UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

CASSANDRA FAIRBANKS, an individual,)
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)
)
Plaintiff,)
V	~
v.	3
EMMA ROLLER, an individual,	Ś
,,	Ś
)
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Defendant.)
Derendant.	_)

Civil Action No.: 1:17-cv-1052

(Jury Trial Demanded)

COMPLAINT

A reporter (Emma Roller, a reporter for Fusion) with a loud megaphone to the world and a prominent platform from which to use it, defamed another writer, commentator and journalist. Even when others corrected the defamation, Roller refused until the eve of this suit. This suit follows.

INTRODUCTION

Many members of prominent media organizations see themselves as the exclusive arbiters of truth. Protecting their self-declared monopoly, many of these "journalists" use their

perch of public influence to defame, slander and libel those they disagree with politically and ideologically. They see the First Amendment as a sword, not a shield; they view the First Amendment as only protecting those with elites on their rolodex, and view the First Amendment as a wholly owned property of elite-backed journalists to smear and slime their adversaries at will with libels and defamation. In fact, the First Amendment's foundations rest on the cornerstones of independent, outsider writers, scribes, advocates and journalists, from Thomas

- 1 -COMPLAINT

Case 1:17-cv-01052 Document 1 Filed 06/01/17 Page 2 of 9

Paine to Thomas Jefferson, almost always resisted by the establishment courtiers of, and courtesans to, the truth-corrupted power of their day. The First Amendment is meant to protect the Cassandra Fairbanks' of the journalism world: independent, alternative voices of truth in a sea of fake news. It is in this context that this suit arises.

Emma Roller, of Fusion, told the world that Fairbanks flashed a "white power" signal to the world from the media center of the White House. Roller went further, factually telling the world this "white power" signal had been identified as such by the Anti-Defamation League. What was this "white power" signal? The "ok" hand signal. Within days of this false story by Roller — spread to the world through her twitter account, and then throughout the internet — the ADL itself denounced this claim as a "hoax" noting that the "ok" sign had "never" been a white power signal. Did Roller correct her defamation of Cassandra Fairbanks? No. Instead, on the eve of learning of this lawsuit, Roller deleted the tweet, and tried to destroy the evidence of her saying what she said, and doing what she did. This suit followed.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1332 as complete diversity exists and the matter in controversy exceeds \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs.
- This Court has personal jurisdiction over the Defendant because the false and defamatory statement made by Defendant was published in the District of Columbia and the Defendant resides within the District of Columbia.
- 3. Venue is proper in this District under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) because all or a substantial portion of the events that gave rise to Plaintiff's claims transpired in the District of Columbia, including the publication of the defamatory falsehood and damage to Plaintiff's reputation.

THE PARTIES

4. Plaintiff Cassandra Fairbanks is a reporter for Bigleaguepolitics.com, a political activist, and a resident

 - 2 -COMPLAINT

 Defendant Emma Roller is a senior politics reporter at Fusion.net and a resident
 Defendant has a Twitter.com following of approximately 23,000 people.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

- 6. On April 28, 2017, Defendant Emma Roller published a photo via her Twitter account of the Plaintiff under a caption Roller wrote: "just two people doing a white power hand gesture in the White House."
- 7. On April 28, 2017, Roller further published a claim that the Anti-Defamation League ("ADL") identified Fairbanks' hand signal as a two-handed hand sign wherein one hand forms a letter "W" and the other hand forms a letter "P," to represent "WP" or "White Power."
- 8. On April 28, 2017, and in the days thereafter, Roller's post was republished across the web, re-shared by other Twitter users at least 6,827 times, received at least 7,169 "likes" from other Twitter users, and the story was picked up by major news outlets including The Independent.
- 9. Roller's story led to republishing of the story across the world, as a leading article on Yahoo, and pervaded the social media press. Of note, no serious publication in America republished the false story by Roller, and Fusion itself refused to publish the false story by its own reporter.
- 10. The ADL rebuked Roller's claim a few days later, publishing an article on May 1, 2017,

making clear they had never called the hand signal used by Fairbanks (the "OK" gesture) as a white power symbol. Despite this, Roller failed to issue a retraction or correction.

11. Roller knew at the time of her publishing that Fairbanks was a long-time civil rights writer, journalist, and advocate, who backed Trump's candidate for the Presidency only also after protesting civil rights violations against a wide range of citizens, including women and African-Americans, and had previously backed Bernie Sanders presidential

> - 3 -COMPLAINT

bid. Roller knew Fairbanks was not using "white power" signals before she published her false stories on April 28, 2017.

12. Roller knew her story was false when the ADL rebuked the very basis of her claims, yet Roller still refused to retract or correct the story at any time. Instead, upon the eve of filing suit, Roller tried to erase her tracks, deleting her published stories about this, and yet not correcting anything for the world to know the truth.

COUNT I: DEFAMATION (LIBEL)

- Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 12 of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.
- 14. Defendant wrote and published on her Twitter page the defamatory caption overPlaintiff's photo falsely accusing Plaintiff of making a white power hand gesture.
- 15. Defendant published the caption without privilege and without Plaintiff's consent.
- 16. The serious nature of the allegation that Plaintiff made a white power hand gesture should have heightened Defendant's due diligence in confirming the veracity of the claim before publishing the caption. Defendant acted with actual malice when she published the caption either with actual knowledge that the caption was not true or with reckless disregard as to its truth. At a minimum, Defendant failed to exercise reasonable care when she published such a serious allegation against the Plaintiff.
- 17. By falsely claiming that the Plaintiff made a white power hand gesture, the Defendant insinuated that the Plaintiff held white supremacist beliefs and has proximately caused injury to Plaintiff's professional reputation and credibility. Specifically, the caption has caused Plaintiff to suffer in the following manner:
 - Damage to her personal and professional reputation in the United States, and worldwide;
 - b. Damage to her business opportunities in the United States, and worldwide;

- c. A false implication and innuendo attached to her reputation, one won on civil rights advocacy for more than a decade, that she holds white supremacist beliefs;
- d. Being subjected to unwanted negative media attention and online harassment.
- Even after the Plaintiff informed the Defendant in writing that she did not make a white power hand gesture, the Defendant failed to retract the caption.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment in her favor and against the Defendant, issue injunctive relief, including that Defendant issue a retraction, issue declaratory relief, that the Defendant declare that her statement was in fact defamation, monetary relief in an amount to be determined at trial, pre-judgment interest, and grant such other further relief that the Court deems appropriate.

COUNT II: FALSE LIGHT INVASION OF PRIVACY

- Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 12 of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.
- 20. Defendant wrote and published on her Twitter page the defamatory caption over Plaintiff's photo falsely accusing Plaintiff of making a white power hand gesture and falsely insinuating that Plaintiff held white supremacist beliefs.
- 21. As soon as Defendant published the caption it immediately became accessible to the entire Internet, to Defendant's approximately 23,000 followers, was re-shared by other Twitter users at least 6,827 times, received at least 7,169 "likes" from other Twitter users, and the story was picked up by major news outlets including Fox News and United Kingdom based magazine The Independent, with the article published by Independent being shared at least 20,000 times.
- 22. The caption contains a false and defamatory allegation about the Plaintiff that insinuates that the Plaintiff holds beliefs she does not hold and that has the effect of placing Plaintiff in a false light, specifically, that she is a white supremacist. Such false light is highly offensive to a reasonable person.

- 23. Defendant published the caption without privilege and without Plaintiff's consent.
- 24. The serious nature of the allegation that Plaintiff made a white power hand gesture should have heightened Defendant's due diligence in confirming the veracity of the claim before publishing the caption. Defendant acted with actual malice when she published the caption either with actual knowledge that the caption was not true or with reckless disregard as to its truth. At a minimum, Defendant failed to exercise reasonable care when she published such a serious allegation against the Plaintiff.
- 25. Even after the Plaintiff informed the Defendant in writing that she did not make a white power hand gesture, the Defendant failed to retract the caption.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment in her favor and against the Defendant, issue injunctive relief, including that Defendant issue a retraction, issue declaratory relief, that the Defendant declare that her statement was in fact defamation, monetary relief in an amount to be determined at trial, pre-judgment interest, and grant such other further relief that the Court deems appropriate.

COUNT III: INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL HARM

- 26. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 12 of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.
- 27. Defendant's choice to write and publish on her Twitter page the defamatory caption over Plaintiff's photo falsely accusing Plaintiff of making a white power hand gesture and falsely insinuating that Plaintiff held white supremacist beliefs occurred intentionally and with a desire to harm Plaintiff.
- 28. How Defendant sought to harm Plaintiff, including the publication of a false and defamatory statement about Plaintiff to a worldwide audience, was extreme and outrageous.
- 29. Because of the actions of Defendant, including the resulting mass harassment campaign experienced by Plaintiff, Plaintiff has experienced extreme emotional distress.

30. Because of the actions of Defendant, the character and reputation of Plaintiff were harmed, her standing and reputation among the community were impaired, she suffered financially, and she experienced undue and unnecessary stress.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment in her favor and against the Defendant, issue injunctive relief, including that Defendant issue a retraction, issue declaratory relief, that the Defendant declare that her statement was in fact defamation, monetary relief in an amount to be determined at trial, pre-judgment interest, and grant such other further relief that the Court deems appropriate.

COUNT IV: NEGLIGENT INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

- Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 12 of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.
- 32. Defendant's choice to write and publish on her Twitter page the defamatory caption over Plaintiff's photo falsely accusing Plaintiff of making a white power hand gesture and falsely insinuating that Plaintiff held white supremacist beliefs occurred as result of Defendant's negligence.
- 33. The manner by which Defendant sought to harm Plaintiff, including the publication of a false and defamatory statement about Plaintiff to a worldwide audience, was extreme and outrageous.
- 34. Because of the actions of Defendant, including the resulting mass harassment campaign experienced by Plaintiff, Plaintiff has experienced extreme emotional distress.
- 35. Because of the actions of Defendant, the character and reputation of Plaintiff were harmed, her standing and reputation among the community were impaired, she suffered financially, and she suffered mental anguish and personal humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment in her favor and against the Defendant, issue injunctive relief, including that Defendant issue a retraction, issue declaratory relief, that the Defendant declare that her statement was in fact defamation, monetary relief in an amount to be determined at trial, pre-judgment interest, and grant such other further relief that the Court deems appropriate.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Wherefore, Plaintiff Cassandra Fairbanks respectfully prays for judgment as follows:

A. For injunctive relief requiring Defendant to publish a retraction stating that Plaintiff did not make a white power hand gesture in her photo published on April 28, 2017, and that Plaintiff does not hold white supremacist views;

B. For declaratory relief requiring Defendant declare that her statement claiming Plaintiff made a white power hand gesture was in fact defamation;

C. For monetary relief in an amount of at least \$100,000.00, or in an amount to be determined at trial;

- D. For prejudgment interest as allowed by law;
- E. For costs of suit incurred herein;
- F. For reasonable attorney's fees; and

For such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff demands trial by jury on all issues so triable.

DATED: June 1, 2017

Respectfully submitted, Cassandra Fairbanks By Counsel

/s/ Robert E. Barnes

Robert E. Barnes, Esq. (*Pro hac vice admission to be sought*) BARNES LAW 601 South Figueroa Street, Suite 4050 Los Angeles, California 90017 Telephone: (310) 510-6211 Facsimile: (310) 510-6225 E-mail: robertbarnes@barneslawllp.com

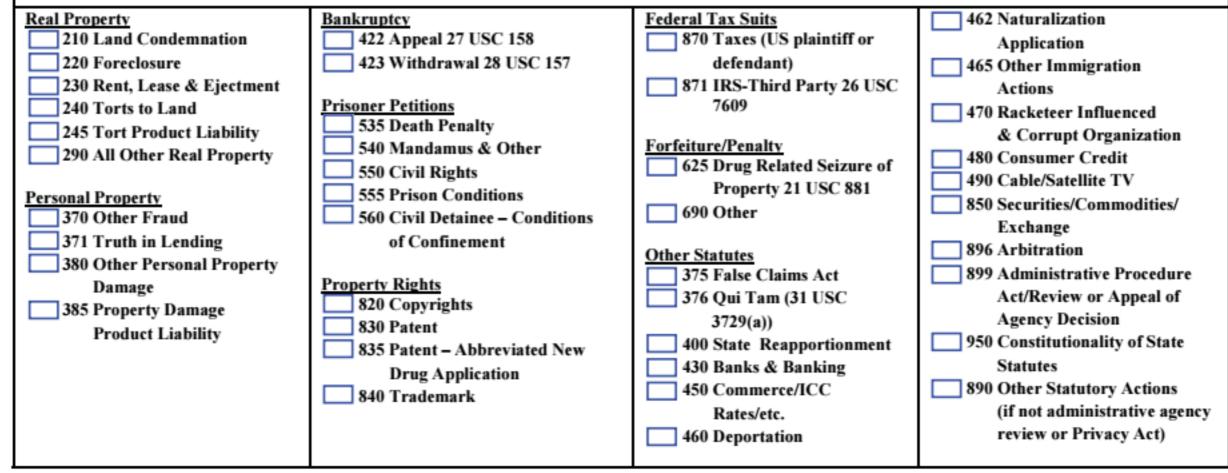
<u>/ s / Daniel D. Mauler</u> Daniel D. Mauler (D.C. Bar No. 977757) REDMON, PEYTON & BRASWELL, LLP 510 King Street, Suite 301 Alexandria, Virginia 22314 703-684-2000 (Tel) 703-684-5109 (Fax) dmauler@rpb-law.com

Counsel for Plaintiff Cassandra Fairbanks

Case 1:17-cv-01052 Document 1-1 Filed 06/01/17 Page 1 of 2

CIVIL COVER SHEET

JS-44 (Rev. 6/17 DC)			
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS		DEFENDANTS	
Cassandra Fairban	ks	Emma Roller	
			FF CASES ONLY)
(c) ATTORNEYS (FIRM NA	ME, ADDRESS, AND TELEPHONE NUMBER)	ATTORNEYS (IF KNOWN)	E LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED
Daniel D. Mauler Redmon, Peyton &		+	
(Place on Y		IENT AND NATURE OF SUIT your Cause of Action and <u>one</u> in a corresp	onding Nature of Suit)
O A. Antitrust	B. Personal Injury/ Malpractice Malpractice Additional Content of the second se	O C. Administrative Agency Review	O D. Temporary Restraining Order/Preliminary
410 Antitrust	 310 Airplane 315 Airplane Product Liability 320 Assault, Libel & Slander 330 Federal Employers Liability 340 Marine 345 Marine Product Liability 350 Motor Vehicle 355 Motor Vehicle Product Liability 360 Other Personal Injury 362 Medical Malpractice 365 Product Liability 367 Health Care/Pharmaceutical Personal Injury Product Liability 368 Asbestos Product Liability 	 151 Medicare Act Social Security 861 HIA (1395ff) 862 Black Lung (923) 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) 864 SSID Title XVI 865 RSI (405(g)) Other Statutes 891 Agricultural Acts 893 Environmental Matters 890 Other Statutory Actions (If Administrative Agency is Involved) 	Injunction Any nature of suit from any category may be selected for this category of case assignment. *(If Antitrust, then A governs)*
O E. General Civ	il (Other) OR	F. Pro Se General Civil	



Case 1:17-cv-01052 Document 1-1 Filed 06/01/17 Page 2 of 2

O G. Habeas Corpus/ 2255	O H. Employment Discrimination	O I. FOIA/Privacy Act	O J. Student Loan		
530 Habeas Corpus – General 510 Motion/Vacate Sentence 463 Habeas Corpus – Alien Detainee	442 Civil Rights – Employment (criteria: race, gender/sex, national origin, discrimination, disability, age, religion, retaliation)	895 Freedom of Information Act 890 Other Statutory Actions (if Privacy Act)	152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loan (excluding veterans)		
	(If pro se, select this deck)	*(If pro se, select this deck)*			
 K. Labor/ERISA (non-employment) 710 Fair Labor Standards Act 720 Labor/Mgmt. Relations 740 Labor Railway Act 751 Family and Medical Leave Act 790 Other Labor Litigation 791 Empl. Ret. Inc. Security Act 	 L. Other Civil Rights (non-employment) 441 Voting (if not Voting Rights Act) 443 Housing/Accommodations 440 Other Civil Rights 445 Americans w/Disabilities – Employment 446 Americans w/Disabilities – Other 448 Education 	 M. Contract 110 Insurance 120 Marine 130 Miller Act 140 Negotiable Instrument 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits 160 Stockholder's Suits 190 Other Contracts 195 Contract Product Liability 196 Franchise 	 N. Three-Judge Court 441 Civil Rights – Voting (if Voting Rights Act) 		
V. ORIGIN					
I Original Proceeding 2 Removed from State Court 3 Remanded from Appellate Court 4 Reinstated or Reopened Court 5 Transferred from another district (specify) 6 Multi-district 7 Appeal to District Judge 8 Multi-district Litigation – Direct File Judge					
VI. CAUSE OF ACTION (CITE THE U.S. CIVIL STATUTE UNDER WHICH YOU ARE FILING AND WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF CAUSE.) 28 USC sec. 1332 (Diversity) - Defamation and Libel					
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT	ACTION UNDED E D C D 22	\$ 100,000 Check M RY DEMAND: YES	(ES only if demanded in complaint X NO		
VIII. RELATED CASE(S) IF ANY	(See instruction) YES	NO K If yes, p	lease complete related case form		
DATE: June 1, 2017	SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF REC	CORD /s/ Daniel	D. Mauler		

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET JS-44 Authority for Civil Cover Sheet

The JS-44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and services of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. Listed below are tips for completing the civil cover sheet. These tips coincide with the Roman Numerals on the cover sheet.

- I. COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED PLAINTIFF/DEFENDANT (b) County of residence: Use 11001 to indicate plaintiff if resident of Washington, DC, 88888 if plaintiff is resident of United States but not Washington, DC, and 99999 if plaintiff is outside the United States.
- III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES: This section is completed <u>only</u> if diversity of citizenship was selected as the Basis of Jurisdiction under Section II.
- IV. CASE ASSIGNMENT AND NATURE OF SUIT: The assignment of a judge to your case will depend on the category you select that best represents the <u>primary</u> cause of action found in your complaint. You may select only <u>one</u> category. You <u>must</u> also select <u>one</u> corresponding nature of suit found under the category of the case.
- VI. CAUSE OF ACTION: Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are filing and write a brief statement of the primary cause.
- VIII. RELATED CASE(S), IF ANY: If you indicated that there is a related case, you must complete a related case form, which may be obtained from the Clerk's Office.

Because of the need for accurate and complete information, you should ensure the accuracy of the information provided prior to signing the form.

Case 1:17-cv-01052 Document 1-2 Filed 06/01/17 Page 1 of 2

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action

	UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT for the District of Columbia		
Cassandra Fairbanks))		
Plaintiff(s) v. Emma Roller))))))))))))))		
Defendant(s))))		

SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address) Emma Roller



A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are: Daniel D. Mauler, Esq. Redmon, Peyton & Braswell, LLP 510 King Street, Suite 301

Alexandria, VA 22314

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

CLERK OF COURT

Date:

Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

Case 1:17-cv-01052 Document 1-2 Filed 06/01/17 Page 2 of 2

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No. 1:17-cv-1052

PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))

	This summons for (na	me of individual and title, if any)					
was ree	ceived by me on (date)		•				
	□ I personally served	d the summons on the individ	dual at (place)				
	on (date)				; or		
	\Box I left the summons at the individual's residence or usual place of abode with <i>(name)</i>						
	, a person of suitable age and discretion who resides on (<i>date</i>), and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or					е,	
	□ I served the summons on (<i>name of individual</i>) designated by law to accept service of process on behalf of (<i>name of organization</i>)						
		1 1		(date)	; or		
	□ I returned the summons unexecuted because					; or	
	□ Other (<i>specify</i>):						
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$		for services, for a total of \$	0.	00	
	I declare under penalty of perjury that this information is true.						
Date:							
				Server's signature			
				Printed name and title			

Server's address

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc: