UNF IN'SHED

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Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

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What we're thinking about

A number of our team members have been reading ***Internet for the People***, a recent book by **Ben Tarnoff** about the fight for a "more just and equitable internet" — something we certainly care about at Unfinished as we build momentum around **Project Liberty**.

Tarnoff's book argues that privatization of the internet is the root of many evils: Because everything from the basic, physical infrastructure of the internet to the social apps we use are controlled by corporate profiteers, these systems never work exclusively for the public good. ("If privatization meant creating an internet that served the principle of profit maximization," he writes, "deprivatization means creating an internet organized by the idea that people, not profit, should rule.") There's room for disagreement with his perspective, of course, but it's great food for thought.

We were struck by a passage explaining how only a true democratic movement can counter this system:

> *From the edges to the core, from the neighborhoods to the backbones, making a democratic internet must be the work of a movement. This is what was missing in the 1990s, and its absence enabled industry to push through privatization of a particularly comprehensive kind. It wasn't a failure of ideas — activists had ideas — but of power. Other possibilities existed, such as a "public lane on the information superhighway," but the instrument for making those possibilities practical did not: namely, masses of people willing to take disruptive action to overcome the opposition of industry and its faithful representatives in the government.*

Elsewhere in the book, Tarnoff explores how the digital divide is a major impediment to full participation in this democracy — without access to the internet, people are not afforded equality and economic opportunity. (We'll explore this a bit more in a second.)

He writes about Detroit: "The appalling condition of broadband in Detroit is a testament to how inequalities in connectivity tend to be highly racialized: in a city that is almost 80 percent Black, upward of 60 percent of low-income households have no home broadband. A staggering 70 percent of school-age children have no home internet of any kind." (For more context on these statistics and Detroit's digital divide, see **this report from the University of Michigan**.)

Lacking support from traditional internet providers, some people take matters into their own hands and create their own grassroots networks, as Tarnoff explains:

> *Thanks to [the **Equitable Internet Initiative (EII)**], Detroiters who would otherwise be too poor to afford internet service can look up bus schedules and video-chat with their grandchildren. They have access to a resource they need in order to exercise meaningful control of their lives.*
>
> *But by embedding the network within a community organizing effort, EII is also subverting privatization in a subtler sense … They are building a network that brings people into new relationships of trust and support and mutual concern, forged in the course of caring for collective infrastructure and caring for one another.*

It's a timely reminder: There is still so much work to be done to create a true, thriving multiracial democracy and a more just economy. But many people are rolling up their sleeves — including our Unfinished Network partners.

🗣️Listen to our latest Unfinished Conversation

On that note… As part of our ongoing series of "Unfinished Conversations" on Twitter Spaces, we convened a panel this week in partnership with **Heartland Forward**, a nonprofit focused on improving economic opportunity in the center of the United States, and one of our network partners. The talk was about closing the digital divide, and it was co-hosted by Angie Cooper, Chief Program Officer at Heartland Forward; Bryan Walsh, Editor of Future Perfect at Vox; Shira Lazar, Founder of What's Trending; and Damon Beres, our Editor in Chief.

Here are some takeaways:

- Beres on why broadband access is a critical issue to be reckoned with: "If you don't have a computer at home with a good broadband connection, then you have less opportunity to get an education, you have less opportunity to apply to jobs. Lots of problems all flow from this question of broadband access. So just in the interest of democratizing technology and ensuring that people actually have fair economic opportunities across the board, broadband access is a major issue."

- Cooper on why education is also a component of the digital divide: "Digital skills and education are real, and we need to make sure that we're providing the digital skills for the tools that exist today, but also the technology of the future. Because that's how we're going to make sure that we don't find ourselves in a completely new digital divide in the next three to five years."

- Walsh on the ways the digital divide extends beyond the U.S.: Much "of the world's population has **never been on the internet**, period, and that has to be addressed over time, as well, or you just sort of export the problem globally at the end of the day. If we think of what you need to be a functioning citizen here in the United States, and probably in the future globally as well, digital access is going to be key along with the visual literacy and some element of knowing how to use these tools to begin with. The sooner we can close that, the better."

You can listen to the whole conversation here. And make sure to follow us on Twitter — we'll be hosting conversations like this every two weeks.

If this is the kind of conversation that inspires you, we'd also like to remind you: **Join us at Unfinished Live this September** for fantastic programming at the intersection of tech, art, ideas, and impact.

📰 Other notable headlines

🌐 Facebook is launching a major overhaul of its News Feed. It will now feature two main tabs: "Home" and "Feed." **As described by _Wired_'s Brian Barrett**, Home "will ply you with videos and posts from strangers (along with accounts you actually follow) that ranking algorithms have decided you'll engage with," while Feed presents chronologically sorted posts from friends and pages you follow. Barrett describes that second idea as "part of a broader reclamation of algorithm-free zones on social media" — a hot topic following **Frances Haugen's revelations last year.**

🎨 OpenAI is **massively expanding access its DALL·E 2 program**, which uses artificial intelligence to create original images based on typed prompts. (The prompts and resulting images can be _wild_ — just browse the "**dalle2test**"

Instagram account for a taste.) And here's where things get really interesting: OpenAI says "users get full usage rights to commercialize the images they create with DALL·E, including the right to reprint, sell, and merchandise." The era of AI-generated swag is truly upon us, presenting opportunities and challenges to human beings who rely on their art and design skills to make a living.

🌑 Audius, a music-streaming service built on a blockchain platform, **now offers users the ability to tip artists** using the $AUDIO token. It's one small step toward a different economic model for the digital music industry, which is infamous for stiffing artists. For more ideas about the intersection of web3 and music, check out our **interview with Jessica Powell, CEO of AudioShake**.

💰 **Amazon is buying OneMedical**, a primary healthcare provider, for $3.9 billion, drastically expanding the tech empire's reach — potentially into new sources of customer data. As Elizabeth Dwoskin, Silicon Valley Correspondent at the *Washington Post* **put it**…

Elizabeth Dwoskin ✔
@lizzadwoskin

My employer and my grocery store and NOW my health care provider are all owned by Jeff Bezos!!

washingtonpost.com
Amazon to buy One Medical for $3.9 billion in big push into health care

Eep!

Thank you for reading.

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

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team