

A conspiracy site with White House press credentials revives a debunked birther story

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On Thursday evening, precisely 49 days, five hours and 11 minutes after Barack Obama was no longer the president of the United States, the conspiracy-enthusiastic site Gateway Pundit posted a new story.

Gateway Pundit never met an anti-Obama or anti-Hillary-Clinton story that it didn't like. On any number of occasions, the site's articles have been demonstrably false, as collated by the liberal watchdog group Media Matters. Despite that — or perhaps because of its ferocious defenses of then-candidate Donald Trump over the course of 2016 — an employee of the site was recently granted credentials to join the White House press corps in the briefing room for daily administration briefings.

The site's story about the new birth certificate was written by Jim Hoft, the founder of the site. It's little more than a write-up of a tweet from a man named Malik Obama, who is the half brother of the former president and who, over the course of the past year or two, came to embrace Trump and the online community that supported the Republican nominee for president.

Surely. What's this? pic.twitter.com/jaczNXTlvO
— Malik Obama (@ObamaMalik) March 9, 2017

Hoft's additions to Obama's tweet, in full:

Barack Obama's brother Malik Obama tweeted out a birth certificate on Thursday allegedly belonging to his brother Barack. The certificate is from a hospital in Mombassa, Kenya. Baby Barack was a bouncing 7 pounds 1 ounce. The certificate says Barack Obama was born on August 4, 1961 in Mombassa, Kenya. Malik Obama is a Trump supporter.

Not included in Hoft's write-up? That this so-called birth certificate has already been debunked — more than seven years ago.

It emerged in the summer of 2009 when dentist and attorney Orly Taitz was continuing to try to prove that Obama was born outside the United States. (In case it needs to be said: He wasn't.) She'd previously offered up a "registration of birth" that she claimed was real, but it was quickly debunked by both fact-checking sites and even the birther-friendly site WorldNetDaily.

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Among the other clues, the identification of the country on the document was incorrect, referring to Kenya as a republic three years before it attained that status.

Shortly after that, a man named Lucas Smith attempted to sell another birth certificate document — the one tweeted by Malik Obama — on eBay. He was unsuccessful, but Taitz seized on the document and filed a claim with the court on Smith’s behalf alleging the authenticity of the document. Smith’s affidavit claimed that he’d traveled to Kenya and bribed a military officer to obtain the document.

In a later affidavit reported by the Orange County Register, though, Smith attested that Taitz had made that story up. There were already questions about the authenticity of the document, including a lengthy rebuttal again at WorldNetDaily. Jerome Corsi, whose fame was built on his questions about Obama’s birthplace, identified eight ways in which the document didn’t seem to be real, including that it “does not look remotely like the 1961-era birth certificates used in Kenya; infant footprints were not displayed on Kenyan birth certificates in the 1961-era.”

Not that it’s a surprise that the document was fake, of course. Nor is it a surprise that Malik Obama would tweet it out. He’s gained a reputation for trolling Trump opponents, leveraging his family name to great effect. What’s surprising is that a media outlet with White House press credentials would share a long-debunked story about a former president as though it were true. Or, rather, it would be surprising if that outlet were anything but Gateway Pundit.

As of writing, the article has 1,272 comments, heavily weighted toward an embrace of this “new” “proof” of Obama’s birthplace. The story was unquestionably good for Hoft’s traffic and embraced by his audience — raising little question of how Hoft and his site plan to frame what they learn from their access to the White House.

Update: According to pool reports, Gateway Pundit was allowed into the Friday press briefing, less than 24 hours after the birth certificate post.
