pigment varied in brown, yellow, or red tints), ash, mineral rocks, etc. has been around for 500 years. Ornamental expressions like lines and dots cover the body to appeal to the opposite sex, much like peacocks when they shake their luminous feathers to invite a peahen's attention. Karo women especially embrace self-decoration by dutifully inflicting scars on their torsos to exhibit beauty and sexual appeal. Such scars include deep-set dotted patterns circulating the upper arms, swirls around the face, or long dashes across the chest area. As for attire, Karo women traditionally don loincloths made from animal skin accessorized with cowrie shells and

multicolored beads. Even their ear lobes and mouth are stretched to input wide wooden plates as another sign of beauty and maturity.

Karo men also inflict scars to resemble boldness. For instance, scars on the chest indicate a Karo man's courage for slaying a wild animal or an enemy from an opposing tribe. You may have watched Black Panther and encountered the array of raised lumps marked across the chest of antagonist Erik Killmonger (played by Michael B. Jordan). That portrayal of ritual scarification is identical to that of the Karo men. Hence, every single scar represents one kill. Moreover, the tribe's male warriors usually wear hair buns layered with gray or red ochre clay and topped with ostrich feathers. This unique hairstyle is routinely worn for an extensive period of time and redone every 3-6 months.

Additionally, festivals and rituals are sacred to the Karo people. The Bula initiation is just one of several festivals in which Karo men are permitted to showcase their charm to attract the women in the tribe. All while enveloped in ashes and fat, younger Karo men prove their maturity to manhood by literally leaping over a line of cattle at least six times in a row. If victorious, the young men are entitled to appear in holy places with the Karo elders, whilst those who fail are dishonored by the rest of the tribe. This ceremony overall is only conducted in large groups with same-aged boys which sets them apart from the Hamar tribe where the ceremony is executed individually.

The Karo tribe's way of life deviates far from the urbanized trajectory of society in which people are classified by status such as wealth and cultural background. Rather, this Ethiopian tribe is one of many which exalts possibilities for nature, religion, gender, and cultural interdependence.

*By Charmaine Swasey*



Young Karo woman © Alfonso Romero Santromán



# WHAT IS THE DAY OF SILENCE?

BY JASON LEE

In 1986, two college students would hold an event that would soon become known as the Day of Silence. Ever since, there has been a day in April each year where thousands of students all across America vow to be silent. Officially organized by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) since 2002, Day of Silence is a student-led effort to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ efforts and protest the harmful discrimination against LGBTQ+ students.

GLSEN helps provide materials for interested parties to run a successful Day of Silence event at their schools. Moreover, they encourage interested educators and student leaders to host their own events to spotlight LGBTQ+ issues. Providing shareable graphics and statistics, GLSEN puts information into the hands of those interested in raising awareness.

Throughout the school day, students taking part in Day of Silence gain the school's permission to not talk for the whole school day. Though, some communicate in other ways like writing on sheets of paper. At the end of the day, many schools hold a campus-wide assembly to spotlight issues and foster conversation surrounding LGBTQ+ topics.

Though Day of Silence has students vow to literally be silent for a day, its impact and meaning is meant to demonstrate the complete opposite. By being silent, students demand a spotlight and speak out against violence/harassment towards the LGBTQ+ community. In many states, legislation does not support LGBTQ+ members, much less students in the community. Young leaders and LGBTQ+ people are once again being silenced by others in the country. Now more than ever, events like Day of Silence are needed to show that there are communities that will not stand for continued discrimination. Any support from any person has a significant impact on the movement, and participation in Day of Silence is just one of the many ways someone can help out.



Moreover, participation is not limited to any single orientation. Students of all kinds can participate or raise awareness even if they don't consider themselves directly part of the LGBTQ+ communities. Straight-identifying students can simply be allies and help to promote their peers.

Furthermore, Day of Silence does not have to be limited to a single day either. Though GLSEN's Day of Silence is an annual event in April, supporting the LGBTQ+ community can and should be done every day of the year. Continued support can be shown in all kinds of ways. Ask yourself what simple things you can do or say to help promote LGBTQ+ members. Buy from LGBTQ+ businesses, donate to local causes, preserve and protect safe spaces, and speak out against discrimination. No one deserves to be a victim of violence solely based on their orientation.

Day of Silence being a student-led demonstration goes to show how the American youth have a voice and want to use it for change. Though Day of Silence is just one day out of the year to speak out against the harassment toward LGBTQ+ students, its effects and significance demand to be lifelong. In essence, it is a demand from students to be compassionate and support everyone. And to the educators, parents, and the general population, take a step back and listen to their resounding silence.







# What Lies in Store This Earth Day?

by Charmaine Swasey



Former U.S. Democratic Senator Gaylord Nelson was an environmentalist and the founder of Earth Day. Nelson organized this annual event on [April 22, 1970](#) as a day for the general public to voice their environmental concerns and press politicians to recognize the intensity of environmental impacts such as pollution, land degradation, etc. Since then, the environmental movement has heightened on a global scale and led to the formation of organizations such as the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#).

Now in 2023, it's never been more crucial to turn back the clock—the [Climate Clock](#), that is. As maintained by the [team](#) behind the Climate Clock, the deadline to limit global warming to 1.5°C has dropped from 7 years to “6 YRS, 100 DAYS” and counting. This critical time window indicates that carbon emissions will be used up and increase the risks of global warming, should the time run down to zero.

This year's theme, [Invest in Our Planet](#), aims to uphold the movement towards making the planet ozone-friendly through

the influence of everyday citizens, government, and business officials. Some environmentally friendly actions anyone can do include limiting the daily habits of food waste by planning out how much groceries you need for the week vs. buying in bulk because of the risk of food spoilage. Even a simple diet change by adding more plant-based foods to meals is convenient because it requires less combustible gas on stoves or coal on grills than cooking animal products.

Switching to reusable bags, using glass food storage containers, and drinking from reusable



reusable bottles/cups help control one's plastic consumption, reducing the hazard of toxic chemicals resulting from the breakdown of plastic on landfill sites. These changes greatly protect the world's ocean and green lands from contaminated plastic particles where animals that accidentally ingest it are susceptible to harm. One can even join a local or national cleanup team to keep the natural environment intact. Even the simple act of discarding litter as tiny as a gum wrapper is beneficial.

Lastly, art can effectively reveal the negative impacts of greenhouse gasses, waste, and other factors in the environment. Photography, for instance, can feature close details of an area affected by human-induced environmental change and global warming. Such photos don't have to be as grand as a wildfire in a forested area either. Capturing waste material on pedestrian zones, exhibiting exhaust fumes from factory buildings, or displaying the smog of a city's skyscrapers are influential. Besides photography, adorning waste as a fashion statement or creating displays out of discarded products produce strong points of reducing, reusing, and recycling. Thus, creativity to end pollution may grant one the power to share their perspective on climate change and instill the emergence to act for the sake of a greener tomorrow.

What good is free speech if one doesn't voice their concerns, especially one where climate change poses a major risk to their way of life? Acknowledging and questioning how political and economic issues are further intensifying the effects of climate change is significant to persuade world leaders to mandate a plan in the planet's best interests. Consider, for example, how Russia's continued war on Ukraine is imposing the risk of increased armament and nuclear/carbon destruction to oil depots and gas power plants. Also, consider the economic issue of increased manufacturing to meet the annual quota of businesses associated with any type of consumer goods, which leads to daily upticks in carbon emissions. Hence, Earth Day serves as a reminder to all about how government-level decisions around the world can have rippling consequences on climate change.

The lasting message this Earth Day is to divert from material wealth. Instead let's support improved climatic, political, and economic habits to better the human experience and preserve it for future generations.



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# WHAT IS EID AL-FITR?

by Jason Lee

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Eid Mubarak! You may have recently heard this Arabic phrase meaning “blessed festival,” but what exactly does it mean?

In Islam, Eid al-Fitr is the first of two official holidays in the religion that Muslims from all over celebrate. Though some may not view it as a sacred holiday due to its lack of mention in the Qur’an, Eid al-Fitr is observed by many as a way to celebrate the ending of Ramadan.

A month-long period of fasting from sunrise to sunset, Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. During this time, observants focus on prayer and community. In 2023, Ramadan ends on April 20th, the first day of the tenth month Shawwal begins, and Eid al-Fitr is observed..

Eid al-Fitr literally means “Holiday of Breaking the Fast” and is celebrated for around one to three days. During this time, families and friends gather in order to celebrate and end their month-long devotion to not eating.

Thus, Eid al-Fitr is a time to feast on delicious goodies, and people from all over have a variety of foods they use to celebrate. Some traditional foods include samosas, turkish delight, cookies, baklava, dates, and more.

On the morning of Eid, special prayers reserved for Eid, salat al-aid, are performed. Families, friends, and communities gather to participate in the joyous occasion and may host events or parties to celebrate with everyone. Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam,

is the duty of Muslims to give to those in need. During Eid al-Fitr, zakat may be seen in the form of charity donations so that Muslims who may need financial assistance can celebrate as well.

A common phrase, “Eid Mubarak,” is often spoken toward each other as a greeting and a way to offer well wishes. While this is a generally accepted phrase, it may be helpful to know that it is not the only way to wish someone well for Eid. Since Islam spans countries and cultures all over the world, the term “Eid Mubarak” and even the holiday name of Eid al-Fitr itself can have different variations. Regardless, every greeting is one filled with joy and intent.

Furthermore, Eid al-Fitr is not the only Eid to exist. The other of the two Islamic holidays, Eid al-Adha, is arguably a bigger holiday that involves sacrificing an animal to represent sharing food with everybody. This holiday lasts for four days, while Eid al-Fitr is three. Thus, you may hear some people refer to Eid al-Fitr as Smaller or Lesser Eid.

Ultimately, when celebrating Eid, remember that it is a holiday of joy to commemorate a devotion to one’s religion. After fasting for an entire month, it is once again coming together to eat with those you hold close. It is a time of remembrance, charity, community, and festivity. What more could anyone ask for in a holiday? So to all those who may be celebrating, Eid Mubarak!



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