

The Hate-Fueled Rise of r/The_Donald—and Its Epic Takedown | WIRED

By Robert Peck

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On March 22, 2017, at 2:40 pm local time, a terrorist attacked pedestrians on Westminster Bridge in London with a truck, killing five people and injuring at least 50. Thirty-one hours later, a Reddit user named TrumpBeatsHillary wrote a post on the forum page r/The_Donald. Its title was “But hey, it wasn’t all bad. In the end a Muslim was shot.”

Since mid-2016, when The_Donald—or “T_D,” a subsection of the massive social site Reddit.com—came into its own, posts like these made the forum the most notorious in the history of a website with a fair number of skeletons in its closet. By March 2017, when these posts were made, the page’s membership had swelled to more than 350,000 members. It was to double that and more, nearing 800,000 subscribers, before—on June 29, 2020—Reddit’s staff banned the subreddit, and it vanished from the site’s pages for good. (Advance Publications, which owns WIRED’s publisher, Condé Nast, is a Reddit shareholder.)

In the five years of its existence, the subreddit played host to Russian propaganda, launched memes and stories parroted by Trump and his campaign, conducted opposition research on behalf of the president, and harassed (and was harassed by) hundreds of people around the internet. Major media organizations have covered the page again and again. But while Reddit changed its rules and rewrote its algorithms to stop T_D (and other pages) from dominating the site, it resisted banning it. Only now, in the wake of half a decade of online protest and justification after justification by Reddit staff all the way up to CEO Steve Huffman, has that resistance collapsed.

And therein hangs a tale.

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