



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 15, 2019

## Is Smollett “Not Guilty” Plea a Ploy To Get a Lesser Charge, No Jail Time?

Jussie Smollett, the biracial homosexual actor, [pleaded not guilty](#) yesterday to 16 felony counts of disorderly conduct in connection with what police allege was an elaborately planned hate hoax designed to get him a raise.



The plea is something of a surprise given the evidence police amassed against the *Empire* actor, but then again, the move is likely a ploy to extract a concession from prosecutors. Smollett might well plead guilty to a lesser charge in exchange for no jail time.

Whatever happens, poor Jussie took it all a little too far. The tale of two white racists stalking him in Chicago in at 2 a.m. in bitter cold was a dog that just wouldn't hunt.

### Hate Hoax on Steroids

As hate hoaxes go, give Smollett credit. He told a tale that invited even the [president to denounce](#) his attackers almost immediately.

On January 22, [Smollett claimed](#), he received a hate letter from supporters of President Trump. Bearing the ominous return address “MAGA” — Make America Great Again — the envelope contained white powder that turned out to be acetaminophen, an over-the-counter pain reliever, and a threatening message fashioned like a ransom note in cut-out letters: “You will die black f\*g.”

That was bad enough. But then, on January 29, while Smollett was returning from Subway after a 2 a.m. munchies run, two whites attacked him. “This is MAGA country,” they snarled. “Aren't you that Empire faggot n\*\*\*\*r!?” They beat him, doused him with bleach, and wrapped a noose around his neck.

America stopped breathing. Former [Vice President Joe Biden](#) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [tweeted their rage](#). A Twitter mob blamed Trump and his racist supporters.

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But police smelled a rat.

They pulled video from 55 private and police surveillance cameras in the area, the [Chicago Tribune reported](#), and eventually found two Nigerian brothers who said Smollett paid them \$3,500 to stage the attack. He promised another \$500 afterward. And cops had the canceled check, along with video that showed the brothers purchasing their hate-hoax supplies.

[Police speculate](#) that Smollett was trying to get a raise.

And the idea for the hoax, some of [Smollett's cast members claimed](#), might have come from *Empire* director Lee Daniels, who posted a story on Instagram about a cousin who suffered an attack by “homophobes.”



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It didn't work out as planned. Instead of a raise, Smollett got a visit from police, who arrested him on a charge of felony disorderly conduct for filing a false police report. He was released on a \$100,000 bond. Yesterday, as the [Tribune reported](#), he was arraigned on 16 felony counts for the multiple lies police say he told them in interviews after the attack.

Remarkably, as with so many hoaxes, none of Smollett's backers who claimed the president and his supporters were responsible for the "attack" wondered whether what the actor claimed could possibly be false.

They accepted at face value the claims that white men were running hither and thither in Chicago, in subzero temperatures, and picked Smollett because they recognized him.

But how many Americans in Trump's base watch *Empire*, and presuming any do, likely because they enjoy the program, would they really beat up one of its stars and say such terrible things?

But Smollett has a record of lying to police, a crime to which he pleaded guilty in 2007.

### **Justice for Jussie**

Despite the hard evidence, Smollett still has believers, the [Tribune reported](#), "well-wishers" who showed up at the hearing to back their man.

"We don't claim to know exactly what happened," said Frank Chapman of the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. "We've got two things to go with: the word of Jussie Smollett, who says he was a victim, and we've got police. And we'll go with Jussie Smollett.... I think as a movement for social justice, we don't have a choice."

What will happen to the "movement" if Smollett pleads guilty to a lesser charge Chapman didn't say.

*Photo: AP Images*



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