

Renowned photojournalist assaulted by US Secret Service at Trump rally

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An agent of the US Secret Service violently assaulted veteran photojournalist Christopher Morris Monday at a rally in Radford University in Virginia for right-wing Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

The incident, which was caught on video, is a testament to the brutality of law enforcement forces and the violent climate whipped up at the rallies of the right-wing demagogue.

Bystander video showed the Secret Service agent choking the journalist with both hands. “I stepped 18 inches out of the pen and he grabbed me by the neck and started choking me and then he slammed me to the ground,” said Morris.

Morris, who was working on assignment from *TIME* magazine, was seeking to photograph supporters of the group Black Lives Matter, who staged a protest during Trump’s speech in opposition to a string of racist and xenophobic remarks by the candidate.

Another video showed that Morris played no role in initiating the violence, but rather responded to confrontational behavior from the Secret Service agent, by declaring “f*ck you.” This prompted the assault. The US Constitution protects even offensive speech directed against law enforcement officers, and using such speech as a pretext for violence or arrest is a violation of the First Amendment.

Shortly before the assault, Trump vituperated against reporters, who he said were “amazingly dishonest” and “a real problem in this country.” While he said politicians were “sleaze bags,” “the press is worse,” and the political press is “the worst of all.”

Morris has documented over eighteen foreign conflicts, including the US invasion of Iraq, the Persian Gulf war, and the wars in Afghanistan, Somalia, Yugoslavia and Chechnya. He has extensively documented both the Bush and Obama administrations.

In a statement, Morris said, “I’ve worked for nine years at the White House and have never had an altercation with the Secret Service.”

“The agent’s response was disproportionate and unnecessarily violent. I hope this incident helps call attention to the challenges of press access,” he added.

A review of Morris’ work, available at his web site, reveals him to be an extraordinarily gifted and accomplished photographer.

His photojournalism during the Iraq war is at once hauntingly beautiful and unflinching in its depiction of the carnage of the US occupation, and his coverage of the institutions of American state power is subtle and perspicacious.

His second book, *Americans*, published in 2012, is described by the publisher as presenting “a nation in a state of perpetual loss and its people searching for an identity—stranded within two long-running wars and an economy on the verge of collapse.”



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