

Tulsa police major, department respond to controversial comments during radio interview

 ktul.com/news/local/tulsa-police-major-responds-to-controversial-comments-from-radio-interview

by Megan Butler, KTUL Staff

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Photo of Tulsa Police Major Travis Yates (Courtesy: SAFETAC)

TULSA, Okla. (KTUL) — Tulsa Police Major Travis Yates is coming under fire after an article by Public Radio Tulsa claimed he said police shoot black Americans "less than we probably ought to" in a radio interview.

In a statement, he said the article "misquoted" him and is a "libelous claim." Yates said he's looking to file a lawsuit.

He released the following statement in response to the article:

As I wrote last year in my book, The Courageous Police Leader, cowardly leaders and less-than-truthful members of the media often contribute to myths, lies, and chaos. This is now happening to me personally, and to exemplify it, I want to share two factual inaccuracies from a recent article written about me.

For one thing, beyond the outrageous, inflammatory headline, I was misquoted. In what seems like an attempt to discredit me, the article reads "all of the research..." However, I clearly prefaced this statement with attribution, and mentioned my sources by name. What I actually said—in mentioning research from Roland Fryer, Heather MacDonald, and the National Academy of Sciences—was that "all of their research says" Obviously, this is a serious, factual error of attribution.

But perhaps the most inflammatory, egregious inaccuracy involves how the article misquoted me. In the context of comparing the probabilities drawn from the statistical research of others, I said, "all of their research says we're shooting African-Americans about 24% less than we probably ought to be, based on the crimes being committed This isn't Travis talking—the research is sound, but nobody's watching it" [emphasis added].

However, the article states that "TPD Maj. Travis Yates also suggested that, according to his interpretation of crime data, police should actually be shooting black Americans more frequently."

I never said actually. This is plainly false and factually inaccurate. And to think that beyond a discussion of comparative statistics that I would suggest that the "police should actually be shooting" anyone is simply outrageous.

To spell out this outrageous—and libelous claim—here's a comparison of what I said, and what the article claimed:

What I said:

"all of their research says we're shooting African-Americans about 24% less than we probably ought to be, based on the crimes being committed... This isn't Travis talking—the research is sound, but nobody's watching it" [emphasis added].

What the published article says:

“...according to his interpretation of crime data, police should actually be shooting black Americans more frequently.”

Clearly the published article does not reflect my hypothetical discussion of statistics based on the research of others. It makes no mention of the sources I cited. And it absolutely does not factually reflect my words.

As I explained in my book that was published last year, sometimes the media overlooks the facts. And it's difficult to understand how these misstatements of facts and failure to identify the sources I cited do not add to the myths, chaos, and lies about law enforcement in America. But please don't take my word for it, listen to recording for yourself to understand how factually inaccurate the article is—and to hear what I actually said to help dispel the myths and help law enforcement and the communities they serve.

The Police Department also released a statement on Yates' comments:

“On 6-9-2020 the Tulsa Police Department was made aware of comments made by Travis Yates on a local radio show earlier this week. We appreciate and respect the concerns we are hearing from the community regarding these comments. Chief Wendell Franklin and the Tulsa Police Department want to make it very clear we do not endorse, condone or support Yates' comments made on the show. This matter has been referred to our Internal Affairs Unit.

We want to make it clear the statements made by Yates are not a part of any curriculum or training provided by the Department. Yates' comments do not align with the mission, values or policies of the Tulsa Police Department.

The Tulsa Police Department is comprised of 1,041 employees (838 of whom are sworn peace officers) from a variety of races, religions, political views, and belief systems. We respect the diversity in our ranks and the diversity in our community. We are striving to do our part to heal pain in our community and we ask our community to continue to work with us as we endeavor for improvement.

Yates is a Major with the Department currently assigned to the Records Division which is primarily staffed with civilian employees. Yates' statements during his appearances on this show are not made while on duty and are neither official representations of the Department nor of his fellow officers.”