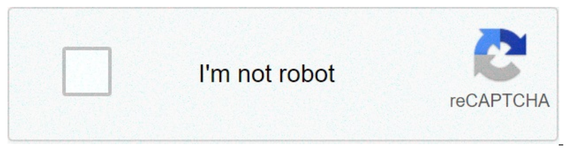


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# David icke was right

Spotify has removed a controversial podcast featuring an interview with conspiracy theorist David Icke. The streaming service pulled the episode, published by London Real on April 7, hours after CNBC brought it to the company's attention on Wednesday. "That episode has been removed from the Spotify platform as it is a violation of our content policies," a spokesperson told CNBC. Apple is yet to remove the same podcast from its podcast platform. Apple did not respond to CNBC's request for comment. The podcast is titled "David Icke - The coronavirus conspiracy: How Covid-19 will seize your rights & destroy our economy."London Real host Brian Rose starts the episode by explaining how his last interview with Icke went viral, receiving more than 7 million listens and more comments than any other London Real episode. "That tells me one thing, people want to hear your opinion," he said. In the episode, which is 2 hour 33 minute long, Icke doubts the existence of coronavirus and links it to 5G. The existence of coronavirus is scientifically proven and scientists have found no evidence to suggest there is any link to 5G. The conspiracy theory has led some people to set fire to 5G masts in Britain. The World Health Organization updated its coronavirus myth-busting web page last month to inform people that 5G doesn't spread Covid-19.The next-generation 5G mobile network relies on signals carried out by radio waves, which are part of the electromagnetic spectrum. The scientific consensus is that 5G is safe and poses no risk to humans. Other tech companies have already pulled Icke's content from their platforms. On May 2, YouTube removed Icke's channel after repeatedly telling him that he was violating YouTube's policies by posting misleading information about the coronavirus pandemic. On May 1, Facebook took down Icke's official page after concluding he had posted "health misinformation that could cause physical harm".U.K. media regulator Ofcom ruled on April 20 that a lengthy TV interview with Icke on the coronavirus was a risk to the public's health. It was broadcast on the small, London-focussed TV channel London Live. On the same day, the regulator "issued guidance" to ITV after presenter Eamon Holmes made comments about 5G and coronavirus on the popular breakfast show "This Morning." Please enable browser cookies to use this feature. Learn more. Preview Preview By Reuters StaffFootage being shared on social media shows a known conspiracy theorist making false claims about the coronavirus pandemic being “fake”, and how it is being used to push forward a new world order.Reuters Fact Check. REUTERSThe interview has been shared on several Facebook accounts using different camera angles (here, here) and features David Icke making these claims.He says: “More and more people all over the world - it’s increasing all the time in country after country after country - are realising that they’re part of a scam. They’ve been had. And the scam is to transform human society using the excuse of this fake virus.”Lockdowns, he adds, have been introduced to countries around the world to “destroy the global economy” to ensure local businesses are ruined, and to make way for governments to prop citizens up with a guaranteed income.“The guaranteed income will be presented as a way of giving people survival income, if that, because all the jobs have gone […] and there comes with that a few consequences,” he said.According to Icke, these consequences include mandatory vaccinations that are a “horrific and sinister agenda for humanity” and “you have to do what the government says”.These claims are false, as is Icke’s final suggestion that the virus is fake because he has embraced hundreds of people and has been spared the disease.Firstly, David Icke is a well-known British conspiracy theorist who has previously made claims debunked by Reuters (here, here) . His accounts on Facebook and YouTube were removed in May for misinformation (here), while his Twitter account was banned at the beginning of November for the same reason (here) .Secondly, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is the name of the virus that causes the disease COVID-19 (here). It was identified by Chinese authorities on Jan. 7, 2020 (here) and is not a “fake virus”.As of Nov. 9, there have been more than 50 million reported infections of the virus around the world, along with 1,254,000 deaths (here) . Reuters has also previously debunked claims surrounding the veracity of the disease (here, here, here) .There is no evidence to suggest lockdowns are part of a deeper governmental ploy to destroy business, the world economy – nor to force people to submit to mandatory vaccinations. Reuters has previously debunked a similar claim from Canada, which said citizens would be given money in return for their personal freedoms, including such vaccinations (here) .In the UK, to make a vaccination compulsory, there would need to be a change in law. This has not happened, and Health Secretary Matt Hancock has previously said he believes it will not be necessary (here) .Scientists at Imperial College London have said that lockdowns are a way of reducing the transmission of COVID-19 as it enforces strict social distancing among populations (here) . To combat the negative effect these measures have had on businesses and their employees, the UK government has extended its furlough scheme until March 2021 (here) .VERDICTFalse. The virus is neither a scam nor fake, and it has killed more than a million people worldwide. Lockdowns have been introduced to try to stem transmission of COVID-19 while a vaccine is not yet available. They are not a secret tactic to destroy the global economy and push forward a new world order.Read more about our work to fact-check social media posts here .Our Standards: The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles. Alice Walker at the premiere of The Color Purple on Broadway in 2015. Photo by Mark Sagliocco/Getty Images Alice Walker, the beloved activist and author of The Color Purple, is under fire for promoting an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. Walker has flirted with anti-Semitism for years, but the public at large seemed to ignore it — until last weekend, when she took some time in her New York Times Book Review “By the Book” interview to admiringly shout out David Icke. Icke is best known for arguing that the world is run by a secret cabal of alien lizard people, many of whom are Jewish. While Walker has previously recommended Icke’s work on her blog, this is the first time her apparent affinity for him has gone quite so public. (Vox has reached out to Walker and Walker’s publisher, Atria, for comment.) “In Icke’s books there is the whole of existence, on this planet and several others, to think about,” Walker said in the column, specifically noting And the Truth Shall Set You Free, in which Icke variously argues both that Jews funded the Holocaust and that maybe the Holocaust did not happen. Icke’s books, Walker says, are “a curious person’s dream come true.” Walker’s recommendation, and the New York Times’s decision to publish it without comment, has attracted widespread outrage. “The only thing that is accomplished by uncritically disseminating Walker’s bigoted book bon mots is ensuring that the racism is disseminated to more people,” wrote Yair Rosenberg in a widely circulated article in Tablet. He adds, “Anti-Semitism is not incidental to Icke’s book, it is essential. It is impossible to miss it.” Both Walker and Icke have contested the idea that Icke is anti-Semitic. In a post on her website published in response to the outrage over her By the Book interview, Walker writes of Icke, “I do not believe he is anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish. I do believe he is brave enough to ask the questions others fear to ask, and to speak his own understanding of the truth wherever it might lead. Many attempts have been made to censor and silence him. As a woman, and a person of color, as a writer who has been criticized and banned myself, I support his right to share his own thoughts.” In a statement to Vox, Icke wrote, “To claim that the book is ‘anti-Semitic’ — or that I am — is utterly ridiculous.” To understand exactly how Walker, Icke, and the New York Times all came together — and why it’s so upsetting to so many people that they did — you have to understand Icke’s history as peddler of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, Walker’s largely ignored history of anti-Semitic writing, and the unexpected lightning rod for controversy that is the New York Times’s By the Book interview. Here’s the background. David Icke’s conspiracy theories are both racist and ludicrous David Icke first rose to fame in the UK as a soccer player, but his career ended when he developed rheumatoid arthritis at age 21. He stayed in the public spotlight working as a sports commentator, and he began to explore politics as a spokesperson for the ecology-focused UK Green Party in the 1980s. It was while Icke was searching for a treatment for his arthritis that he began to explore alternative medicine. From there, he became interested in New Age spiritualism, then began hanging out with psychics, and ultimately came to the conclusion that he himself was “the son of a Godhead.” In 1991, Icke resigned from the Green Party (which would later ban him, calling him a fascist), and then set out on a press tour during which he discussed his claim that he was the son of a Godhead. In Britain, Icke became a much-mocked spectacle: In his most infamous appearance, he welcomed gales of laughter from the audience for one of his interviews, and the interviewer had to explain to him, “They’re laughing at you. They’re not laughing with you.” Icke commenced traveling the world to share his message, delivering lectures and publishing books and videos. The details of that message have evolved over time, but for the past few decades, the broad strokes have remained the same. They are as follows: The world is run by a global elite of Illuminati, and the government, the British royal family, celebrities, and journalists are all in on it. “Behind this constant and coordinated centralization,” Icke writes in his 1999 book The Biggest Secret, referring to a centralization of world political and economic powers, “is a tribe of interbreeding bloodlines which can be traced back to the ancient Middle and Near East. They emerged from there to become the royalty, aristocracy, and priesthood of Europe before expanding all their powers across the world, largely through the ‘Great’ British Empire. This allowed the tribe to export its bloodlines to all the countries the British and European powers occupied, including the United States where they continue to run the show to this day.” The Illuminati are the descendants of a race of shape-shifting, blood-drinking, child-sacrificing alien lizard people. “In simple terms, there is a predator race which take a reptilian form,” Icke told Vice in 2012. “They’re feeding off humanity. They’re turning humanity into a slave race. They demand human sacrifice — that’s where Satanism comes in. They feed off human energy. They feed off the energy of children.” Many but not all of these evil lizard people are Jewish. Icke is fond of saying that the Rothschilds, a prominent wealthy Jewish family, are lizards. But he has also said that the British royal family the Windsors are too, and so is former President George W. Bush, neither of whom are Jewish. A series of cataclysmic earthquakes and floods will eventually cause New Zealand to disappear, and the moon is really a surveillance system set into place by the lizard people to watch us. Also, vaccines are the Illuminati trying to control us. Icke’s theories are objectionable for many reasons, beginning with the fact that they are, objectively speaking, ridiculous. But particularly worrisome is the anti-Semitism of his worldview: The idea that the world is run by a secret cabal of Jews (it’s not) is a recurring theme, and the idea that these imaginary Jews drink blood and sacrifice Christian babies (they don’t) goes back centuries and has been used to justify horrific persecution of Jewish people since before the Crusades. Icke maintains that he is not an anti-Semite, and that he is criticizing not real Jews, but 12-foot-tall alien lizard people, many of whom just happen to be posing as Jews. “I’m not talking about one earth race, Jewish or non-Jewish,” he told the Guardian in 2001. “I’m talking about a genetic network that operates through all races, this bloodline being a fusion of human and reptilian genes.” “My philosophy and view of life is that we are all points of attention within the same state of Infinite Awareness and the labels we are given and give ourselves are merely temporary experiences and not who we are,” he said in a statement to Vox. “Thus to me all racism is ridiculous and completely missing the point of who we are and where we are.” If you believe in lizard people, this distinction might conceivably matter, but if you don’t, the result is that Icke is still projecting vile conspiracy theories onto a whole bunch of Jewish people, whether he thinks they are Jewish or not, which makes his hair-splitting look academic at best. And Icke’s conspiracy theories return again and again to anti-Semitic tropes. Yair Rosenberg has outlined a number of them at Tablet magazine, but here is a quick overview of some of Icke’s ideas: that a Jewish organization was behind the slave trade; that far-right groups are actually Jewish fronts; that a Jewish group funded the Holocaust (“The Warburgs, part of the Rothschild empire, helped finance Adolf Hitler,” he writes in The Truth Shall Set You Free); that schools should allow students to study Holocaust deniers. He also goes after the Anti-Defamation League, which he claims is a hate group but is in fact a Jewish advocacy group. “I am told by an extremely reliable source very close to the intelligence organisations that the ‘far Right’ group, Combat 18, is a front for the sinister Anti-Defamation League, the United States and of the ‘Israeli’/Rothschild secret service, Mossad,” Icke writes in And the Truth Shall Set You Free. “The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has been operating in Britain and Europe since at least 1991 and its role is to brand as anti-Semitic anyone who is getting close to the truth of what is going on. What better way to discredit an investigator than to have a ‘far Right’ group like Combat 18 to praise them?” For the record, Combat 18 is a neo-Nazi hate group, and there is no evidence that it is a front for the ADL. And again, the ADL is not a hate group; it’s an advocacy group devoted to fighting anti-Semitism. Icke also focused on the ADL in his statement to Vox. “The public are now getting sick and tired of this constant mantra about everything from hate groups like the ADL whose modus operandi is simply to urge people to hate their ever-gathering number of targets,” he wrote. “Organisations like the ADL are obsessed with the labels and completely and utterly self-identify with them. So who’s obsessed with ‘race’ — me or them? Alice Walker has the high-intelligence to see this. The ADL and their like do not. I feel sorry for them and I hope that one day they will wake up from their trance.” He is similarly fervent on his belief that Holocaust denialism should be taught in schools. “Why do we play a part in suppressing alternative information to the official line of the Second World War?” he writes in And the Truth Shall Set You Free. “How is it right that while this fierce suppression goes on, free copies of the Spielberg film, Schindler’s List, are given to schools to indoctrinate children with the unchallenged version of events? And why do we, who say we oppose tyranny and demand freedom of speech, allow people to go to prison and be vilified, and magazines to be closed down on the spot, for suggesting another version of history?” Despite, or perhaps because of, the fringe nature of Icke’s beliefs, over the course of his long career, he has steadily accumulated followers. In 2012, the Independent watched Icke deliver a lecture to a rapturous crowd of 6,000 people and reported that Icke had sold more than 140,000 copies of his books in the UK. He has embarked on multiple world tours and reliably sold out his venues. And the industry tracker Nielsen BookScan told Vox that between 2004 and December 2018, Icke has sold a combined 233,000 copies of his books in the US. That’s not a blockbuster number — it averages out to around 20,000 copies per book, which is not on the level of, say Bill O’Reilly. However, it does indicate that Icke has a reliable audience for his work, and that his audience has continued to grow. Back when the Independent covered Icke’s 2011 tour, many journalists were able to observe Icke’s popularity with a bemused smile: Look how funny, people actually believe this nut. But over the past few years, as widely disseminated conspiracy theories have helped usher in the rise of far-right populist nationalism, figures like Icke have come to seem actively dangerous. If Icke can convince people that the world is run by a cabal of mostly Jewish lizard people who are molesting and murdering kids — well, who knows what his followers will do with that belief? Which makes it all the more unnerving when a figure as beloved as Alice Walker endorses him, and has now done so via a platform as big as the New York Times. Alice Walker is a celebrated activist. For the past decade, she’s been leaning more and more toward blatant anti-Semitism. For her entire public life, Alice Walker has stood for social justice and for great writing. After she graduated college in 1965, she worked first for the New York Department of Welfare and then for the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund. At Ms. Magazine in the 1970s, Walker helped rediscover and revive the legacy of Zora Neale Hurston. She coined the term “womanist.” She published The Color Purple in 1982, then won the Pulitzer Prize for it, then saw it adapted into a Steven Spielberg-directed movie that gave Oprah Winfrey her first film role and earned 11 Oscar nominations. Walker’s legacy seemed to be clear: She was both an artist and an activist who would stand by marginalized people in all of her work. All of which perhaps made many people willing to avert their attention and avoid talking about the apparent anti-Semitism in Walker’s work and public statements as she began to flirt ever more publicly with the theories of David Icke over the past decade. That’s not to say that no major media figure has ever discussed it before now. Jewish media has been keeping track of the growing trend in her work for years, and Roxane Gay has noted that she makes a point of mentioning it whenever she praises Walker’s other work in public. It’s been out there for years, in Walker’s writing and public comments, for anyone paying close attention to Walker to see. But major outlets like the New York Times have pointedly avoided mentioning it, which means that for the general public, anti-Semitism wasn’t part of the story of Alice Walker. Until now. Walker has long been a vocal critic of Israel and its treatment of Palestine. In 2012, she refused to allow the publication of an Israeli edition of The Color Purple, saying that she believes the country “is guilty of apartheid and persecution of the Palestinian people.” Criticizing Israel of course does not mean that someone is anti-Semitic, but Walker’s critique of Israel has at times been much more extreme: In her 2013 book The Cushion on the Road, she repeatedly compares Israel to Nazi Germany. And when she began to show an interest in David Icke, things got weird. Walker first began to write about Icke in 2013. In a post on her blog, she enthusiastically recommended his book Human Race Get Off Your Knees, writing, “A lot of it is how shall we say: shocking, beyond belief (but not really, if you don’t get too scared), stunning, profound. The deconstruction of language is breathtaking, the interrogation of symbols startling. Magical, in a way. I kept going: Oh, so that’s why. … You will too.” In her blog post, Walker explicitly lauded Icke’s ideas about the lizard people who control the world. She wrote: The Reptilian space beings whose hybrid (part human, part reptile) descendants make our lives hell in Paradise were blue eyed devils to Malcolm X, the devil himself to my Christian parents, who never talked about eye color, which I think was not only prudent but wise, although they seemed clear enough about his sex, and as demons in many other religions, including the non-religion, Buddhism, where the advice is often to invite them in until they go away. But maybe these were other kinds of demons. Not the ones controlling not just you, but everything. Walker has since endorsed Icke numerous times on her blog, and even recommended an interview he did with Alex Jones, who also promotes racist conspiracy theories, in 2015. “I like these two because they’re real, and sometimes Alex Jones is a bit crazy; many Aquarians are,” Walker explained. “Icke only appears crazy to people who don’t appreciate the stubbornness required when one is called to a duty it is impossible to evade.” In 2017, Walker published a poem on her blog called “To Study the Talmud.” The Talmud is an extremely old book of Jewish law, very long and confusing and contradictory, and anti-Semites frequently quote it out of context in order to “prove” that Jews condone pedophilia and the murder of Christians. (For the record: They do not!) Walker’s poem follows in the same tradition. In Walker’s poem, she describes turning to the Talmud to understand Israel, which she describes as “demonic / To the core,” and finding the very worst: Are Goyim (us) meant to be slaves of Jews, and not onlyThat, but to enjoy it?Are three year old (and a day) girls eligible for marriage and intercourse?Are young boys fair game for rape?Must even the best of the Goyim (us, again) be killed?Pause a moment and think what this could meanOr already has meantIn our own lifetime. Walker also advises her readers to supplement their reading of the Talmud with their own research. She means a specific kind of research, though: If her readers just look at Google, most of what they find will be “slanted, unfortunately.” Instead, she writes: For a more in depth studyI recommend starting with YouTube. Simply follow the trail of “TheTalmud” as its poison belatedly winds its wayInto our collective consciousness. We can’t know for sure what is going on in Walker’s mind, but it sure sounds like she is describing the process of her own radicalization here. As Jane Coaston has written for Vox, YouTube has a conspiracy theory problem: The site’s algorithms are designed to keep users engaged, and that means they tend to feed users ever more extreme and radical content. As a result, videos peddling conspiracy theories — especially bigoted conspiracy theories — get amplified on YouTube. Basically, it sure seems like Alice Walker, legendary activist and author, went looking for some critiques of Israeli politics and ended up getting “redpilled” on YouTube into becoming an anti-Semite by a person who doesn’t believe in the moon. (In far-right discourse, “taking the red pill” or having been “redpilled” implies that someone has “woken up” to a worldview that includes the belief that feminism is ruining everything and frequently involves anti-Semitic and white supremacist dog-whistling.) Now she’s amplifying Icke’s voice. And though it doesn’t seem to have been her goal to cause a controversy, if it had been, then the New York Times Book Review’s By the Book column was a weirdly perfect place for her to do so. The By the Book column sounds bland, but it’s actually a lightning rod for controversy In his Tablet article, Rosenberg specifically criticizes the New York Times for not pushing back against Walker’s endorsement of Icke in the moment. “This [Walker’s recommendation of Icke] passed without comment from the New York Times interviewer,” he writes, “and the publication passed it on to readers without qualification. This is rather remarkable because the book is an unhinged anti-Semitic conspiracy tract written by one of Britain’s most notorious anti-Semites.” Rosenberg’s criticism also represents a heightened version of the kind of criticism that gets the By the Book column into trouble all the time. The By the Book column is a weekly feature in the New York Times Book Review, and for such an anodyne-sounding column, it has long been a magnet for controversy. Every week, the Times Book Review emails an author a list of questions to answer, mostly about their favorite books. The list of questions always includes a few standards — including the “what’s on your nightstand” question that prompted Walker to recommend Icke — and the Times never comments on the answers. Nearly every week, this column makes people mad. The most common critique of the By the Book column is that the men interviewed in the column almost never mention books by women, and the numbers bear out this critique: According to a recent study by UC Berkeley assistant professor David Bamman, men interviewed in “By the Book” mention men four times more frequently than they do women. (Women tend to mention men and women equally.) This year, Electric Literature invented a Read More Women recommendation series explicitly as a feminist corrective to By the Book’s dude-heavy track record. But there are other criticisms nearly every time a new By the Book column publishes. Just a few weeks ago, senator and novelist Ben Sasse remarked in his By the Book interview that he doesn’t read much modern fiction and recommended his “family canon.” While the full list of 60 books features authors of color, the 33 books Sasse cites in the column itself are all by white authors. The Splinter called the interview “psychotic”; the Chicago Tribune, more measured, described Sasse’s rules as “a bad idea.” In a Q&A with the Times after the backlash against the Walker interview, Book Review editor Pamela Paul said it is the Times’s policy not to comment on the books that authors mention in By the Book. “We would never add that a book is factually inaccurate, or that the author is a serial predator, or any kind of judgment on the work or the writer. We do not issue a verdict on people’s opinions,” she explained, adding, “If people espouse beliefs that anyone at The Times finds to be dangerous or immoral, it’s important for readers to be aware that they hold those beliefs. The public deserves to know. That’s news.” All of this means that the By the Book column is consistently a place where America’s public intellectuals expose their blind spots as readers — via whose voices they think are worth amplifying and whose are worth ignoring — while the New York Times discreetly declines to comment. In this case, Alice Walker wasn’t just exposing a blind spot. She was publicly recommending a book that is filled with bigoted conspiracy theories. But because Walker made her perspective clear on a platform that often catches America’s public intellectuals in their unguarded thoughts, rather than on her relatively private personal blog, for the first time, it became unignorable to the public at large. Walker’s recommendation of Icke’s work comes at an especially unsettling time So here’s where we’re left: One of the most beloved writers and activists in the American letters recommended a writer of bigoted conspiracy theories to the public at large, after hiding her beliefs in plain sight for years, and she did so in the paper of record without any pushback. As a result, Alice Walker’s acceptance of anti-Semitic beliefs has been exposed to a lot of people who previously had no idea she felt this way — which, as Paul pointed out, “is news.” But she has also amplified David Icke’s message, and because the New York Times Book Review printed her recommendation uncritically in accordance with the policy of its By the Book column, the Times is complicit in that amplification as well. There’s every possibility that people who aren’t aware of Walker’s history or the nature of Icke’s work might seek out his book on the strength of Walker’s New York Times recommendation, and that they might potentially get drawn into Icke’s way of seeing the world.