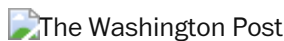


Exhibit 40



Post Partisan Opinion

Sarah Sanders's diabolically clever attack on Jim Acosta

By Molly Roberts

“This is a lie.”

That was CNN reporter Jim Acosta's response to White House press secretary Sarah Sanders's [accusation](#) that he had placed “his hands on a young woman just trying to do her job.”

The [original](#) video of Acosta's (non-) altercation with a press aide shows the aide grabbing the microphone in Acosta's hand and Acosta's wrist landing on her arm as he gesticulates downward. The version of the video Sanders [shared](#) late last night, courtesy of Infowars, makes Acosta's movement appear accelerated so that he seems the aggressor, and the movement itself seems aggressive. There is a tortuous [debate](#) over to what extent the clip was deliberately distorted, but the effect is clear enough. Acosta looks like Sanders wants him to.

So Acosta is right: This is a lie. But no one agrees on what the truth is anymore, and that's exactly what Sanders was counting on.

Sanders's decision to reframe pure anti-press sentiment as a blow struck from the moral high ground against a physical abuser is ludicrously hypocritical — and remarkably canny. A favorite narrative of conservatives over the past nine months has been that the mainstream media is conspiring to destroy the lives of men, and Republican men in particular, with false allegations of sexual assault. There was Roy Moore, there was Brett M. Kavanaugh, and of course there is President Trump himself.

The concerns that conservatives broadcast about unsubstantiated allegations of assault are based on the premise that these accusations are cast wildly without any regard for the capital-T Truth. But they're not. There is no leap of journalistic faith required to believe stories in publications from the New Yorker to the New York Times to The Post. These stories are carefully vetted: The accused have a chance to respond. The potentially exculpatory is included right alongside the incriminating. The press certainly reported unproven allegations against Kavanaugh, but reporters were consistently up front about what we knew and what we didn't.

Sanders is cleverly compelling progressives to prop up a Republican talking point: False allegations exist, and people will pay attention to them. When Acosta's defenders cry out against Sanders, she can cry right back that the liberals are the ones who always insist on believing women — and that the press does not care about abuse when it is one of its own who is accused. Reporters are forced to defend both their reporting on abuse allegations and their colleague who Sanders alleges is himself an abuser.

It's also clever because Sanders knows the Trumpian base to whom she is pandering will believe her. As much as the right wing is primed to doubt conspicuously careful reporting from legacy outlets, they are ready to accept without question unvetted tales from the administration and "alternative" sources such as Infowars. And those alternative sources are ready, with the help of automated accounts, to spread those stories far and wide. So to many Americans, the altered altercation footage featuring Jim Acosta, notorious abuser of women, is the real thing.

This is the surest way to wage a war against the press. Americans live in split realities, and Sanders knows it. She is inverting a narrative that has already inflamed conservatives against the press to inflame them further, playing on anger about assault allegations to amplify distrust and division. It's working. After all, no matter which side you're on, you're probably pretty mad right now.



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