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## Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore key issues at the intersection of tech, ethics, and society.

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### What we're thinking about

The incessant tick-tock of devastating news in the U.S. and beyond, and how technology seems to be playing an ever-more-present role in it all.

In the wake of mass shootings at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, and a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, we want to open this newsletter with remarks from Eric Liu, CEO of Citizen University, an Unfinished Network partner dedicated to building a culture of powerful, responsible citizenship across the country. These remarks are excerpted from a [longer message to the community](#) published on Wednesday:

*It is hard, when we are flooded by grief and numbed by death, to exercise civic imagination. But this is when we need it most. There is a different society to be had... One in which we are a strong people, able to integrate power and character, who don't wait for strong leaders but in fact lead our leaders.*

*That is the society that every person I work with is trying to create...It is what is in your power to make, at every scale from neighborhood to nation.*

*Come and build it.*

### Forging a better web for all

Earlier this week, our team [announced a landmark collaboration with Polkadot](#) to develop the *Decentralized Social Networking Protocol (DSNP)*—a groundbreaking technology designed to empower users toward a more

equitable, socially aware web that is not defined by a select few tech giants holding your data in a vise grip. Our effort is called [Project Liberty](#).

This work is no small thing. The ambition is to quite literally build the foundation for more ethical social networking in the next generation of the internet, where users will have the tools to fully control access to their information without needing to trust the motives of any one entity (like Facebook, or any of the platforms that profit from extracting your data and targeting content against it).

There are many problems with the way the web currently operates, but perhaps two of the biggest are *lock-in* and *surveillance*. It is very difficult to leave a platform like Facebook, no matter how disturbed you are by its various wrongdoings, because you have amassed a meaningful network of friends and content there over a period of years; this is what's called your social graph. Meanwhile, Facebook leverages all of that data—and the data you continue to create by using Facebook, because it's so difficult to leave—to drive engagement and serve ads in a model known to some as *surveillance capitalism*.

This is an unhealthy state of affairs. This business model—in which you have very little autonomy, and algorithms determine which content you're most likely to see—leads to problems ranging from misinformation to outrage to social division to a weakened democracy. Our world is warped around this social media black hole.

With Project Liberty now joining forces with Polkadot—a web3 network protocol that allows different blockchains to work together—we believe there is a genuine, substantial opportunity to break the current model and set new terms for healthy engagement in online spaces. In short, Project Liberty is designed to return control of the social graph to *you*. It would allow you to set the terms of how your data is used by platforms, revoke access when necessary or desired, and move your network elsewhere if you so choose. None of it would rely on you trusting a central organization, even ours: The underpinning infrastructure of how we build relationships and engagement online—the foundational layer of our digital lives—would become a public utility that is not driven by private profit motives.

Here's Polkadot founder Gavin Wood, also a co-founder of Ethereum and the founder of the Web3 Foundation, [explaining the purpose of Project Liberty in a conversation with Alex Kantrowitz](#), host of the Big Technology Podcast:

*I think what's wrong with [existing social networks] is pretty much what's wrong with all centralized information communication architecture. It allows us, as independent, sovereign, decision-making entities, to be manipulated. And if you can manipulate people en masse, then the world doesn't turn into such a great place.*

*I think 'democratic' is often used as a means of trying to say, "We as sovereign and decision-making entities should be empowered through the*

*ability to inform ourselves about the world and through the ability to make decisions based upon that information." And I think with the services that are being provided to us at the moment through the big social media companies, that's not working so well. I think we are losing the ability to inform ourselves well, and we are increasingly being manipulated.*

...

*People are hooked, right? And they're hooked because of the network effect. There's huge amounts of inertia. It's not that the product is necessarily so amazing that the individuals are using it purely based on that, it's that there is a service being provided that the individual has decided that they now cannot do without. Classic addictive product, right? Very similar to, I would say, the nicotine industry. And I think if [Project Liberty] can be some means of allowing people to get the same social fix, but without the bad, potentially democracy-destroying elements of [social media], then great. This is a good thing.*

We would emphasize that technology alone cannot solve social problems. A diverse range of stakeholders must participate in setting terms for the new digital world to come. Here's Frank McCourt, creator of Unfinished and founder of Project Liberty, [sharing his perspective](#) on this with Gavin Wood and Yahoo! Finance Editor in Chief Andy Serwer:

*The tech needs to be fixed massively, but think of the governance piece and the movement piece as equally important and may turn out to be more challenging than the tech. We need to talk about those a bit more, because I think one of the fundamental flaws in our set of expectations is that somehow the technologists are gonna solve for the societal issues. That's a fundamentally flawed premise. Society needs to solve for the societal issues and tell the technologists: What's the framework they should work within and innovate within? What are the guardrails they should be between? What are the values and principles that they should be incorporating? What should they be optimizing for? It shouldn't be up to one of these large entities.*

...

*Social scientists need to understand the power of this technology and be held accountable as much as technologists need to understand the impact on humanity and be held accountable.*

This project aims to support community engagement for years to come. We invite you to participate by [engaging with DSNP at the technical level](#), by connecting with our movement through the [Unfinished Network](#), or by taking part in conversations on governance through the [McCourt Institute](#).

## Inspiring conversations from Davos

Also this week—a busy one!—we convened a number of high-impact discussions during the World Economic Forum in Davos. We're excited to share full videos of these events below:

- **[Tech and the Future of Democracy](#)**: A conversation with Dr. Hahrie Han, inaugural director of the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and Teresa Hutson, VP of Microsoft's Tech and Corporate Responsibility Group, moderated by Damon Beres, editor-in-chief at Unfinished.
- **[What Will It Take to Build a Better Web?](#)** A conversation with Gavin Wood and Frank McCourt, moderated by Andy Serwer.
- **[The New New Media — Exploring the Possibilities of Communication and Compensation in the Next Generation of the Web](#)**: A conversation with Michael Casey, CCO of Coindesk, Leela de Kretser, global breaking news editor at Reuters, and Jamil Anderlini, editor-in-chief of Politico Europe, moderated by Nick Thompson, CEO of the Atlantic.
- **[TikTok at War — Trust and Truth in a Time of Conflict](#)**: A conversation with Salvatore Romano, head researcher at Tracking Exposed, and Nabiha Syed, CEO of the Markup, moderated by Vivian Schiller, executive director of Aspen Digital.
- **[Alex Kantrowitz's Big Technology Podcast Live from Davos with Gavin Wood](#)**, and another with **[Nick Clegg](#)**, Meta's president of global affairs.

We'd like to leave you today with **[a provocation from Dr. Han in that first panel](#)**: *"How do we create a 21st century public square that realizes and strengthens the promise of democracy as opposed to undermining it? Without the intentionality around that, part of what we've seen in the past generation is that [the digital public square] can sometimes undermine the democratic outcomes that we might be striving for."*

## Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished (**[@byUnfinished](#)**) on Twitter for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

Project Liberty, 888 Seventh Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, New York 10106

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