

Obama's ex-pastor speaks out, defends black church: "A sideshow, and an unfortunate one"

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After weeks of public silence, Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. defended the black church and his preaching in a series of appearances, leading political analysts again to ponder Wright's effect on the presidential campaign of Illinois senator Barack Obama.

Wright, Obama's longtime (now retired) pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, said at the National Press Club in Washington April 28 that he was "crucified" by the media for his fiery remarks.

"It is not an attack on Jeremiah Wright, it is an attack on the black church," Wright said. "Maybe now we can begin to take steps to move the black religious tradition from the state of invisible to the state of invaluable."

Video clips of Wright using such phrases from the pulpit as "God damn America" and "U.S. of KKKK" led many to call him unpatriotic, he noted. He countered: "I served six years in the military."

He did not back away from his comment seven years ago that the 9/11 terrorist attacks were retribution for U.S. foreign policy. "You can't do terrorism on other people and not expect it to come back on you," he said. "Those are biblical principles, not Jeremiah Wright bombastic principles."

Speaking on journalist Bill Moyers's PBS television program on April 25, Wright said that he understood Obama's disagreement with certain of his statements. "He goes out as a politician and says what he has to say as a politician," Wright said. "I continue to be a pastor who speaks to the people of God about the things of God."

Asked on Fox News April 27 about Wright's return to the spotlight, Obama said he understands Wright's desire to defend himself, since he was "the subject of some pretty sharp attacks."

Some campaign officials indicated that Wright's appearances may hurt Obama's chances against New York senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. "It's a sideshow, and an unfortunate one," said Susan Rice, an Obama foreign policy advisor, on MSNBC.