

The Manure-Spreaders of Media Sensationalism

Here we go again. If you think the manure-spreaders of sensationalism who masquerade as ethical practitioners of journalism learned anything from last week's MAGA-bashing Covington Catholic High School hoax, I have three words for you:

Ha, ha, ha.

On Tuesday morning, uncorroborated claims by actor Jussie Smollett that he was the victim of a "brutal" hate crime by Trump supporters in Chicago went viral across social media. Entertainment rag TMZ.com first splashed "exclusive" headlines that the "Empire" cast member was "beaten by MAGA backers" in a "homophobic attack" at around 2 a.m. in Chicago. If you have no idea what "Empire" is or who Smollett is, join the club. The TV star is apparently a vocal critic of Trump and attacked "45 and all his white hooded cohorts" on Instagram last week.

But I digress.

Within minutes, the gossip site's squib on the TV star's alleged victimization trended on Twitter and rocketed up to USA Today, Variety, CBS, CNN and The New York Times. The Fishwrap of Record breathlessly reported lurid details of two people who "wrapped rope around his neck," which multiple outlets characterized as a "noose." A police statement providing incident background stated that "the offenders began to batter the victim with their hands about the face and poured an unknown chemical substance on the victim," according to Smollett. Multiple websites reported that the substance was bleach.

This is truly horrible, if true. But color me cautious and skeptical. TMZ initially reported that Smollett had exited a Subway chain restaurant near his luxury apartment when accosted by the racist, homophobic assailants, who allegedly recognized him from his work on "Empire." Allegedly, Smollett received a hate mail with the word "MAGA" on it addressed to him and sent to his studio in Chicago last week. If this was a premeditated attack, the FBI should get to the bottom of it.

But oddities and discrepancies abound:

TMZ quoted one of the "MAGA country" attackers who allegedly hurled epithets at Smollett: "Aren't you that f----t 'Empire' n-----?"

Question: How many racist homophobic menaces wander around the upscale Streeterville neighborhood of liberal Chicago at 2 a.m. carrying rope and bleach, yelling about "MAGA country"?

Question: How many racist homophobic menaces have ever heard of "Empire," could recognize Jussie Smollett, or know or care anything about his sexuality?

Despite TMZ's claim that Smollett had the "hell beat outta him" and attackers "broke his ribs" plus subjected him to a chemical attack, an ambulance was not called and he instead "self-transported" to the hospital. CWB Chicago, a local public safety watchdog site, reported on police dispatch

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records documenting that Smollett's friend "Frank" refused EMS services for Smollett; no mention of bleach was made; "no or minor injury" was observed; and "officers never sent a 'flash; message with offender descriptions to field units."

Weird.

Another assertion not included in the CPD's initial press release on the incident: Any mention of "MAGA supporters" or any mention of the race of the alleged assailants. Police clarified that they had not received any official information backing TMZ reporter Charles Latibeaudiere's claim, which he attributed to sources close to Smollett, that the alleged attackers shouted, "This is MAGA country."

Nor had the police corroborated that the attackers were white, since Smollett had told them their faces and hands were both covered. After launching a search for surveillance video and potential witnesses, the police department reported late Tuesday that "thus far we have not found anything to be able to put out a description."

I was told that public records requests for the incident report may take "weeks" to be approved. I was also told the Chicago police remain in charge of investigating the alleged incident, while the FBI probe of the alleged hate mail remains separate

CPD's public information office also told me late Tuesday that when police responded to the 911 call regarding the incident, Smollett gave them no details about where it occurred or what the attackers looked like. None. They were reportedly on scene for an hour with Smollett. When I asked again how the claims about white "MAGA attackers" were disseminated in the press, the PIO replied:

"We have no idea where that came from."

Minutes after I hung up the phone with her, a local Chicago reporter tweeted that Smollett did mention the "MAGA" angle in a "follow-up, supplemental interview." Which is it?

Despite all the holes, contradictions and unanswered questions, the MAGA hate crime narrative has already calcified. (Sound familiar?) By 5 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday, a search for "MAGA" and "Smollett" on Google yielded 3,520,000 results. And TMZ ended its day of social justice pot-stirring with the Rev. Al Sharpton calling for President Donald Trump to "denounce Jussie Smollett's MAGA attackers" who have yet to be identified.

Classic manufactured "news:" Report on an uncorroborated hate crime. Plant unverified details. Repeatedly blame white male Trump supporters. Stoke Hollywood outrage. Enlist the godfather of hate crime hoaxes to call on the president to denounce phantom attackers. Reap clicks and publicity. Indict all skeptics as racists and haters. Repeat.

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Smears first. Facts later. How much leeway can American journalism get?

By Michelle Malkin