

The Santorum-quote firestorm that wasn't

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"On your skirts is found the lifeblood of the innocent poor," [said the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Jerusalem](#). "You shall be put to shame." For his bold words (and, elsewhere, his street theater), Jeremiah was variously ridiculed, threatened, imprisoned, beaten and left for dead.

"Not God bless America, God damn America!" [bellowed Jeremiah Wright from his former pulpit](#). "That's in the Bible for killing innocent people." This sermon quote--actually, usually just the "God damn America" part, stripped of any context whatsoever--created a media frenzy, earned death threats for Wright and jeopardized a then-parishioner's presidential campaign.

"I don't think God will continue to bless America," [said Rick Santorum the other day](#), "if we continue to kill 1.2 million children every year." Unlike Wright, Santorum is *himself* a candidate for president. Yet two days later [Google offers mostly crickets](#).

Leave aside for the moment whether you agree with Wright's characterization of systemic racism in this country, or with Santorum's of abortion. (To put it mildly, neither reflects anything like a national consensus.) As simply a question of heightened rhetoric and the culture's reaction to it, what's the big difference here? The fact that Wright talked real loud and used a swear?