

# TRUMP'S HANDLERS ATTEMPT TO RETCON HIS FASCIST ATTACK ON HAITIAN MIGRANTS

According to Marc Caputo, the cat-eating screech that was one of the most disastrous moments of Donald Trump's debate was supposed to be a planned bit.

DONALD TRUMP HAD A PLAN FOR Tuesday night's presidential debate. But then the cat, neither abducted nor consumed, got his tongue and talking points.

If the moderators hit him for spreading a baseless urban legend about Haitian immigrants eating cats in the small city of Springfield, Ohio, the ex-president was supposed to execute a classic rope-a-dope strategy: He would dodge the punch and place the blame for the story on town locals; then he'd pivot to attacking Vice President Kamala Harris and the media over the toll of rampant immigration on housing, healthcare, and crime in Springfield.

It was all strategized in advance. There was just one problem: It required Trump to execute it.

But when the topic of immigration came up, the former president got sidetracked by taking umbrage with Harris's insistence that he had uninspiring rallies. He then mentioned the possibility of World War III. Only after that did he launch into the rumors of pet-eating, and then without preparing viewers about the backstory.

"In Springfield, they're eating the dogs," Trump said. "The people that came in. They're eating the cats. They're

eating – they’re eating the pets of the people that live there. And this is what’s happening in our country. And it’s a shame.”

This explanation – that Trump was only supposed to raise this if moderators dinged him for spreading a racist hoax – doesn’t make sense on several levels.

That’s true, most of all, because Trump himself raised the hoaxes he’s been spreading about Springfield and Aurora in his very first response, which was supposed to be about the economy.

On top of that, we have millions of people pouring into our country from prisons and jails, from mental institutions and insane asylums. And they’re coming in and they’re taking jobs that are occupied right now by African Americans and Hispanics and also unions. Unions are going to be affected very soon. And you see what’s happening. You see what’s happening with towns throughout the United States. **You look at Springfield, Ohio. You look at Aurora in Colorado. They are taking over the towns. They’re taking over buildings. They’re going in violently.** These are the people that she and Biden let into our country. And they’re destroying our country. They’re dangerous. They’re at the highest level of criminality. And we have to get them out. We have to get them out fast. I created one of the greatest economies in the history of our country. I’ll do it again and even better.

DAVID MUIR: We are going to get to immigration and border security during this debate. [my emphasis]

Debate first responses at any debate reflect a

campaign's primary focus and should be fresh from debate prep (though Trump invited Laura Loomer to fly to the debate with him, which is whom Mike Allen and Jim "Pool Boy" VandeHei blame for the meltdown). And Harris hadn't yet started the process of beating Trump to a quivering mess yet, so that can't explain why Trump raised it unbidden.

Trump repeated his immigration attack (this time not mentioning Aurora and Springfield) in response to Harris' accusation that Trump exported chip technology to China.

But when you look at what she's done to our country and when you look at these millions and millions of people that are pouring into our country monthly where it's I believe 21 million people, not the 15 that people say, and I think it's a lot higher than the 21. That's bigger than New York state. Pouring in. And just look at what they're doing to our country. They're criminals. Many of these people coming in are criminals. And that's bad for our economy too. You mentioned before, we'll talk about immigration later.

Well, bad immigration is the worst thing that can happen to our economy. They have and she has destroyed our country with policy that's insane. Almost policy that you'd say they have to hate our country.

His cat screech came not in response to a question *to him* about the hoax he had already raised (what Caputo claimed it was supposed to be), but as a follow-up to Harris' response to Muir's question about why the Biden Administration had waited so long to implement executive orders.

DAVID MUIR: But my question to you tonight is why did the administration wait until six months before the

election to act and would you have done anything differently from President Biden on this?

VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: So I'm the only person on this stage who has prosecuted transnational criminal organizations for the trafficking of guns, drugs, and human beings. And let me say that the United States Congress, including some of the most conservative members of the United States Senate, came up with a border security bill which I supported. And that bill would have put 1,500 more border agents on the border to help those folks who are working there right now over time trying to do their job. It would have allowed us to stem the flow of fentanyl coming into the United States. I know there are so many families watching tonight who have been personally affected by the surge of fentanyl in our country. That bill would have put more resources to allow us to prosecute transnational criminal organizations for trafficking in guns, drugs and human beings. But you know what happened to that bill? Donald Trump got on the phone, called up some folks in Congress, and said kill the bill. And you know why? Because he preferred to run on a problem instead of fixing a problem. And understand, this comes at a time where the people of our country actually need a leader who engages in solutions, who actually addresses the problems at hand. But what we have in the former president is someone who would prefer to run on a problem instead of fixing a problem. And I'll tell you something, he's going to talk about immigration a lot tonight even when it's not the subject that is being raised. And I'm going to actually do something really unusual and I'm going to invite you to attend one of Donald Trump's rallies because it's a

really interesting thing to watch. You will see during the course of his rallies he talks about fictional characters like Hannibal Lecter. He will talk about windmills cause cancer. And what you will also notice is that people start leaving his rallies early out of exhaustion and boredom. And I will tell you the one thing you will not hear him talk about is you. You will not hear him talk about your needs, your dreams, and your, your desires. And I'll tell you, I believe you deserve a president who actually puts you first. And I pledge to you that I will.

DAVID MUIR: Vice President Harris, thank you. President Trump, on that point I want to get your response.

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: Well, I would like to respond.

DAVID MUIR: Let me just ask, though, why did you try to kill that bill and successfully so? That would have put thousands of additional agents and officers on the border.

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: First let me respond as to the rallies. She said people start leaving. People don't go to her rallies. There's no reason to go. And the people that do go, she's busing them in and paying them to be there. And then showing them in a different light. So, she can't talk about that. People don't leave my rallies. We have the biggest rallies, the most incredible rallies in the history of politics. That's because people want to take their country back. Our country is being lost. We're a failing nation. And it happened three and a half years ago. And what, what's going on here, you're going to end up in World War 3, just to go into another subject. What they have done to our country by allowing these millions

and millions of people to come into our country. And look at what's happening to the towns all over the United States. And a lot of towns don't want to talk – not going to be Aurora or Springfield. A lot of towns don't want to talk about it because they're so embarrassed by it. In Springfield, they're eating the dogs. The people that came in. They're eating the cats. They're eating – they're eating the pets of the people that live there. And this is what's happening in our country. And it's a shame. As far as rallies are concerned, as far – the reason they go is they like what I say. They want to bring our country back. They want to make America great again. It's a very simple phrase. Make America great again. She's destroying this country. And if she becomes president, this country doesn't have a chance of success. Not only success. We'll end up being Venezuela on steroids.

DAVID MUIR: I just want to clarify here, you bring up Springfield, Ohio. And ABC News did reach out to the city manager there. He told us there have been no credible reports of specific claims of pets being harmed, injured or abused by individuals within the immigrant community –

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: Well, I've seen people on television

DAVID MUIR: Let me just say here this ...

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: The people on television say my dog was taken and used for food. So maybe he said that and maybe that's a good thing to say for a city manager.

DAVID MUIR: I'm not taking this from television. I'm taking it from the city manager.

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: But the

people on television say their dog was eaten by the people that went there.

DAVID MUIR: Again, the Springfield city manager says there's no evidence of that.

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: We'll find out

DAVID MUIR: Vice President Harris, I'll let you respond to the rest of what you heard.

VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Talk about extreme.

There's little doubt that the psychic damage Harris did by calling his rallies "bor[ing]" rattled his response, leading him to first defend the virility of his rallies and only then to deliver the purportedly prepackaged Springfield comment, delivered as screech.

But what happened next is significant, given the retconning that Caputo got fed.

Trump's meltdown might not have been so damaging were it not for Muir's fact check, one of just three from the entire debate, but nevertheless the one that has led right wing trolls to offer bounties to try to create a less pathetic explanation than, "the people on my TV say."



Christopher F. Rufo   
@realchrisrufo

...

Alright, let's settle it: I will provide a \$5,000 bounty to anyone who can provide my team with hard, verifiable evidence that Haitian migrants are eating cats in Springfield, Ohio. Deadline is Sunday. Go.

7:12 PM · Sep 11, 2024 · 3.3M Views

The timeline shows that Trump raised Springfield, what Caputo calls, "a baseless urban legend," himself, when he was still fresh and unsullied by Harris' attacks. Then he had his screech. And then Muir offered a fact check that – let's face it – right wingers didn't expect (which therefore Trump's debate preppers likely didn't either).

No one expected the push back that Muir actually gave after the fact, yet it is central to the effort to retcon the screech.

As an interlude, make sure you seek out the various versions of Trump's screech set to music, which I first saw from this guy.

A few more things happened, though, between Harris' pummeling of Trump, his screech, and the time when people started retconning it with Caputo: Stephen "Discount Goebbels" Miller similarly got pummeled, in that case by a Venezuelan journalist, José del Pino, asking why Miller – and by extension, Trump – have this ridiculous belief that Nicolas Maduro brought down crime by exporting criminals to the United States.

So before someone tried to retcon Trump's meltdown with Caputo, *both* Trump and Miller had had humiliating meltdowns.

And before that, Miller had spent most of the two days leading up to the debate disseminating these same false claims, RTing at least ten tweets dehumanizing Haitians, especially in Springfield.





The retconning fed to Caputo lets not just Miller off the hook for spreading what Caputo calls “a baseless urban legend.” It lets JD Vance off too.

After all, Ohio Senator Vance was a key vector in the pet-eating story.



Even after people explained there was no evidence for it, even as he acknowledge that “these rumors [may] turn out to be false,” JD nevertheless encouraged other trolls to “keep the cat memes flowing.”



Caputo credulously accepts that JD's explanation to Kaitlan Collins in the spin room (in an interview given around the same time that Miller was melting down when called on the fact that he was parroting Maduro's false stats) that meming was just a way to highlight the underlying tensions in a small city with an influx of new residents, of whatever race and national origin.

It was left to his vice presidential nominee, JD Vance, to play cleanup and showcase the campaign's strategy during an appearance on CNN 45 minutes after the debate had ended.

"This town has been ravaged by 20,000 migrants coming in . . . This is what Kamala Harris's border policies have done," Vance said. "The media didn't care about the carnage wrought by these policies until we turned it into a meme

about cats . . . If we have to meme about it to get the media to care, we're going to keep on doing it because the media should care about what's going on."

The primary cleanup here was Caputo's.

Caputo doesn't mention Collins' comparison of this hoax to Bigfoot. He doesn't mention how Vance bulldozed through Collins' point that Trump raised this even though officials have no evidence.

If someone calls your office and says they saw Bigfoot, that doesn't mean they saw Bigfoot. You have a sense of responsibility as a running mate, he certainly does as the candidate to not promote false information, right?

Similarly, Caputo cleaned up what he describes Jason Miller's attempt to "polish" this conspiracy.

In a CNN interview Wednesday morning, Miller also tried to polish Trump's immigration remarks from the night before. He insisted the story of pet-eating Haitians wasn't far-fetched by boosting a story from the conservative website the *Federalist* about a Springfield resident who recently called 911 to report four Haitians each carrying a goose (but the story didn't mention cats, dogs, or pets).

Miller complained about the bias of the moderators for failing to fact-check Harris on issues like fracking and said they should have talked about the Biden-Harris administration's "airlifts" of Haitian migrants into the United States.

[snip]

Later that morning on Truth Social,

Trump posted an image of the police report as well as video of a woman in the city of Canton, Ohio (which is 173 miles away from Springfield) who was arrested for eating a cat. The woman is a U.S. citizen and not of Haitian descent, according to press reports.

Yes, Caputo noted how ridiculous it was for Miller and others to point to Haitians carrying geese (or a troubled non-immigrant woman 100 miles away who did eat a pet) to claim their Haitian hoax was defensible.

He *didn't* note that Miller was on CNN falsely claiming the Haitians in Springfield are *illegal* (or that they were brought in deliberately). That is, Caputo cleaned up the false premise here: that Trump and his team are calling legal immigrants illegals, and on that basis fearmongering about someone eating your pet kitty.

This is the real issue, both in the dissemination and Caputo's willingness to repackage it.

All the evidence suggests this is not "a baseless urban legend." Rather, it is a packaged neo-Nazi attack designed to sow violence against migrant communities.

According to a local leader in the Haitian community, while there were tensions, none of that boiled up until a car accident involving a legal Haitian ended up killing a school boy.

**What were things like over the course of the first couple of years that you were living in Springfield? Was the community welcoming?**

We were just here working peacefully and caring about our family and all of this. The community was okay. There was still a group of people in Springfield who saw the coming of the Haitians as a threat. But normally, generally, the community

was so open with us. We had so many people working with us and things like this. Until the recent incident of the recent bus accident and people have been building up on that just to tell bad news about us.

**So you think the bus accident was when things really started to change?**

Yeah, it triggered it. There was some tension before but not like it came after the bus accident.

A neo-Nazi group responded to that by organizing a march in the town. And then one of them created a conflict at a local city commission.

Late last month, a neo-Nazi group called Blood Ties organized a march outside the Springfield Jazz and Blues Festival. At the Aug. 26 city commission meeting, Drake R. Berentz took credit for organizing that march while introducing himself via an anti-Black pseudonym. He was promptly removed from the hearing after stating, "Crime and savagery will only increase with every Haitian you bring in."

A national far right network with intimate ties to Trump's team start magnifying disinformation from Springfield.

Shortly after, racist claims aimed at the state's Haitian community began to surge online, boosted by known disinformation outlets and eventually echoed by GOP officials.

The unfounded narrative that Haitian immigrants were eating pets reached national attention after being repeated this week first by Republican vice presidential nominee J.D. Vance (the junior senator from Ohio) and then his running mate Donald Trump at the

latter's debate with Kamala Harris.

The origins of the conspiracy theory remain largely unknown, but a New Lines investigation has identified several points of amplification from known spreaders of disinformation. Its fairly rapid spread reveals how extremist narratives travel from the fringes of the internet into the mouths of politicians, seemingly overnight.

Less than a week earlier, End Wokeness, an account on X (formally Twitter) that has been connected in the past to the white nationalist Jack Posobiec, shared a Facebook post alleging that Haitian immigrants were eating pets in Ohio. The claim was quickly repeated by the political commentator and founder of Turning Point USA, Charlie Kirk, during his broadcast hosted on Steve Bannon's media network.

Kirk commented that this brought the United States "one step closer to the great replacement," referring to a white nationalist narrative that claims non-white immigrants are replacing white people in the U.S. The narrative was originally obscure but has been increasingly embraced by the GOP mainstream in recent years.

Kirk is a close associate of Posobiec. Both his claims and the End Wokeness account's tweet reference a single anonymous post on a private Facebook group as proof of their claims.

This was followed up on Sept. 8, when the End Wokeness account tweeted a video from a Springfield City Commission meeting where an influencer and podcaster named Anthony Harris claimed Haitian immigrants were eating ducks in the parks. This seemingly spawned from a repurposed image of a man holding a dead

Canada goose in Columbus, Ohio, taken a month before.

This entire story, then, is about creating false stories in order to stoke far right violence against immigrants. It's not an urban legend. It is deliberate propaganda.

It is already having real effects on the Haitians in Springfield.

And as such, it's little different from the deliberate disinformation used to stoke the Dublin or Southport riots. Indeed, the networks behind all of them have very significant overlaps.

What is different here is that Trump is running to regain the presidency on such a platform of such disinformation. Trump's team is riddled with participants in this transnational effort to stoke fascism with viral disinformation targeting immigrants; some of them aren't even serving prison terms in Danbury FCI for covering up January 6! And Elon Musk has been all too happy to encourage it on Xitter.

Because of this – because of the way Trump's team participates in this – Trump's meltdown calls for far more than embarrassed retconning.

I don't doubt that this was an orchestrated, intentional smear, one that Trump flubbed because Kamala Harris first made Trump insecure and then because Muir came ready with a fact-check. The fact that Trump's handlers are trying to excuse it away as – in the Axios version – a matter of the fascist conspiracists he has admitted into his old man bubble, is a tell, but also an opportunity.

*1. He's haunted. He can't stand being seen as a loser. So it's impossible to fully admit he didn't win in*

2020. He looks to distractions like crowd size and adoring coverage for solace. So, seemingly silly taunts – like Harris’ “people start leaving his rallies early out of exhaustion and boredom” – hit deep.

2. **He falls for fake news.** For a guy who made “fake news” a household term, he falls for it often and easily. It wasn’t hard to learn that the allegations of Haitians eating pet dogs and cats were silly and wrong. But far-right activist Laura Loomer was on the plane ride to the debate with him, egging him on.

3. **He’s old.** A wise man told us three types of people never change: Old guys. Rich guys. Guys with their names on the building. So the chances that Trump – a 78-year-old, self-proclaimed billionaire with his name on buildings, bottles and golf courses – will



*change are, um, nil.*

**4. His bubble lies to him.** *All politicians live in self-protective bubbles. But Trump's, which extends from his social media cocoon to his Mar-a-Lago luxury, is almost impossible to penetrate with hard truths. There's always a Loomer to tell Trump he's winning ... even when he's not.*

Usually, this far right disinformation is supposed to be a little smoother than this – like JD delivered it, rather than the screech with which Trump did.

But, in spite of the excuses fed to Bulwark and Axios, the screech is the real thing. It is who Trump is. It is the ugliness with which this is all intended.

And rather than accepting excuses because the former President's delivery made the ugliness readily visible in front of millions, we need to be clear that these memes are not, in fact, an effort to focus attention on the growing pains of a town with booming population.

Rather, they are a deliberate attempt to dehumanize people to either sow fear among voters – Trump even targeted this at union voters! – or violence if that fails.

After Kamala Harris rattled his ego, Trump showed himself for who he and his extended network really are. When people show you who they really are, believe them.

Update: Paul Waldman notes the intentionality of all this as well.