

JEREMIAH WRIGHT INTERVIEW  
*OBAMA: IN PURSUIT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION*  
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

**Jeremiah Wright**  
**Pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ**  
**February 27, 2019**  
**Interviewed by: Peter Kunhardt**  
**Total Running Time: 54 minutes and 29 seconds**

START TC: 01:00:00:00

MATTHEW HENDERSON:

Dr. Wright interview, take one. Marker.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Jeremiah Wright

Pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ

**Growing up in his father's church**

01:00:12:23

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Growing up as a kid at the Parsonage, had a tremendous influence upon me in many, many ways. First of all, he was not the only minister. My mom was a minister. Her father was a minister, her brother was a minister. And they were all graduates of Virginia Union University. So I got to see ministry—in fact, I thought all ministers had been to seminary until I got to be a teenager. I got to see it in a very

close up—from a very close up vantage point. There were—I—I say influenced me many, many ways. There were many questions I did not under—could not get any answers for as a kid. Some biblical, some theological, some sociological.

**Growing up with segregation**

01:01:18:19

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Philadelphia had ROWCA, YMCA for white people and a YMCA for colored. The YMCA for whites had a pool. We could not use that pool as coloreds, but one we—one day a week, after which they emptied the pool to get all that colored water out, I didn't understand. Is this the Young Man's Christian Association? This is how Christianity works? Added to that was the fact that both parents, as I said, finished Virginia Union, their mother and their father lived in Virginia, so I spent half my life in Virginia and that always meant packing a lunch. I couldn't—did not understand why we couldn't stop at a restaurant. We went to restaurants in Philly. My father refused to go to a segregated restaurant, so we packed a lunch so we would have something to eat on the way down to Virginia.

01:02:24:08

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

And he also made us go to the washroom before we crossed the Mason-Dixon line. Now, I'm trying to understand how this fits in with Christianity and it didn't fit in at all. Then the other blessing and curse

for me growing up as a PK (preacher's kid) was daddy had rules. Be in the house when the streetlights come on. One hour of television only when we got a television. But then you had to read. Well, if the teacher said read to page 62, I would read to page 62. My sister would go on to read the next two or three chapters. Not me. But I had to read something, so I would go in my father's study to read, and that impacted me in an awesome way.

01:03:21:01

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

My father was a student of Carter Woodson, the father of African American history. So I was reading Carter Woodson's books, but I was also reading his books. My daddy had a Master of Divinity, a bachelor of arts, a bachelor of divinity, and he had a master in sacred theology, and I was reading books way above my pay grade with no teacher, causing me to question a whole lot of things that were going on in church and a whole lot of things I would hear preachers and Christians say, put in contradiction to the reality of being Black in Philly and Black in Virginia. So, asking him gave me some answers, but many times it raised more questions in my mind than giving me answers.

### **Attending college during the Civil Rights Movement**

01:04:21:00

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I got to Virginia Union in January of '59, and the sit-ins started in '60. I was a part of the sit-ins. I was also part of—Virginia Union is a Baptist related Christian university, and we had joint Christian activities with what was then RPI, Richmond Polytechnic Institute, which is now a big college. I was trying to think of the name of it. Virginia—it's a huge white school, state school. And the Christians, we worshipped together, sang together, studied the bible together, Black and white. But at the sit-ins I saw these same kids who were in hi-wi, who were in Christian organizations, calling us names, dragging our girls, our women across the street by the heels, spitting on us. That impacted me in a very negative way in terms of, is this what the faith is all about?

01:05:30:15

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

These are—these are my brothers and sisters in Christ and calling me a nigger? Well, the sit-ins only made it worse because as militant as the kids were at Virginia Union, Virginia State, Norfolk State, all the schools with which we had any kind of affiliation, North Carolina A&T, North Carolina college—summertime I go to Philadelphia.

Woolworth's is a national chain. Woolworth's has segregated seating. I believe that's where the students from Greensboro started it. We go to Woolworth's; we, meaning the students of Virginia Union, Virginia State down south. We're gonna picket Woolworth's and the members of my father's church who were all gonna cross the picket line telling us that it's our problem in the south, that was not their problem.

01:06:30:09

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Now that was very disappointing, disheartening and confusing for them to not see that the struggle was about equality and human rights for everybody, every place, not just in the south. And because Woolworth's in Philadelphia was not segregated, it was ok? That made it worse.

### **Military service**

01:06:57:11

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I went into the military. In fact, I said the college experience, the Civil Rights movement, the sit-ins, the segregation, the disjointedness and disconnectedness—I was a senior at Virginia Union, president of the choir, president of our fraternity, but I knew the next step was seminary and I couldn't do that, not with all the confusion. So I left school to join the military. My uncle, who pastored the church where Sam Proctor was a member, called it a divine interruption. I went into the military and had my eyes opened in a way that had—they had not yet been opened, even with Philadelphia and Virginia contradistinctions. I joined the Marine Corps. Eleanor Roosevelt used to call us oversexed, underpaid, teenage killers.

01:08:06:21

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

And the first problem I had was I didn't—nobody told me—I didn't talk to anybody of course, but you don't ask questions. You just do what you're told to do and your job is to kill. Kill. Period. Then I saw—I was stationed in the Second Marine Division in North Carolina, Camp Lejeune. And our barracks, and the barracks of G2 were next to each other and most of my friends were guys in G2. Guys in headquarters, company headquarters battalion, segregation, most of it, most of it was voluntarily where the whites hung together, the Hispanics hung together, and the Blacks hung together. Well, the guys from G2 were sharing information with me that was making me more and more upset to my stomach.

01:09:11:14

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I go, what have I joined? I did not know until I got to Camp Lejeune that we as a country knew Pearl Harbor was going to be attacked and we sacrificed a part of that fleet so we could get into war. That's not of God. How do you sacrifice lives so you can get in the war and be a part of those who divide the spoils? The racism-- Now here, guess Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. So I got to see racism at its rawest in the state of North Carolina, more raw than in Virginia.

**Attending to President Johnson as a cardiopulmonary tech**

01:10:00:05

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

After two years of Marine Corps experience, I applied for Navy School, cardiopulmonary technology. My request was granted, which meant I had to get an inter-service transfer; the Marine Corps is a part of the Navy, so that was no problem. They transferred me into the Navy and I went to Corpsman school and my 52-week school of cardiopulmonary technology. We monitored open and closed heart surgery, we did cardiac characterizations, pulmonary functions, and blood tb—tb tests, skin tests. President Johnson had a heartbeat that was not like a regular, da-dun, da-dun, da-dun heartbeat. His heart sounded like a competition between the Grambling marching band and Florida A&M marching band.

01:11:03:06

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

So anything that pertained to exciting him to the point of a cardiac arrest, we were there. We were under the platform during his inauguration, as he made his speech. There was a platform on which he stood, and we were right underneath it in case he had a heart attack or God forbid an assassination attempt. Well, the two surgeries I monitored—when I graduated from cardiopulmonary technician school, I was valedictorian, and they kept me there as a teacher so that meant I monitored surgery, any surgery that he had, even minor, not cardiac surgery, but we had to monitor his heart 24/7 in case his body reacted to what was going on.

**Finding his calling as a minister**

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01:12:04:09

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I did my—finished my undergraduate work at Howard, got my first master's degree at Howard and that last year I was at Howard I was a teaching assistant for John Lavelle, who wrote the definitive work on the spirituals. My work with him as a TA opened my eyes to the broad, broad world of Black sacred music and I said, oh that's what I want to teach.

01:12:32:19

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Got accepted to the divinity school at the University of Chicago. Entered divinity school—first I entered in the field of theology and literature because that's Black sacred music. I was hungry. I had a wife and two children to feed. I was on a fellowship; I was on a scholarship. I had little part time jobs. They weren't cutting it in terms of family bills; so let me find a church. The United Church of Christ had a little small church called Trinity United Church of Christ ten blocks from where I lived. Perfect. Small church; won't take up any time away from your school, any time away from your family. So when they called, I said, "yes." There were 87 active members. Third Sunday in August 1972, our offering for the day was 39,000 dollars. A whopping, whopping fee. My salary was 6,000 dollars.

### **Getting to know Obama**

01:13:52:12



JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Dr. Lacey Curry, pastor of the Emanuel Baptist Church sent him to talk to me, and he sent him on a humorous note. He said to Barack and he says this publicly. He said, “You know what your problem is? You think you’re smarter than all Black preachers because of your education. You need to talk to Jeremiah Wright. Go on over there and meet him.” And he came—but he came as a community organizer.

01:14:24:01

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

His experience of the Black church was zero. So we began talking about that. As we talked more about the Black church, in one of the conversations, I mentioned that at the University of Chicago, I had studied under Fazlur Rahman. He said, “The Muslim?” I said, “Yeah. I was doing Islam in West Africa under him.” and we began talking about it ‘cause that’s when I found out he had family members who were Muslim, and we began talking about the similarities and differences. I found him to be a very intelligent young man, and our conversations increased in terms of his just stopping by to talk about issues. Not necessarily what’s going on in Chicago and how we can unify but picking up on our conversations about, “The news media says there’s a fight between Christians and Muslims. I’ve got family members who are Christian and Muslim in the same family.” And yeah, I remember that because when he said he was interested in public office, I never met any politician prior to him who was interested in those kinds of things. So it stands out vividly.

**Obama joining the Trinity United Church of Christ**

01:15:45:21

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

He wanted to make an intelligent decision about his faith. I think the rest of his life, in terms of his identity, he had a pretty good grasp on, it was just uncertainty. I would say I was able to help him work through some of his questions, some of his doubts to the point of his being certain when he walked the aisle to join the church; it was not that all doubts are settled, but God accepts you with your doubts. I read that in the passage of scripture where the father says, I believe but I got some unbeliefs, just some stuff I just don't understand, that that's normal and that an unexamined faith is not a faith worth having, so yeah, I would concur that I was able to help him accept Christianity with doubts. Not every an—every doubt was settled, not every question was answered, but he didn't feel like he was out of place. I said, welcome to the club.

01:16:47:15

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I think that President Obama's joining Trinity before he was a Senator, before he was a candidate for the presidency gave him visibility among a large—very large number of persons in the Black community and when he—not just at Trinity but when he would go to different places and say he was a member of Trinity, that bought him—buy—I had people who couldn't even pronounce his name asking me who he

was when he started running. I said, “He’s a regular guy, he’s a church member.” “For real?” I said, “Yeah.” “With a name like that?” I said, “Yeah, with a name like that.” I know several commentators since the election have said he joined for that reason. I don’t know that that’s true, I know it gave him creds.

01:17:52:16

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

He joined the legal counseling ministry, with a legal background, where we ask all new members to pick a ministry and become active in that, particularly with a church our size. So he’s just not coming in on Sunday anonymously, leaving on Sunday anonymously but have your life interwoven with the lives of other persons whether in your profession or not.

### **Developing a friendship with Obama**

01:18:26:03

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

We became the level—the level of comradery, understanding and friendship we had before he joined based on those conversations did not diminish in any way. It increased so that when he says he wants to get married, it’s not just like John Doe in a mega church. He asked me to come to a house blessing where he had a very intimate—it was not a big splash thing. He had close friends. I doubt that there were more than 12 people there, so that-- that level of friendship, yes.

01:19:09:09

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

It moved not just to friendship but adviser where he would come and ask me for advice. And he didn't want to run for Senator against a Black woman, and I'm saying to myself, "I know guys who would run against their own mother for Senator." but that's where he was. And that level of trust and talking, you know, I'm saying, "Calm down. Have you asked? Just ask her. That's the best way to find out." "But my name needs to be out there right now." I said, "If it's gonna happen, Barack, don't worry about right now. Ask her and then do what you gotta do; hold off if she's gonna run now." So, that level of friendship. I never talked with him, with anybody in political office on that level before.

***The Audacity of Hope***

01:20:09:23

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

No, I didn't talk with him about the sermon. I was watching on television and when he said "the audacity to hope," I broke out into a broad grin. I said, "I know where you got that." I was proud of him and proud that he's quoting me or paraphrasing my sermon. I did not talk with him. The media called me trying to get me to take issue with him. "Isn't that plagiarism?" I said, "No, I'm proud of him." You know what, my daddy said, "Once you preach a sermon, it's public property." So I was happy that my sermon made history. But we never talked about the sermon, no.

01:20:59:05

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

When Barack brought copies of the book to my home to talk with me, brought a copy for my wife and our baby daughter who was still at home, trying to get the year right. He had not yet run for Senator.

**Obama's thoughts about running for U.S. Senate**

01:21:21:18

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

That's when we talked. He—and again, he exhibit—he exhibited a quality that I had not and still have not to this day experienced with any other elected official. He came to talk to me, not just about the book, but about running. He was having qualms. Why? 'Cause he might lose? No, because he might win. And if he won, that would give him even less time with Sasha and Malia. Michelle was already up the wall about him being downstate as a Senator. "If I make US Senator, I won't see them." And one of his biggest joys in life was putting them to bed at night. Daddy-daughter time at night. He was worried about being away from them. I said, "Let me tell you something. As much money as you're going to make with this book, you can—private schools, you can take teachers with you wherever you go. They won't miss a day of school. So don't worry about the schooling." He said, "I got to check with Michelle first," which became my mantra when people asked me, "You think he'll run for president?" I'd say, "You better ask Michelle. If she gives her approval, he'll run, but not before

then.” But he was serious ‘cause—because she was unhappy with that. You know, they want a daddy, not a public figure.

**Support during Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign**

01:23:09:17

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I was part of the religious agency advisory committee and saw his dream come true in another way when I called a meeting of all those disparate clergy who don’t like each other normally to talk with Barack. The place was packed with folk who wouldn’t speak to each other on the street. And I said in introducing him to speak that day, “Another one of your dreams has come true. There are clergy in this room who don’t like each other but you have brought us all together and presented him.

01:23:53:04

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Yeah, we became—and then when he hired Joshua Dubois, Joshua knew nothing about Chicago. I was driving Joshua around, showing him different churches, who the key players were in the religious community, and trying to help him learn the fast track what he was stepping into, the staff position, not volunteer and he trusted me to do that and trusted me to go out on the road, speaking—speaking for him. One day we laughed about the fact I had to cover the whole state of South Carolina, from real South Carolina to north-South Carolina, south-South Carolina, talking to preachers about conferences who

were getting ready to vote for Hillary, helping them understand who he was, that he was not somebody they should distrust.

01:25:01:03

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I mean, literally all day from eight in the morning till 9:30, ten o'clock at night across the state.

### **The start of the controversy with Rev. Wright**

01:25:14:08

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

While I was in Amherst, Senator Obama called me. He called me three times that day. He was very worried about my prayer. And I said, "Why?" He said, "You know, I go to Iowa the next day, don't say anything in your prayer that's gonna upset farmers." And I said, "Man, I'm the one talking about how you brought Southern Illinois together to stop distrusting and mistrusting Chicago. I wouldn't do that in a prayer." He called back, "David's worried." Axelrod. "David's worried. Are you—are you sure?" I said, "I'm straight." The third call, he said, "Rev, Rolling Stone has got their hands on one of your sermons, and they're running it in this week's weekend edition and David feels that if I take you out on a stage with me to open up the ceremony with a prayer, the press will only focus on you because of that sermon Rolling Stone printed. You know you can be over the top sometimes." I said, "What are you talking about?" "Well, that's not—the issue is this,

I still want—two things; I still want you to pray for me and my family. Can you do that before I go out?” I said, “Yes, I can do that.”

01:26:46:09

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

From Amherst to Logan, I was asking the chaplain, “What have I done? What have I said? What sermon of mine have you heard that’s over the top?” He said, “I don’t know. I listen to you every week.” Because we used to be on television, national television. So I did not know at that time what sermon it was. I got to the state capitol; they took me, the car that went under the capitol. And then—car drove from the airport to the capitol, underneath the capitol where the Senator, Michelle, Sasha, Malia, Senator Biden, his wife, secret service were waiting. And Barack asked—made a public statement—small group, that his church and his faith were so important to him that he did not want them—not to be a part of that day.

01:27:58:14

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

It’s a historic day for the nation but for him and his family was even more historic because it was God that brought him to that point and he wanted God included. And he had asked me to pray, and we joined hands in a circle, and I prayed for the family. I prayed for him. I prayed a non-partisan prayer and asked that the candidate most dedicated to the principles of the founders would be elected and that God would keep him and his family safe and that they’d run a hel—healthy and



helpful race. Secret Service then took Barack out to the platform. I walked up with Michelle and stood next to her as he announced.

### **Reaction from the Black community**

01:29:05:13

I was riding with him back to Chicago asleep, and my phone just kept ringing. I keep it on silent, but it wouldn't stop. So, I finally stopped and looked at it, it was Father Mike Flager. I go, he doesn't call me to play or to bs. I say, "You been trying to reach me?" He said, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm in a car between Springfield and Chicago." He said, "Have you heard what's going on on television?" and I had not. He said, "Tavis Smiley was having the state of Black America show on CNN and somebody had said I had been disinvited to do a public invocation. Is that true?"

01:29:58:00

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I said, "Yeah." He said, "They giving Barack the blues on this show. I didn't know anything at all about that." I said, "No I don't—we don't have a television in this car, I'm just trying to get home. I've been up since two in the morning." Well, that's when all hell broke loose in terms of the Black community coming down against—I had not said a word—coming down against him. "You don't ditch your pastor like that." So forth and so on. But that was a light haze in terms of the thunderstorm there was that happened the next month.

**The impact of the media coverage**

01:30:45:12

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I served Trinity church for 36 years. I had never taken a sabbatical. So I told the congregation my agreement with Pastor Moss was that he would work with me for two years and I'd turn it over to him. That two years was up May 31<sup>st</sup>. But I was going on a sabbatical March 1<sup>st</sup>. Don't call, don't text, don't email, going on a sabbatical. From February—March the 1<sup>st</sup>—February 28<sup>th</sup>, my last day at church till May 31<sup>st</sup>. First thing we're gonna do is go on a family vacation, all of us. Five kids, two grandkids at the time. The boat sails Sunday morning.

01:31:46:20

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

While sitting in the lobby, I saw my daughter Jeri jump up and come and stand in front of me with her back to me. I said, "What are you doing?" She said, "That man over there is trying to take a picture of you." I said, "What man?" "There's a guy over there with a camera." So she was blocking his view. I said, "Why does he want my picture?" "I don't know." Between the lobby and the ship, everybody's taking pictures of me. Is it because I'm Barack's pastor? What is—what is this fame? Man, we got on the boat and cruise ships only broadcast certain stations. They had Fox News on the boat and were playing a clip from a sermon I preached the Sunday after 9/11/01. I said, "What?" So we started changing the channel. It was on all of the channels. I then

became persona non-grata on the boat with the white crews and passengers.

01:33:18:05

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I became a hero to the Black passengers. On a cruise ship they sit you at one table where you sit every meal, unless you're on the deck eating. The white families at the table next to ours had requested to be moved. They don't want to sit next to an anti-American racist. A what? The waiter told us. Said, "You're hurting my tip. I gotta find somebody else, because we get tips from these tables." That became for us the cruise from hell. I stayed in the cabin most of the time so that the nasty remarks, name-calling would not be something my family had to be exposed to but if they saw us, they're just talking to me but they heard that my grandkids were here.

01:34:28:02

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

My oldest grandson was taking pictures. This senior citizen, late 80's, kept looking at me. Every time he'd look, I'd look away. They're taking pictures. I'd look back, he's looking. I look away. Finally he yells, "You the preacher on CNN?" I said, "Jesus?" He said, "You're right, man. Every damn thing you said, keep on saying it."

01:35:07:00

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

We get home, there were death threats, there were bomb threats. They had to sweep the church with electronic devices, have dogs sniff.

We had 24-hour security at the house with off duty police officers parked in front of the house. People were going through the trash and I said, “What in the world?” It became a nightmare. One of our members who’s in the media called me and again, like Father Flager, he’s not somebody who calls just to chat about football or anything. He said, “We all have your schedule. You are the October surprise. Wherever you go, the media’s gonna be there. Whatever you say, they’re gonna twist it. I’m giving you a heads up. If I were you I would just cancel October.” I said, “What about my income?” “Cancel October.” Which we did.

**“A More Perfect Union”**

01:36:18:03

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

It was a great speech. At that point in his run for the presidency, I could no longer tell where his thoughts and his writings left off and where his handlers were saying you better mention this or mention that. But it was a great speech that cobbles together or original.

**The real message of Wright’s controversial sermon**

01:36:50:09

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

We had a telephone dialogue when the then Senator said my sermons offered no hope. I—I was a bad boy. I said to the Senator, “I would think that the editor—first Black editor of the Harvard Law Review

would at least listen to the sermon or read it as it's been in print since 2001 before making public comment about my sermon. Second week in April he said, "You were right. I hadn't heard the sermon." Because that's what it's about, hope and love, but nobody wants to go to the end of the sermon to hear that. Nor do they make the parallel that I was making between Psalm 137 and the anger felt by the people of Israel and the anger felt by the people of the United States on 9/11 and 9/12. But I said, "Why are you making comments on sermons you haven't heard?"

01:38:02:01

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Now my issue then becomes not that he did it but how he did it. For instance, both on the distancing and on the answering questions related to the sermons, whole—whole sermons. "Mr. Obama, your pastor said he was quoting Ambassador Peck that the chickens might be coming home to roost. Is that what you think?" "I disagree with that, next question." "Do you agree with everything your pastor says?"

01:38:46:19

Your pastor said god dammit, well I thought journalists did fact checking? William James said God Damn America in 1903. Harvard professor, for his policies and for his practices. But that is not how it was handled.

### **How their relationship changed**

01:39:13:02

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

We had words about that in my home. That was not a phone, but that was a face-to-face conversation. The Senator came to my home to ask me to stop preaching until after the election, to not make anymore public statements about anything. And I asked him how I was supposed to live? I'm retired, I'm on a fixed income. I have a daughter at Howard. Howard tuition doesn't care that you're running. They want their money. And he said, "The press is gonna eat you alive." I said, "I'm preaching the gospel." He then paid me one of the highest compliments I've ever had paid to me.

01:39:57:06

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

He said to me, "You know what your problem is?" I said, "What's my problem?" "As a preacher, you have to speak the truth." I said, "That's a good problem to have."

### **Feelings around Obama distancing himself**

01:40:16:23

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

The answer to how I felt when he distanced himself from the church is in two parts: Part one, I knew he was gonna distance himself. I said that in February of 2007. I literally stopped watching television and reading papers when the media frenz—frenzy started, so I didn't know he had officially distanced himself until I was sitting at a board meeting at church and the letter he sent to Pastor Moss fell into my

hands. They were passing it around the table. That's when I found out officially, he was leaving. That hurt.

01:41:11:11

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

All that's down the toilet because getting elected is more important. That hurt. I felt not only abandoned and betrayed, I felt like—well, exactly in terms of betrayal. That's the word I've been using in terms of trying to describe—put a finger on what emotion surfaced the most. It was betrayal. There was in Philadelphia where I was growing up, there was a radio station that played doo-wops that I—my parents would kill me if they knew I was listening to quietly in my bedroom. Every night the disc jockey would go off the air saying, "If you don't feel this close to God as you once felt, please remember which one of you did the moving." I did not distance myself, I didn't do the moving. So the sermons that they found excerpts from, I've been preaching that way for years. He knew that. To try to act like he didn't is disingenuous. You did the moving, you had to do it you felt for political reasons. My number hasn't changed since he texted me happy Palm Sunday and all he has to do is say after a stroke and a wheelchair, I'm not going anywhere, what day, what time you wanted to talk.

### **Election night 2008**

01:42:59:15

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

The night he was elected, I would have given an arm or a leg to be downtown when he came home, and the crowd went wild. I was there for your nomination to the Senate, I was there when you were elected to the Senate, you invited me to Washington DC for your swearing in. Now I've got to watch this on television 'cause I'm the bad boy. The commentators were ooh-ing and ah-ing over how wonderful a campaign they had run and the lady commentator, I don't know her name, said, -- I was sitting in bed watching TV smiling and grinning ear to ear like one of my kids had just won an Olympic medal. I said, "It's beautiful, it's beautiful."

**Rev. Wright's legacy**

01:43:57:00

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Right now, I think it's going to be very bad. The problem that you face is that a narrative has been spun around you and now all we're reading is commentary on the narrative." My legacy will be the mud and dirt that the Obamas threw on me and continue to throw on me. That's what I think my legacy will be when it comes to the Fox News mentality type people. When it comes to academia, when it comes to seminaries, I think it will be a very different legacy. My books are used right now. I've written four books; they're used in seminaries. I'm still invited to teach at seminaries. I'm just finishing up a doctoral class I'm leading at McCormick Theological Seminary.

01:44:47:16



JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I've been asked to address the graduating class and their families at commencement this year. So in that world, which is a small arena, it will be a very different legacy, just like William James. But in academic circles, particularly theological education, I think it will be a positive legacy.

**Wright's patriotism and tolerance**

01:45:14:05

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

It's very frustrating that I am considered anti-American. It's even more con—frustrating that I am considered a racist. I said a moment ago that I've called Michelle Obama's writing drivell when she says I act like all white people—I have never said that. And if you had been in church, you'd know I never said that. One of the sayings in our church, if I started off the congregation, we'll finish it. "Everybody your color," and they answer back, "ain't your kind." "And everybody not your color," "is not your enemy." I have never said all white people are racist and for her to print that, it's in print for generations to come, to read. That's—that's—that's very painful.

01:46:13:15

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, two honorable discharges, two letters of commendation from President Johnson. People who call me anti-American don't know that.

01:46:29:23

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

The point was to scare, as I said to Bill Moyers, to scare the white voters and to scare the average Black voter who does not know me away from voting for Barack.

**A message to Obama**

01:46:47:04

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

If I were to say something to President Obama as a part of this film, I would say, Congratulations. I am proud of you; I'm even prouder of what you did as president. The polls are showing what many of us know, that even though we disagreed many times with your pragmatic approach to issues rather than just putting your foot down and being more presidential in our eyes, you still pulled off a phenomenal eight years and polls are showing that you're one of the best presidents we've ever had.

01:47:31:14

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I congratulate you on that. I also congratulate you, Barack, on your grey hair. You look a lot different than you did when you walked into my office the first time. I congratulate you on the way you and Michelle have raised your daughters. They don't know me, that worries me. All they know is the narrative. They were too young to

know or remember me, but I thank God for what you tried to do in offering yourself for service to this country, early on to the Palestinians, to Africa and its people and I wish you nothing but the best in the future. That's what I would say to him.

### **Donald Trump's election**

01:48:19:10

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

I think what we're seeing today in the nation with the ascent of Donald Trump to the presidency is opening a door. I was not surprised when Donald Trump was elected. I told many people he was going to be elected because I would sit in United Airlines regency club or sit at Hyatt regency, sit in the airline club at American, and I heard what white people were saying. They agreed with him. It's like he had the nerve to say what many have—looks like the majority have been feeling for a long time, which was not politically correct to say in earlier times under different presidents. I think electing a Black president pulled the stopper out just a little bit so that when Donald came in, he could just pull it up.

01:49:31:09

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

And you have candle stick marchers, Nazi marchers openly because they've got—Don has their back. Now he grabs other things in the front with women, but he's got—they have nothing to worry about. And that's frightening because—to me it's frightening because the

generation—Sasha and Malias’ generation, Black Lives Matters kids, they ain’t going for it. Ain’t gonna be no we shall overcome some day, hand in hand we walk. It could explode into a conflagration that many of us don’t want to see, and many innocent persons will be hurt.

01:50:24:10

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

America has never admitted or come to grips with how racism is sewn into the fabric of the country. And until we do that, and frankly, you can’t fix it if you don’t face it. But just like—look at my narrative and what the average American thinks. A lot of those kids were raised in racist homes. That’s all they heard in church and at school. Now you got the president saying the same thing. That it’s a ghost from our past that we have not dealt with, so that’s what I think we are seeing—witnessing as it surfaces.

### **Prophets vs. politicians**

01:51:16:10

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Yes, the biblical definition of a prophet is one who speaks forth the mind and will of God, regardless of the political context in which that prophet is called to speak. Moses—Moses is considered the greatest prophet in the history of Israel, was called upon to preach and to act under the reign of Pharaoh during Moses. Amos is called to preach and to act under Jeroboam. Jeremiah, Isaiah, they each called to a different era to preach to the will of God and what God wants. What

does the Lord require of me to do justice, to love mercy and to walk where God walks?

01:52:20:11

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Politicians, on the other hand, have a responsibility. Now in the bible there were no elected politicians, but they were servants of the state. Their allegiance is to the state. Their obedience is to the state wants and state needs. God be damned, God is not in the equation. The prophet does not care what the government says or how the government likes or dislikes. Prophets have no option but to do what God has asked them to do. I've been preaching this way for 50 years. Regardless of who's running for what office. Carol Mosley Braun, Harold Washington, Barack Obama. That doesn't change or affect or alter the gospel in any way if it's the gospel. Jesus Christ was called by God, ordained by God. Politicians are ordained by the government and their allegiance is to them. You have to keep both—in fact it's almost the same mistake that Donald Trump made when he said there's nice people on both sides. Let's look at the whole picture. Barack did the same darn thing when Skip Gates was arrested for being in his own home instead of saying no, this is wrong, let's sit down and have a beer and talk.

01:53:58:23

JEREMIAH WRIGHT:

Politicians try to juggle, they're very pragmatic because there's another election coming and they want to be elected again, or they

want their party to be represented again. Prophetic ministry is not about that and to tell me to shut up and not preach what I've been preaching for 50 years, to use the right wing or even alt-right language, is an abomination.

END TC: 01:54:29:06