

Conservatives release 2007 video linking Obama to former pastor Jeremiah Wright

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) Conservative media are circulating a 2007 video in which then-presidential candidate Barack Obama praises his former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, and suggests that racism played a role in the federal government's slow response to Hurricane Katrina.

The resurfacing of Wright as campaign fodder came as Obama and his GOP challenger, Mitt Romney, were preparing for their first debate in Denver on Wednesday (Oct. 3).

Fox News host Sean Hannity, conservative blogger Matt Drudge and Tucker Carlson's Daily Caller website hyped the video on Tuesday, saying it had never been seen in full. Hannity said the video offers a "glimpse into the mind of the real Barack Obama."

Media critics, however, noted that Obama's speech to black pastors at Hampton University in Virginia was widely covered by the media in June 2007.

In the video, Obama gives a "special shout-out to my pastor, the guy who puts up with me, counsels me, listens to my wife complain about me. He's a friend and a great leader. Not just in Chicago, but all across the country," as the audience cheers. "Please everybody, give an extraordinary welcome to my pastor, Dr. Jeremiah Wright Jr."

Adopting the cadences of a preacher, Obama also says in the video that the government's response to Katrina "tells me that somehow the people down in New Orleans -- they don't care about as much."

Obama also recalls meeting Wright at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, where Wright was the longtime pastor. "He helped me on another journey and introduced me to someone named Jesus Christ," Obama says in the 2007 speech. "And I learned that my sins could be redeemed."

Wright married Obama and his wife Michelle, and baptized their two children, Sasha and Malia. Obama distanced himself from Wright, however, after videos surfaced of the fiery pastor preaching that the U.S. had "nuked far more than the thousands in New York and the Pentagon" who died in the 9/11 attacks, "and we never batted an eye. ... America's chickens are coming home to roost!"

In April 2008, after Wright continued to make contentious remarks in public speeches, Obama denounced his former pastor's rhetoric as "divisive and destructive."

Ben LaBolt, a spokesman for the Obama campaign, called the video released on Tuesday "a transparent attempt to change the subject" from another recently unveiled video, in which Romney dismisses "47 percent of Americans" as

"dependent upon government."

The Romney campaign has denied any link to the Obama video. Earlier this year, prominent GOP donors scuttled a plan to feature Wright in anti-Obama attack ads.