

Right Wing attacks on Michelle Obama hit new low

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CHICAGO (Special to the NNPA from the Final Call) - The wives of U.S. presidents are referred to as "First Ladies" and historically even the wives of candidates running for the nation's highest office are afforded a certain level of respect. This, however, has not been the case with Michelle Obama who has been insulted and maligned at every turn by right wing conservative radio and television talk show hosts.

Despite the vicious and seemingly ubiquitous critical comments, the 44-year-old Princeton University and Harvard Law School-educated executive has carried herself with dignity and class throughout the entire campaign gaining the admiration of many.

"In today's world, a woman of this caliber who is the mate of one who is a nominee for president of the United States deserves all of the recognition, admiration and respect that she has so well earned," said Dr. Dorothy I. Height, chair and president emerita of the National Council of Negro Women. "When I follow many of the stories and comments, I realize that we have come a long way, but there is a long way to go," added Dr. Height who has known every first lady of the United States since Eleanor Roosevelt.

Dr. Height referred to the wife of Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) as "a woman of considerable accomplishments."

Already a veteran campaigner who withstood the "kitchen sink" strategy of vanquished Democratic presidential rival, Sen. Hillary Clinton, Sen. Obama seems to have realized that in the age of the internet and 24-hour news cycles, nothing is sacred.

According to the Obama campaign, there is a deliberate misinformation and disinformation campaign of smears being waged by the Republicans.

In May following a political advertisement sponsored by the Republican Party of Tennessee using comments made by Michelle Obama taken out of context, Sen. Obama insisted that political rivals and the media "lay off" his wife.

Despite Sen. Obama's request, the tenor and tone of the criticism has increased, and the insults-specifically directed at his wife-appear to have no end.

A rumor has circulated about a videotape of Mrs. Obama railing against "whitey" in a vitriolic diatribe at Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ. The rumor-repeated by conservative talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh-implies this "October Surprise" could torpedo Sen. Barack Obama's historic quest for the presidency of the United States.

Sen. Obama was even asked about the mythical tape by a mainstream reporter aboard his airplane.

During an June 11 appearance by conservative minion Michelle Malkin on the Fox News Channel a graphic element was used on the lower third of the TV screen referring to Mrs. Obama as "Obama's baby mama," which is a slang term widely understood as a pejorative reference to a female who is the mother of a man's child but without the status of wife or girlfriend. Malkin has previously referred to the media as "Obamedia," implying favoritism toward the Obama campaign, and referred to Mrs. Obama as Sen. Obama's "bitter half." She immediately posted comments on her website absolving

herself of any responsibility for the graphic miscue.

"I did not write the caption and I was not aware of it when it ran (the Baltimore studio doesn't have a monitor). I don't know if the caption writer was making a lame attempt to be hip, clueless about the original etymology of the phrase, or both," wrote Mrs. Malkin.

Others reject the characterization of Michelle Obama as bitter, describing her as an "asset" for Sen. Obama and his presidential campaign. They say Sen. Obama and his wife have been examples of grace, dignity and class under difficult circumstances.

"There is nothing bitter about her, but there is a lot of honesty about her and I appreciate her for being the woman that she is," said Dr. Wynetta Frazier, president of the National Hook Up of Black Women, Inc. "She is in touch with the people and to say something negative about her is an affront to Black women period."

Just after crossing the delegate threshold June 3 to lay claim to the Democratic presidential nomination Sen. Obama said, "What you won't hear from this campaign or this party is the kind of politics that uses religion as a wedge, and patriotism as a bludgeon-that sees our opponents not as competitors to challenge but enemies to demonize."

Sen. Obama's opponents, however, have repeatedly failed to live up to those lofty ethical standards.

In another recent verbal gaffe, E.D. Hill, was removed from her position as anchor of Fox News Channel's "America's Pulse" after referring to the widely publicized June 3 celebratory fist pound between Michelle Obama and her husband as a "terrorist fist jab." Hill later apologized for the comment. "I certainly didn't mean to associate the word terrorist in any way with Senator Obama and his wife," she said.

Still fresh in the minds of many are analyst Liz Trotta's May 25 comments-also on Fox News Channel-joking about Sen. Obama's assassination and Fox talk show host Bill O'Reilly's snide comment and apology for using "lynching party" in February remarks about Mrs. Obama.

Incessant rumors forced the Obama campaign to set up a website www.fightthesmears.com specifically to counter lies, rumors and half-truths. In addition to point-by-point denials of many of the most pervasive rumors, a copy of Sen. Obama's birth certificate and a photo of him being sworn in using a Bible are posted.

Mrs. Obama appeared on the popular female-oriented daytime show "The View" on June 18 in an attempt get beyond the smears and sound bites of this year's presidential campaign.

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