



## The Wright Stuff vs. the Woods Model. Do Americans really want an “authentic” president?

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The same pundits who declared John McCain dead and Hillary Clinton inevitable are now saying Barack Obama has weathered the storm over his association with Jeremiah Wright. Color me skeptical. The reason? Tiger Woods.

Ask yourself: Why do Americans adore Tiger Woods? Because he's a winner, of course. But also, I suspect, because he seems so comfortable with his multi-racial heritage. He calls himself a "Cablinasian" - a Caucasian-black-Indian-Asian. He famously told Oprah Winfrey: "I'm just who I am, whoever you see in front of you." How classy is that? And, if you are among those who still think of America as a melting pot, how all-American?

A few short months ago, it appeared Barack Obama was cut from similar

cloth. He, too, is of mixed race, the son of a black, Kenyan, Muslim father and a white, Christian, mid-western mother. In front of the cameras, he looked and sounded like a winner as he called for unity, not division. His candidacy implied a historic promise: to move America beyond its long struggle and preoccupation over race.

But it now turns out that for the past 20 years Obama's pastor, friend and advisor has been spouting anti-Americanism, neo-Marxist "black liberation theology," and racism.

Jeremiah Wright has accused whites of "inventing the H.I.V. virus as a means of genocide against people of color." He has dismissed the atrocities of 9/11 as "chickens coming home to roost." He has called on God to "damn" America. He and

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan visited with Muammar Qaddafi in Libya in 1984 – a time when Qaddafi was known to be supporting international terrorists. Wright has slandered Israel as an apartheid state, and he has reprinted an article by Mousa Abu Mazook, a member of the terrorist movement, Hamas, on the “Pastor’s Page” of his church bulletin.

Let’s stipulate that Obama is being honest when he says he endorses none of this. Still, does it not speak volumes about his judgment that he chose to expose his daughters to such extremism? And what does it say about his moral compass that he never told Wright that his words were offensive and damaging? What does all this suggest about Obama’s ability to deal with the world’s terrorists and tyrants?

In response to the controversy stirred by the Wright revelations, Obama gave a speech on race relations. Most of the media swooned. But as columnist Charles Krauthammer pointed out, its tired themes were moral equivalence and white guilt. Geraldine Ferraro and Obama’s white grandmother were made to seem just as wrong as Wright.

Peggy Orenstein, a writer for *The New York Times* and an Obama admirer (do I repeat myself?) noted recently that the Senator “has increasingly positioned himself as a black man” rather than an individual of mixed heritage. She adds: “That’s understandable: insisting on being seen as biracial might alienate

African-American leaders – and voters – who have questioned his authenticity.”

Put aside that Orenstein sees nothing to criticize in Obama denying his mother’s lineage to maximize votes on the basis of racial solidarity. Focus instead on “authenticity” – code for embracing the politics of black grievance and resentment. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton are “authentic.” Tiger Woods is not.

Are we really to believe that such authenticity is something a majority of Americans now desire in a national leader? According to Orenstein, we are. For whites, she says, electing the first black president is “certainly a more exciting, more romantic and more concrete prospect than the ‘first biracial president.’” Is it really?

At the start of this election season, Obama was a politician who happened to be black – not a black politician. The Wright affair has tarnished that image – or will, I think, over time, as its message sinks in even among those who get their news from the mainstream media that have assiduously soft-pedaled this controversy.

Is there a way out of the trap in which Obama finds himself? He could do what he claims to be doing: initiate a more serious discussion about race than we have had in the past. He might begin by acknowledging that what distinguishes America is not its racial, religious and ethnic tensions – those can be found just about every-

rywhere -- but the strenuous efforts Americans have made to combat these pathologies.

Were Obama to do that, he would sacrifice a measure of "authenticity"

and displease Wright, Farrakhan, Jackson, and Sharpton. A political Tiger Woods would do it anyway. Does Obama have that kind of class? Color me skeptical.

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