

CNN Attacks Man for Saving Women: He Broke Sharia Law Under Taliban

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CNN is in a world of hurt after defaming a security contractor who risked his life to rescue women under threat from the Taliban.

There isn't any question about the defamation, and a judge ruled that the network exhibited actual malice when they worked overtime to destroy the man--a bar so high that it is almost never met. Internal emails showed that the reporters' and producers' goals were to destroy the man and his reputation.

So in a desperate attempt to escape upwards of a billion dollars in liability, CNN's defense is now: by helping women escape the Taliban he was breaking Sharia law.

At issue is a vile report the network did in which they slandered Zachary Young as a human trafficker. Young was saving women who had worked for or collaborated with the United States government--they had been left behind by the Biden Administration--and were being hunted by the Taliban for execution.

They make him sound like he is kidnapping women for the sex trade or something, not saving their lives.

The ruling of actual malice is a slam dunk:

NewsBusters recently reported on Florida's First District Court of Appeals affirming that plaintiff Zachary Young could seek punitive damages, in addition to economic and emotional damages, from the Cable News Network in a civil trial after they allegedly defamed him regarding his work in getting people out of Afghanistan. The total could near or exceed \$1 billion.

For that outcome to be remotely in the cards, Young needed to prove malice and according to the ruling, he's done exactly that. "Young sufficiently proffered evidence of actual malice, express malice, and a level of conduct outrageous enough to open the door for him to seek punitive damages," Judge L. Clayton Roberts wrote in the court's ruling.

The court felt the high bars for actual and expressed malice were met because of internal CNN messages that were extremely vicious toward Young. Correspondent Alex Marquardt, the "primary reporter" expressed in a message to a colleague that he wanted to "nail this Zachary Young m...fucker" and thought the story would be Young's "funeral." On that declaration of wanting to "nail" Young, CNN editor Matthew Philips responded: "gonna hold you to that cowboy!"

Alongside Marquardt, CNN senior editor Fuzz Hogan, who's a member of CNN's internally lauded "Triad" of editorial, legal, and standards/practices oversight personnel, described Young as "a shit."

You can understand why CNN is panicked. They can almost always get away with outright slander by hiding behind an "absence of malice" defense, but the emails show actual malice. They wanted to "nail" Young, and conspired to do so.

The case hinged on CNN's use of the phrases "black market" and "exploited" to describe Young's legitimate business helping corporately sponsored Afghans escape the country as it collapsed around them and the Taliban retook control. Young's clients included Audible and Bloomberg News - one of CNN's industry peers, and he saved 24 people.

Freedman said CNN essentially "branded [Young] a human trafficker" and a "war profiteer" and broadcasted it to millions of households.

Jake Tapper, the host whose show the allegedly defamatory story ran on (*The Lead*), also made a point to note that people seeking escape were given "no guarantee of safety or success." Yet, at no point could CNN prove that what Young was doing was a scam. In fact, their editors admitted in messages that couldn't find evidence of it.

In a filing submitted by Freedman, a message from a CNN editor - uncovered during discovery - expressed concern with the story: “Digital decided not to publish a digital version from Alex. They told me it was bc we could not answer the question is this a scam.”

So in their panic CNN is now trying to argue that Young was committing the crime of human trafficking under Taliban Sharia law and that he should have respected the will of the Taliban to rape, torture, and murder the women he was saving.

That's quite the legal flex, CNN. I hope you are proud.

Apparently they are.

CNN essentially blamed Young’s insistence that they accused him of a crime for their choice to cite Sharia law to prove their innocence:

But, even if Young is right that CNN accused him of illegal conduct—which CNN vigorously disputes—he still cannot prevail on his claims (...) discovery has indicated that the activities Young directed and funded almost certainly were illegal under Taliban law, as the Taliban prohibited Afghans (especially woman) from exiting the country without permission and vastly restricted their movement inside the country.

The filing also says “CNN vigorously disputes” the claim that they were accusing Young of a crime – while they were actively citing Sharia law as evidence of Young committing crimes. They further suggest that the use of the term “black market” was meant “to convey that the private market for evacuation services was unregulated,” which by common understanding was a gray market.

So CNN accused Young of being a black marketeer and human trafficker based on the fact that the Taliban were hunting the women in order to enslave or kill them.

Nice.

CNN internal emails admit that the story sucked and was without merit. In other words, they knew it wasn't substantiated but decided to run it anyway because they wanted to "nail" Young and were willing to lie to accomplish that goal.

And while the filing portrayed CNN's reporting as rock solid and whole, Judge Roberts did note in his punitive damages ruling that the network's own internal communication showed concern about it not being ready for public viewing.

"Young proffered CNN messages and emails that showed internal concern about the completeness and veracity of the reporting—the story is ‘a mess,’ ‘incomplete,’ not ‘fleshed out for digital,’ ‘the story is 80% emotion, 20% obscured fact,’ and ‘full of holes like Swiss cheese,’” he wrote.

In response to NewsBusters' questions about why they were citing Sharia law, given it was so oppressive of women, and if they didn't think what Young was doing, in terms of saving women from that situation, was a good thing, a CNN spokesperson said: “Young takes issue with CNN referring to the conditions on the ground as a black market. Acknowledging the state of local law is a necessary part of the legal analysis. There is no good faith reading of CNN’s filing that supports such a false, reckless, and malicious characterization.”

CNN accusing others of pushing "false, reckless, and malicious" characterizations is rich beyond belief, and relying on Taliban law to justify their slander of an innocent man based on a story that was "80% emotion" and "20% obscured facts" and "full of holes like Swiss cheese" is even richer.

And these are the people who "objectively" tell us the "truth" and "fact check" others.