

The Markup

2021
ANNUAL
REPORT

MORE THAN
THE SUM OF
OUR PARTS



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How We Got Here

To Our Supporters

Your 7-year-old walks to school, and you want to know when she gets to her second-grade classroom. Your newly minted teen driver is testing the real meaning of speed limits, and you want to be able to put the brakes on risky behavior. You rely on a convenient app like Life360 for its location tracking and driving safety features to protect what matters most to you. And Life360 turns around and sells your family's private information to the highest bidder.

But, thanks to you, The Markup's young nonprofit newsroom—an incredible collection of journalists, programmers, technologists, engineers, analysts, and editors—is shedding light on how your data, and your life, are being monetized. We are chipping away at

the chokehold of Big Tech with meticulous analyses of massive datasets that allow us to reveal the hidden biases and flaws of the algorithms that govern our lives. We've managed to produce a stunning array of investigative journalism and create one-of-a-kind tools to give you control over your digital life. Pretty impressive for a lean team in our second year of publishing.

At The Markup, we use our in-house expertise to help you understand the world around you. Our

work isn't designed to get clicks. It's designed to have impact. Did we hold powerful institutions accountable for their decisions? Did our investigations help policymakers and individuals make better choices and give them the evidence they needed to create change?

In 2021, the answer to all of the above was "Absolutely." After our exposé on Life360, the app announced it would stop selling its users' raw location data. And

Our work isn't designed to get clicks. It's designed to have impact.

that wasn't all that our journalism changed. The following report brings the impact of our work to life in greater focus.

As a nonprofit, our work is funded only by those who are as committed to our mission as we are, and we are proud to be accountable to our supporters. We are committed to providing you with the transparency that we ourselves seek, because this calculus—tech expertise + engineering + investigative reporting—doesn't add up without you.

Thank you for being part of The Markup as we work to bring agency to readers navigating their lives in the digital age. We need your continued support to uncover the ways that technology is affecting our lives, our communities, and our work. We're beyond grateful that you were part of The Markup's story in 2021, and we can't wait for you to see what we've got in the works in the coming year.



NABIHA SYED

President
The Markup



JULIA ANGWIN

Founder and
Editor-in-Chief
The Markup



FROM THE BOARD

Chairing the board of a startup organization is a bit like helping a baby bird venture out of the nest: thrilling, nerve-racking, and pride-inducing. And what a joy it has been to watch The Markup fly in its second year!

As we look back on 2021, I'm energized by the impact The Markup's work has had, which you'll see detailed in this report, and by the growth this extraordinary organization has experienced. Our journalism, our tools, and our team have all evolved as our work has reached the halls of Congress, boardrooms across the world, and the lives of ordinary families. The Markup not only exposes how technology shapes our world but also outlines how we each can take action, providing a sense of agency in an increasingly uncertain world.

The Markup's Board of Directors, like its staff, is a collection of journalists, technologists, educators, and entrepreneurs, bound together by the belief that empowering people through technology will lead to a better society for us all. I'm immensely proud of each and every person who has shared their energy and expertise with The Markup and grateful to donors like you who have made it a philanthropic priority.

Thank you for being part of The Markup's young life. I hope you will continue to support us as we grow.

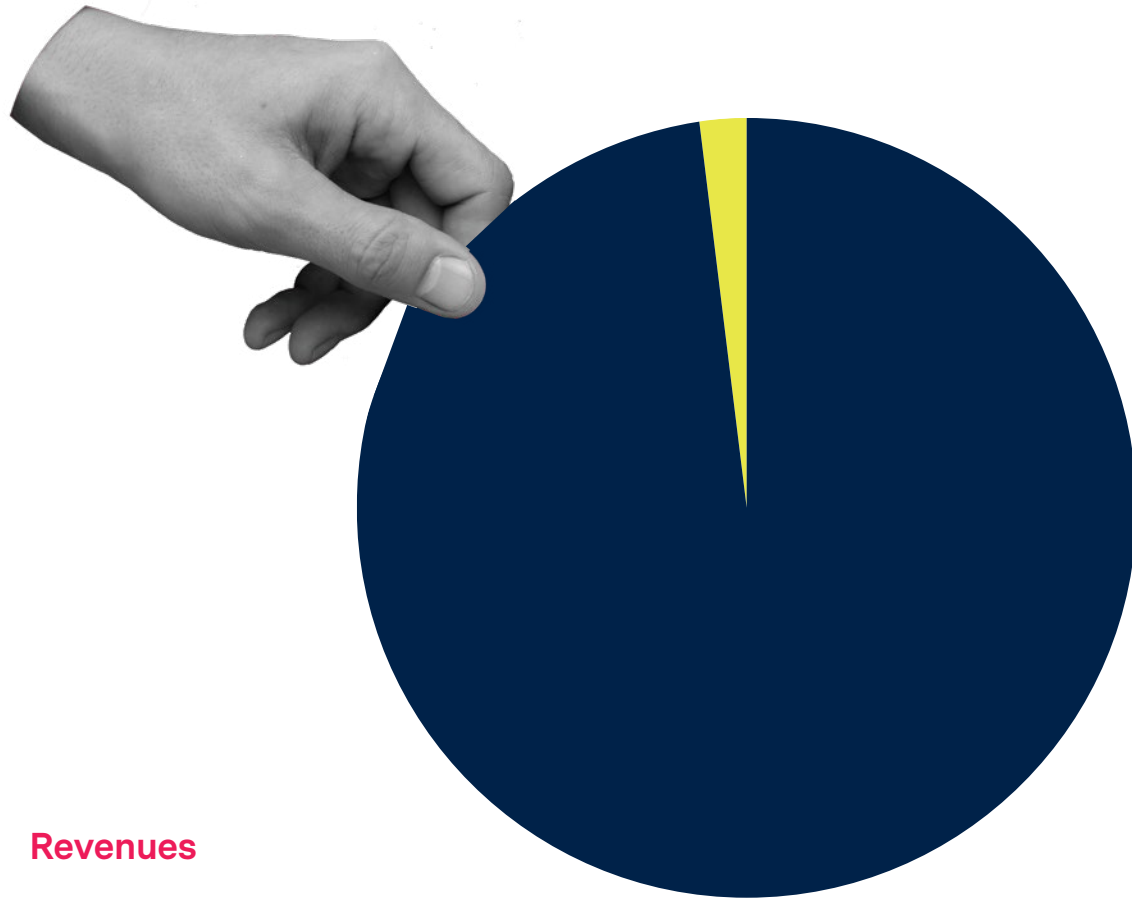


DAVID BOARDMAN

Chair
The Markup

Financials

FOR THE PERIOD 1/1/2021 - 12/31/2021



Revenues

- GRANTS \$6,708,632
- SMALL DOLLAR DONATIONS \$120,971

TOTAL \$6,829,603

Expenses

- NEWSROOM SALARIES AND BENEFITS \$2,769,514
- NON-NEWSROOM SALARIES AND BENEFITS \$1,368,219
- OFFICE AND OPERATIONS \$1,407,149

TOTAL \$5,544,882

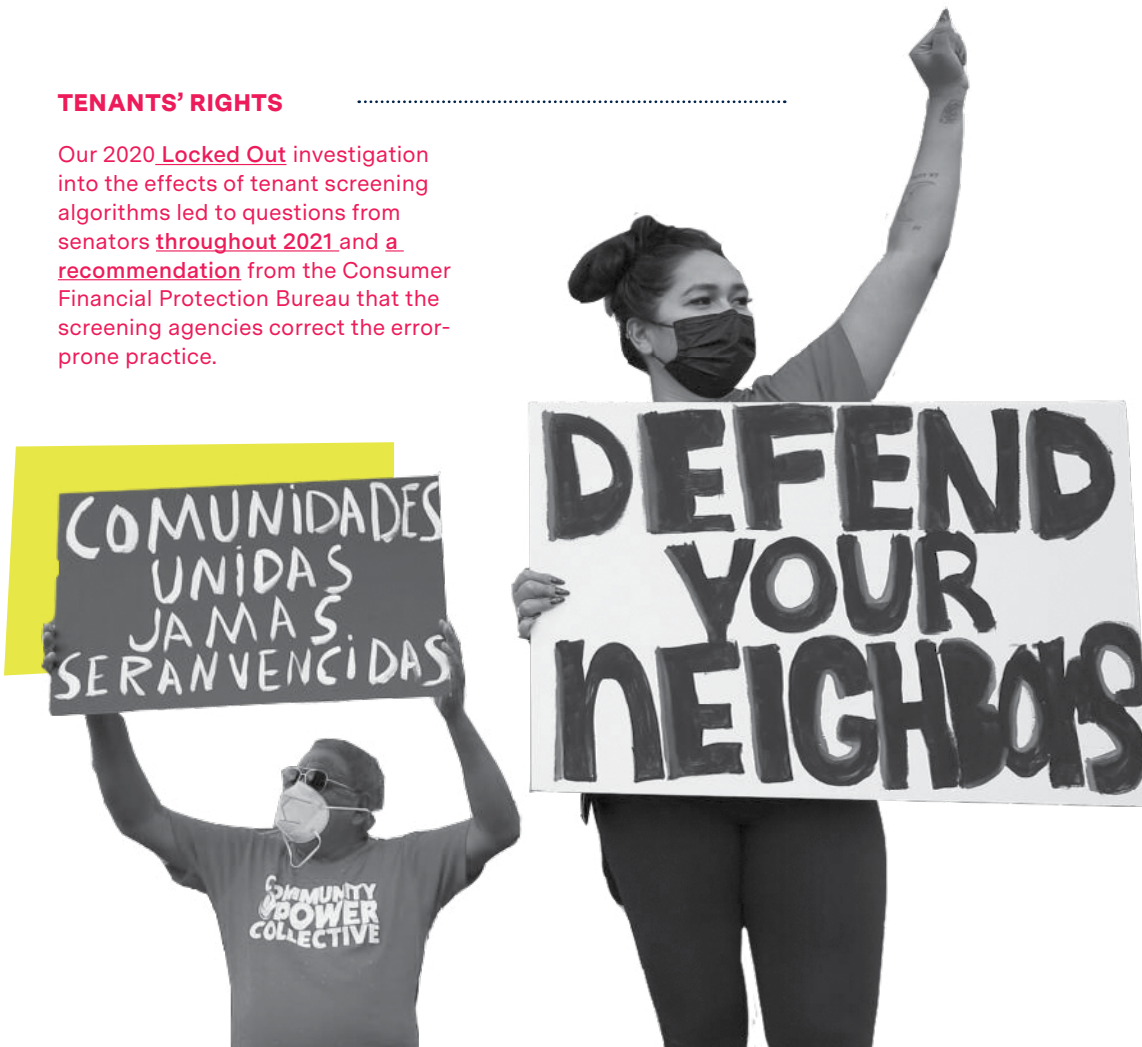


A Year of Impact

Rather than chasing clicks, we're chasing a better future. We published 109 articles this year; here's a sampling of the impact we had.

TENANTS' RIGHTS

Our 2020 [Locked Out](#) investigation into the effects of tenant screening algorithms led to questions from senators throughout 2021 and a [recommendation](#) from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau that the screening agencies correct the error-prone practice.



RACE AND ALGORITHMS

Texas A&M University dropped "race" from its student risk algorithm after a [Markup investigation](#) revealed that Black students were being steered away from math and science majors because an algorithm predicted they had a higher risk of failure than White students.

DISCRIMINATORY MORTGAGES

The U.S. Department of Justice, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and other agencies announced a new initiative to combat discriminatory mortgage lending practices, citing [our investigation](#) into home loan application approval rates as evidence of a nationwide problem.



PRODUCT PREFERENCING

Members of Congress asked Amazon to respond to [our investigation](#) about the platform giving its private label brands a leg up—and we built an Amazon Brand

Detector tool to make it easier for you to understand how this affects your own shopping.

GOOGLE THE GIANT

The House Subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial and Administrative Law [introduced The American Choice and Innovation Online Act](#) to prohibit certain large tech platforms from favoring their own products and services on their platforms (including in search results), citing The Markup's 2020 [Google the Giant investigation](#).



Our innovative approach is attracting notice! A few of our accolades in 2021:



The Electronic Privacy Information Center's **CHAMPION OF FREEDOM AWARD** for safeguarding the right of privacy and protecting democratic values.



GERALD LOEB AWARDS for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism (finalist, two categories)



University of Michigan's distinguished **KNIGHT-WALLACE REPORTING FELLOWSHIP:** Investigative Data Journalist Surya Mattu



REAL WORLD IMPACT: Peers across the tech press took our lead and adopted the policy of not allowing corporate spokespeople to go "on background" in an attempt to shirk accountability.



YouTube Diversity

Color of Change cited [our investigation](#) into YouTube ad placements when calling on the platform’s parent company, Google, to perform an internal racial equity audit.



ACCESS TO GUNS

Etsy removed gun parts and accessories, including high-capacity magazines, from its online marketplace after being alerted to these listings by The Markup.



KIDS’ DATA FOR SALE

We revealed that the popular family safety app Life360 was selling data on kids’ and families’ whereabouts to approximately a dozen data brokers who sell location data to virtually anyone who wants to buy it. After our reporting, the company said it would get out of the business of selling raw location data.



▲ WATCH THE SHORT VIDEO HERE TO PREVENT YOUR FAMILY’S DATA FROM BEING SOLD.



Civil Rights Violations

Facebook pledged to remove credit card ads targeted by age—a violation of its own policies and, potentially, civil rights laws—after The Markup discovered [companies were targeting financial services](#) to specific age groups on the platform.

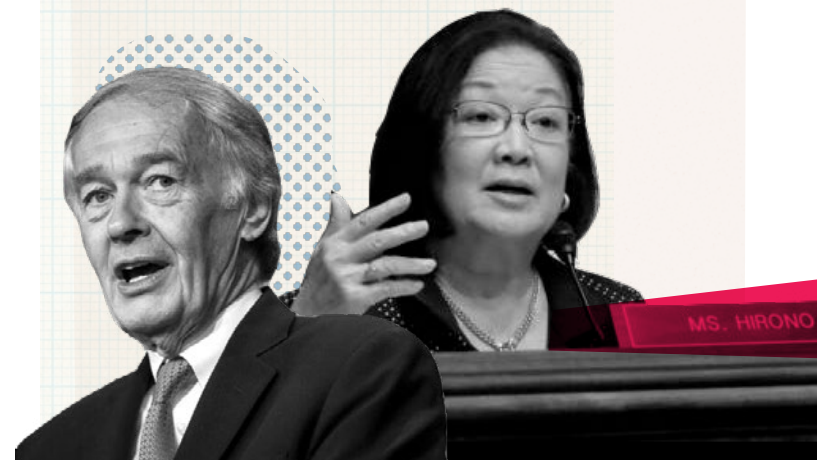


WORKING FOR AN ALGORITHM

In a win for gig workers who answer to algorithms, Postmates reimbursed couriers who were victims of a phishing scam after we [reported on the issue](#).

Facebook Accountability

Findings from our Citizen Browser project led Facebook to repeatedly admit mistakes and change its practices. Senators [Markey](#) and [Hirono](#) also called on Facebook to uphold its own promises and policies.



OUR SECRET SAUCE: The Tools

Part of The Markup's secret sauce is our proprietary tools—engineering marvels that allow us to persistently monitor Big Tech in ways that no other organization has been able to accomplish. We believe—and we've shown—that privacy-aware, ethical data collection is possible, and it's the right thing to do. Here are just a few of the tools we've spun up:

BLACKLIGHT is a real-time website privacy inspector. Enter the address of any website, and Blacklight will scan it to reveal the specific user-tracking technologies on the site. To date, public users have run more than 2.6 million scans using the tool to better educate themselves on how their data is used.

CITIZEN BROWSER is a one-of-a-kind desktop app that provides nearly real-time visibility into the choices Facebook's algorithms are making about what content to amplify and suppress. Paid panelists install Citizen Browser, which allows us to monitor what is being broadcast to their Facebook feeds. With the data we receive, we're able to explore how elections are affected, how public opinion is shaped, how democratic institutions are eroding, and how society itself is changing.

SPLIT SCREEN is an interactive dashboard that uses Citizen Browser data to reveal what Facebook's algorithm chooses to place in the users' feeds of users on a given day, split by gender, age, or political leanings.

TRENDING ON FACEBOOK is a Twitter bot that provides an independent check on Facebook's claims about what's trending on the platform (spoiler: Right-wing content is consistently at the top).

AMAZON BRAND DETECTOR is a browser extension that highlights product listings of Amazon brands and exclusive products (often inconsistently disclosed by the company) by placing a box around them in Amazon's signature orange. A Markup investigation found that the online shopping behemoth often gives its own brands and exclusive products a leg up in search results over better-rated competitors.



THE MARKUP METHOD

We have established a new model for investigative journalism; we use the scientific method as the inspiration for our reporting.

BUILD

We ask questions and collect or build the datasets we need to test our hypotheses.



BULLETPROOF

We bulletproof our stories through a rigorous review process, inviting external experts and even the subjects of investigations to challenge our findings.



SHOW OUR WORK

We share our research methods by publishing our datasets and our code. And we explain our approach in detailed methodological write-ups (some surpassing 10,000 words!), inviting experts and the broader public alike to understand our work, interrogate our conclusions, and engage in dialogue—bringing a new level of transparency to investigative data reporting.

Who We Are

The Markup team has added 11 members since our launch, an expansion fueled by passionate, mission-driven growth. We are a newsroom that values collaboration, a business team that guides shrewdly, and together, an organization that lives its values.



The Team

FOUNDER AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Julia Angwin

PRESIDENT
Nabiha Syed

MANAGING EDITOR FOR
INVESTIGATIONS
Evelyn Larrubia

CHIEF OF STAFF
Korey Te Hira

NEWS EDITOR
Rina Palta

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT
Ramsey Isler

DIRECTOR OF AUDIENCE
Rachael Berkey

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
Lauren Spirig

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER
Malena Carollo

HR BUSINESS PARTNER
Deborah Dash

VISUALIZATIONS ENGINEER
Joel Eastwood

DATA REPORTER
Corin Faife

ENTERPRISE REPORTER
Todd Feathers

INFRASTRUCTURE ENGINEER
Simon Fondrie-Teitler

REPORTER
Annie Gilbertson

VISUAL DESIGNER
Gabriel Hongsdusit

COPY EDITOR / PRODUCER
Jill Jaroff

INVESTIGATIVE DATA JOURNALIST
Jon Keegan

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER
Adrienne Jeffries

ENTERPRISE REPORTER
Dara Kerr

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER
Lauren Kirchner

REPORTER
Colin Lecher

INVESTIGATIVE DATA JOURNALIST
Emmanuel Martinez

INVESTIGATIVE DATA JOURNALIST
AND SENIOR DATA ENGINEER
Surya Mattu

GRAPHICS EDITOR
Sam Morris

PRIVACY REPORTER
Alfred Ng

FULL STACK ENGINEER
Dan Phiffer

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL
MEDIA MANAGER
Maria Puertas

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER
Aaron Sankin

INVESTIGATIVE DATA JOURNALIST
Maddy Varner

CITIZEN BROWSER
PROJECT MANAGER
Angie Waller

PRODUCTION AND OPERATIONS
ASSOCIATE
Wynton Wong

INVESTIGATIVE DATA JOURNALIST
Leon Yin

OUR TEAM PARTNERS

To strengthen our work and amplify the impact of our stories, The Markup partners with organizations that complement our skills and extend our reach. In 2021 we were proud to work with some of today's most well-regarded media outlets and institutions:

The Associated Press
Consumer Reports
Gizmodo
Süddeutsche Zeitung
The City

The Board

The exceptional members of our Board of Directors share our long-term vision for building a sustainable nonprofit newsroom that uses technology to hold technology to account. We remain immensely grateful for their leadership this year.



NEW

In 2021, The Markup was proud to welcome **Anil Dash**, CEO of Glitch, to our Board of Directors. With decades of experience in ethical technology, Dash serves in a strategic role as the organization focuses on its next phase of growth. In addition to serving on The Markup's board, Dash is also on the board of directors for Data & Society Research Institute and The Lower Eastside Girls Club of New York. Before his current role as CEO of Glitch, he was the co-founder and managing director of Activate and co-founder and CEO of ThinkUp, as well as a contributing editor for WIRED magazine. Anil's background as a technology entrepreneur and his stature as a thought leader has already proven invaluable to The Markup's operation and evolution.



▲ David Boardman, Chair, Melissa Harris-Perry, Stuart Karle, Paul Ohm, Dele Olojede, Nicole Wong

HOW WE GOT HERE:

You + Us

Our deepest gratitude goes out to the individuals and institutions who provide financial support to The Markup. This generosity fuels our innovative and independent journalism. Thank you for helping us investigate how powerful institutions are using technology to shape our society—and for helping us to build a better future.



HOW TO DONATE

Big Tech has become the architecture of our entire reality—and with every investigation, The Markup is uncovering just how much its power impacts our world. Your support, at every level, helps us uncover the ways technology is shaping our society and to inspire ethical data practices across industries. Together, we can build a better future—starting right now.

www.themarkup.org/donate

To discuss other ways to support The Markup, contact Lauren Spirig, Development Director at spirig@themarkup.org

The following list acknowledges institutional supporters that made contributions between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021.

Arnold Ventures

Rudolf Augstein Foundation

Edward M. Dua & Nicole A. Wong Family Fund

DuckDuckGo 2021

Julie Ehrlich and Noam Elcott Fund

Ford Foundation

Fund for Nonprofit News: NewsMatch 2020

Goel Giving Fund

Marc Haas Foundation

Irie Foundation

Raymond James Charitable

Susan Litaud Foundation

Luminate

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

New Venture Fund

Craig Newmark Philanthropies

Omidyar Network

Park Foundation

ProtonMail

John Sperling Foundation

Spiezle Family Charitable Fund

Thomas Street Fund

We are deeply indebted to the hundreds of individual donors who support The Markup, without whom the successes of 2021 would not have been possible. At this time, due to the privacy-focused nature of our work, we do not list individual donor names in our Annual Report.

SPECIAL THANKS

A special thanks goes out to the many talented people and organizations below for their guidance, expertise and support in 2021.

Joy Ahmed
Shazeda Ahmed
Dana Amihere
Fiona Anderson-Kowlessar
Ian Ardouin-Fumat
Chinmayi Arun
Leila Barghouty
James Bernal
Emma Beutel
Calvin Bradford
Dare Anne S. Brawley
Yemile Bucay
Dell Cameron
Robyn Caplan
Dan Carino
Jeffrey Carrillo
Proana Matt Chase
Kenyatta Cheese
Kyunghyun Cho
Brandi Collins-Dexter
Color of Change
Lynae Cook
Andrea Coscelli
Andrew Coutts
Judy Cronin
Jeff Crouse
Ariel Davis
Bob Devecchis
Ojus Doshi
Veena Dubal
Brooke Erin Duffy
Rebekka Dunlap
Cynthia Dwork
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Michael Ekstrand
Sarah Fineman
Amber Ford

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Emily Goligoski
Micha Gorelick
Karin Halperin
Xavier Harding
Rita Harper
Sara Harrison
María Hergueta
Woodrow Hertzog
William Isaac
Pinar Isak
David Isenberg
Pinar Istek
Harrison Jacobs
Juozas “Joe” Kaziukėnas
Justin Kazmark
Elizabeth Kim
Kate Klönick
Jeffrey Knockel
Brett Kodama
Karen Kornbluh
Berit Kruse
Laura Kurgan
Jennifer LaFleur
Kat Lapelosa
Josh Lash
Michael Lavine
David Lazer
Daniel Lempres
Emily Lin
José Loya
Kristian Lum
Abigail Markowitz
Marianna Martinelli
Cynthia McKelvey
MediaJustice
Dhruv Mehrotra

Jeremy Merrill
Howard Metzger
Mijente Bratislav Milenković
Muslim Advocates
Netograph
Brendan Nyhan
Dan Oshinsky
Liz O’Sullivan
Zoe Pappenheimer
Eli Pariser
Thomas Pullin
Manoel Ribeiro
Monica Riese
Ronald Robertson
Brian Root
Emily Roseman
Kristin Lynn Sainani
Vivian Schiller
Victoria Schott
Simply Secure
Jeremy Singer-Vine
Brittany Hosea Small
Stephen Wm. Smith
Alex Stamos
Ben Tanen
Kristen Taylor
The Project Twins
Sébastien Thibault
Steven Tiegel
Mago Torres
Akilah Townsend
John Napier Tye
Luke Underwood
Aaricka Washington
David Weisburd
Rebecca Weiss
Christo Wilson
Benedict Witzemberger
Jill Woodward
Eve Zelickson
Shoshana Zuboff
Ethan Zuckerman