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Hooks Institute's Scholarly Dialogue Will Explore The Obama Phenomenon April 3-4 at the U of M

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The historic election of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency and the implications of that event for the nation are the subjects of a major conference sponsored by the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis. *The Obama Phenomenon: Race and Political Discourse in the United States Today* will convene April 3-4 on the U of M campus.

Scholars from around the nation will explore expressions of thought and public reaction to persons and events associated with Obama's candidacy, including media images of Barack and Michelle Obama, the potential impact on minorities of Obama's proposed public policy agenda, the use of Islamophobia against Obama, the question of the "post-racial society," and interpretations of the Obama candidacy by critical race theorists.

On Friday, April 3 at 6 p.m., the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. will give the conference's keynote address. Wright is pastor emeritus of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. He was Obama's pastor for more than 20 years, presiding over the Obamas' wedding and the baptisms of their daughters. Barack Obama has publicly credited his own conversion to Christianity to the Rev. Dr. Wright. Although Wright was well known in Chicago for decades because of his involvement with South Side community enrichment projects, he gained national attention when excerpts from some of his sermons were reported in the media during the presidential election.

On Saturday, April 4 at 4 p.m., Ronald S. Sullivan will deliver a plenary address. Director of Harvard Law School's Criminal Justice Institute, Sullivan was the chair of candidate Obama's Criminal Justice Policy and National Legal Advisory Group and was an advisor to the United States Department of Justice Transition Team. He will discuss the reception of Obama's candidacy, specifically addressing those who questioned whether Obama was "black enough."

"The facts and events of this election impacted not only the United States, but reverberated around the world," said Daphene R. McFerren, director of the Hooks Institute. Just as the ascendancy of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the United States and his personal and political views on slavery continue to be examined today, scholars for generations to come will scrutinize the political, racial, and other issues that played out in President Obama's election.

"While it remains to be seen if President Obama's election increases the field of minority candidates for political office and the outcome of his administration policies, there is no denying the fact that his election represents a profound shift in how people will view the significance of race. In this respect, like the campaigns and election of presidents Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, President Obama's campaign and election have coincided with an intense self-examination of how we as a nation will allow race to shape our identities, institutions, and democratic principles. This conference seeks to undertake an in-depth examination of the facts and circumstances surrounding the election of President Obama because of its significance to our nation's and world's history."

All conference proceedings will take place at the Michael D. Rose Theatre Lecture Hall. All events are free and open to the public on a first come-first served basis.

If, as expected, capacity crowds attend the Rev. Dr. Wright's speech or other conference events, once the Theatre is filled, then no more people will be admitted.

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A full schedule of conference events is available on the Hooks Institute's Web site:

<http://benhooks.memphis.edu/obamaconference.html>

NOTE TO EDITORS: NO media interviews will be available with the Rev. Dr. Wright.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Photographers and videographers will be allowed to shoot photos and video of Dr. Wright's address only from an area that will be specially designated for press. That area will be clearly marked by signage. Thank you for your cooperation.