

Suspended Alt-Right Activist Charles Johnson Sues Twitter



Summary: Charles C. Johnson is suing Twitter for banning him in 2015.

Since his banishment in 2015, right-wing activist Charles C. Johnson has threatened to sue Twitter for years. Now that day has finally come.

According to BuzzFeed News, Johnson filed a lawsuit in California Superior Court in Fresno on Monday. His attorney Robert E. Barnes said that Johnson was banned from Twitter because of his political views, and this is a violation of free speech. The lawsuit is seeking millions in damages.

"This is going to be a very serious case over the freedom of the internet," Johnson said to BuzzFeed News. "And whether people have the right to say what they mean and mean what they say."

Johnson is a former Breitbart reporter who owns the investigations website, WeSearchr. In May 2015, he asked on Twitter for donations to help "take out" Black Lives Matter co-founder DeRay McKesson. Twitter banned the alt-right activist after that, and Johnson claimed his tweet was taken out of context.

Before his ban, Johnson had spread false rumors that President Barack Obama was gay and had posted photos and the address of a person he claimed had been exposed to the Ebola virus. In his lawsuit, Johnson said that emails published by BuzzFeed News proved that Twitter had removed him because he was a "politically disfavored individual."

"We permanently suspended Chuck Johnson even though it wasn't direct violent threats. It was just a call that the policy team made," Twitter's VP of user services, Tina Bhatnagar, wrote to CEO Jack Dorsey in January 2016. "That account is permanently suspended and nobody for no reason may reactivate it. Period."

In Johnson's lawsuit, he said that Twitter did not conform to its own policy and thus violated the user-platform agreement. However, Eric Goldman, director of the Santa Clara University School of Law's High Tech Law Institute, told BuzzFeed News that Johnson has a difficult case to win because Twitter essentially has the right to ban whoever they want.

"Twitter can choose to terminate anyone's account at any time without repercussion," Goldman told BuzzFeed News. "It has a categorical right to block whoever they choose."

Twitter declined to comment on the pending litigation. Goldman said that as a publisher, they are protected by the First Amendment as well as Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act.

Johnson told BuzzFeed News that his lawsuit is a statement challenging the way publishers treat conservatives. Aware that he could lose the case, he said that getting the lawsuit to push forward and into discovery could still be a victory.

"You can lose a lawsuit and still win the argument," Johnson said.

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Source: BuzzFeed News

What do you think of Johnson's lawsuit? Let us know in the comments below.