

### Three Audiences For Obama

Sen. Barack Obama had at least three audiences for his [speech on Tuesday](#) in Philadelphia about race, society and American politics. The pastor of his church, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, is a leading voice of black liberation theology. Reverend Wright has also said that America started the AIDS virus and was responsible for a chain of actions that resulted in the terror attacks of 2001. It wasn't until video of some of Wright's most inflammatory comments began to attract attention that Obama denounced those statements. The speech was intended to add context, to fully separate Obama from the angriest comments and to regain momentum for his campaign for the Democratic nomination.

**First audience** Editorial writers, journalists, TV producers. Obama had to reach the people who make the decisions about how much air time and how much ink to give to Wright's comments. The initial reviews from the pundit class ranged from awe to caution, but were mostly positive. Chris Matthews said it was a speech "worthy of Abraham Lincoln." Tim Rutten in *The Los Angeles Times* also [compared Obama to Lincoln](#), "another lanky lawyer from Illinois." A member of the editorial board of the *Kansas City Star*, [Yael T. Abouhalkah](#) wrote that the "smoothly delivered" speech "wasn't perfect," but, Abouhalkah added, "it hit most of the right notes."

Rich Karlgaard, a McCain supporter, in his *Forbes.com* [Digital Rules blog](#), called the Obama speech "the best, straightest talk on American race relations ever heard from a national politician."

**Scorecard** Win for Obama. He popped the balloon of much of the high-level criticism and stopped the constant looping of the Wright video.

**Second audience** Swing voters in sure-to-be swing states, from Missouri to Ohio, but also in states that could swing in the general election, from Georgia to Pennsylvania. This includes Democrats attracted to Clinton and worried about Obama's judgment. Others are the Reagan Democrats or their descendants who cringe at the idea of a candidate who associates with what they call the "I hate America" crowd. On his own, Obama has been appealing to these groups as an agent of change who can be a funnel for their aspirations.

**Scorecard** Neutral to negative. Obama talked about the anguish of white voters. Resentment builds, he said, "when they are told to bus their children to a school across town; when they hear that an African-American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced." But the Wright comments didn't go away and Obama acknowledged a deep 20-year relationship with the pastor.

**Third audience** Superdelegates. These are the Democratic party leaders. They can taste victory. They do not want an Achilles heel when they go into the November election against John McCain, a popular senator, an honest-to-God war hero, an experienced hand on the global stage. Make your own predictions on the [Forbes.com delegate counter](#) and you will see there is almost no way in the remaining contests for Obama or Sen. Hillary Clinton to win the required 2,025 delegates through primaries and caucuses. The superdelegates will determine the Democratic nominee, and they won't pick someone who they think can't win in November. This group of experienced politicians will be testing and retesting the reaction from the second group in those swing states as they ponder Obama's prospects.

**Scorecard** Any actions in the next several weeks will be scrutinized for extra meaning. Rep. John P. Murtha of Pennsylvania, a previously undeclared superdelegate, [came out for Clinton](#). The furor over Reverend Wright was not part of his explanation, but his announcement was the first good news on this front for Clinton in some time.

In polling before all the questions about Reverend Wright and Obama's allegiance to his pastor, *Forbes.com* and E-Poll Market Research had found that Obama was more associated with positive attributes and that Clinton was losing ground. Click for the [full polling results](#). Right now, many columnists and talking heads once again associate Obama with these positive attributes. Watch the superdelegates closely, though, to find out the real fallout of the Tuesday speech.