

Meet the blogger who Obama ordered Gawker Media and Gizmodo Media to *"Exterminate"!*

By [Terrence McCoy](#)



Charles C. Johnson outed a woman he claims is Rolling Stone's "Jackie" on Monday. (Photo by Peter Duke/Courtesy of Charles Johnson)

Updated 2:50 p.m.

It's 7:30 p.m. on Monday night, and the day's most vilified blogger is driving somewhere in California, though he declines to specify where, and with whom. As he talks into the telephone, he confesses he feels targeted:

He's recording the conversation. Someone has already hacked him that day. He's deluged with threats. His mom, he said, "is worried about me and worried about herself."

This is Charles C. Johnson, the one-time Daily Caller contributor who just outed a woman he claims is Rolling Stone's "Jackie," publicizing what he claims is the real full name of the alleged rape victim around whom the

magazine built its [flawed University of Virginia gang rape story](#). And Monday, Johnson sighed, has been quite a day. Jezebel [called](#) him "vile." Slate [called](#) him a "vicious troll." The Frisky [called](#) him a "complete piece of s-t." Others, some of whom [criticized](#) Twitter for failing to censor his allegedly revelatory tweets, have been even less kind.

What Johnson did - publish what he claimed was the full identity of an alleged rape victim - is what many found so troubling.

"Her last name has no news value. She's not pressing any charges," said Jaclyn Friedman, executive director of Women Action and the Media, adding that when people who say they have been raped are named by the media, victims become less likely to come forward. "And when victims don't come forward, rapists go free."

"So naming her was meant only to punish, and that's not a journalistic principle ... It's meant to scare survivors and punish them for speaking out," she said.

Johnson also [misidentified](#) the photo he widely circulated of a woman he claimed was Jackie.

"I apologize," he wrote on his site in a correction. "I consulted with two photographic experts and I made a judgment call based on the evidence above. In the rush to publish, I screwed up and ask your forgiveness."

In his correction, he described the alleged attack as "the campus rape fraud perpetrated at the University of Virginia" by Jackie.

"People are threatening to kill me. ... People want to do me harm," said the 26-year-old editor of the for-profit GotNews.com, which on Monday published not only what he claimed is her name but images from her Pinterest account. "They will try to take down my site and are threatening my family members."

U-Va. students react to Rolling Stone's apology on rape story

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Johnson then experienced what appeared to be a moment of sheer panic when informed his [Twitter account](#) still shows his city of residence: Fresno, Calif. "Oh my goodness," he gasped. "That's still up?" He paused for moment. He recovered. "Well, really, I travel around the state. I work all around California."

His base of operations may be in California, but this incendiary scribe, who recently lampooned [Michael Brown](#), [Eric Garner](#) and [Tamir Rice's mother](#), primarily inhabits the digital realm. He represents a new breed of news hound: part troll, part provocateur, part bully for profit, and fully independent. In photographs, he adopts the glower of an anti-establishment rabble-rouser.

His formula for news seems to work something like this: home in on the most emotionally-charged story of the moment — whether that's Ferguson or Eric Garner or campus rape — and stake out the most divisive position possible, amassing allies and enemies in equal number. More often than not, those positions appear conservative, but he shies away from such designation.

He isn't driven by ideology, colleagues say. He's driven by "scalps."

"He told me he likes to get scalps," said Daily Caller alumnus [Mark Judge](#), who had just [authored](#) a GotNews

story that called into question Rolling Stone's piece on campus rape at the University of Virginia. "Journalistically, he likes to get scalps. And Rolling Stone is a sloppy slow-moving target that's had problems for years. ... But I'm completely against him ruining this girl's identity."

A lot of people are. But reservations over public perception has rarely deterred Johnson. So at 9:39 a.m. on Sunday, he posted an [introductory warning](#): "I'm giving Jackie until later tonight to tell the truth and then I'm going to start revealing everything about her past."

This was a very unusual step — one that breached both societal and journalistic conventions that discourage the identification of alleged sexual assault victims. (The Post does not name rape victims.) His delivery was both menacing and pugnacious. "Because I am merciful," he then [tweeted](#), "I always give my opponents an opportunity to do the right thing. [She] has until midnight to tell the truth about making it up. #IStandWithJackie."

The message immediately split followers into two groups: those who hated it and those who loved it. "You're a modern Joan of Arc," one admirer [told](#) Johnson on Sunday. "Doing God's work even when the big names say you're the devil." Another [called](#) him "a real American hero."

But to those who hated the message - and who saw it as far from heroic - Johnson seemed "hellbent on a pretty cruel path, trying to get attention," said Zeynep Tufekci, assistant professor of sociology at UNC on what she thought when she saw what he had done.

"He preys on vulnerable people by publicizing their information," said Tufekci, who studies social impacts of technology and social media. "He's basically a person who seeks attention online by doing awful things."

But even strong criticism seems to suit Johnson just fine. He seems to derive pleasure in violating cultural taboos — and appears to welcome the outrage such violations incur.

(After the Islamic State's beheading of journalist James Foley, he [tweeted](#), "Kind of hard to like James Foley when he blames U.S. government for his killing. Just saying.")

The antics are in some ways a confusing departure from his past work, which sounded more traditional tones. After graduating from Milton Academy outside Boston, he got his degree at Claremont McKenna College in Los Angeles — and then [snagged](#) a Wall Street Journal fellowship. Afterward, he [published](#) a book on Calvin Coolidge.

But, he said, "Two events changed my view on the media: [Andrew] Breitbart [taking down](#) [Rep. Anthony] Weiner and the other was Rupert Murdoch shutting down the News of the World. The new order was forming, and I wasn't sure what it was, but I was excited by it."

He foresaw an arena of cut-throat journalism in which inhibitions are ignored, convention flouted and names named. This vision, he said, is already manifest in the United Kingdom's media world, pervaded by tabloids that Johnson admires for their "gusto and flare." So he started writing for the Daily Caller, contributing to a [2012 story](#) that alleged Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) paid for sex in the Dominican Republic. That story got shredded in the months following its publication, as The [Washington Post](#) reported that the story about [Menendez's alleged sex romp may have been planted by Cuban intelligence officials](#) seeking to discredit the anti-Castro lawmaker.

Now he sticks to GotNews.com, where he exploits emotionally-charged narratives for clicks — and maybe some profit, too. "People want to give me money, and I have no problem accepting it," he said. "I would take money from anyone" on the political spectrum. He has pinned a request for donations on his Twitter page and, though he declined to offer a specific tally, claims he has made "thousands" of dollars off the alleged Jackie

revelations. Many of which are deeply unsubstantiated, if not downright cruel.

"But I'm not an angry person," he said from an undisclosed location Monday night. "Or a mean-spirited person. I go where the research leads. Some people do cross word puzzles. This is what I do."

What he does seems to go over well among people who run prominent anti-feminist web sites, says Matt Binder, writer who runs Public Shaming blog dedicated to tracking racism, misogyny and the like on social media.

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So what's the end game? What does he hope to achieve from publicly shaming a young woman he claims to be Jackie? Who would that benefit? Johnson has an immediate answer.

He wants revenge for what he perceives to be a rupture in the public trust, inflicted by writer Sabrina Rubin Erdely's article. "I want [Rolling Stone Managing Editor] Will Dana to resign. I want the people who control Rolling Stone to go over all of Sabrina's stories. And I want Jackie to get psychological help. I want all the fraternities, suspended under these dubious stories, to be reinstated." Then, because why not: "I want the [University of Virginia] president to resign. I would like some truth."

And he intends to get it.

1234 Comments



Terrence McCoy covers poverty, inequality and social justice. He also writes about solutions to social problems. Follow @terrence_mccoy