



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 26, 2010

Shirley Sherrod Fiasco

On March 27, 2010, U.S. Department of Agriculture official Shirley Sherrod addressed the NAACP's 20th Annual Freedom Fund Banquet. Months later, a small excerpt from Sherrod's speech was posted by Tea Partier Andrew Breitbart on the Internet. The excerpt went viral, stirring up controversy over Sherrod's racially biased statements. As a result, Sherrod was forced to resign by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. Later, however, further footage of the speech showed Sherrod's comments to be taken out of context, prompting the USDA to offer Sherrod a new position.



Sherrod explains that when word of her speech reached the White House, she received three phone calls while driving, asking her to pull over to the side of the road and submit her immediate resignation. Sherrod said she was told, "You will be on Glenn Beck tonight," as a semi-explanation for her forced resignation.

The excerpt posted by Breitbart appeared incriminating, since Sherrod confessed to feeling uneasy about helping a white farmer two decades ago:

The first time I was faced with having to help a white farmer save his farm, he — he took a long time talking, but he was trying to show me he was superior to me. I know what he was doing. But he had come to me for help. What he didn't know — while he was taking all that time trying to show me he was superior to me — was I was trying to decide just how much help I was going to give him.

I was struggling with the fact that so many black people have lost their farmland, and here I was faced with having to help a white person save their land. So, I didn't give him the full force of what I could do. I did enough so that when he — I — I assumed the Department of Agriculture had sent him to me, either that or the — or the Georgia Department of Agriculture. And he needed to go back and report that I did try to help him.

So I took him to a white lawyer that we had — that had...attended some of the training that we had provided, 'cause Chapter 12 bankruptcy had just been enacted for the family farmer. So I figured if I take him to one of them that his own kind would take care of him.

As Sherrod shared the story, cheers of support could be heard from the audience of NAACP members.

However, what was left out of the excerpt was Sherrod's explanation that her experience with the white farmer was a moment of redemption, helping her to see that her job should be about helping all poor farmers, not simply black farmers. She said:

That's when it was revealed to me that, y'all, it's about poor versus those who have, and not so much about white — it is about white and black, but it's not —



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When the video of Sherrod's speech was viewed in its entirety, and the [widow of the white farmer](#) mentioned in the story came out in defense of Sherrod, the White House was forced to backtrack and confess that it had not conducted an investigation before taking action.

Breitbart appeared on the July 22 episode of CBS' *Washington Unplugged*, where he denied allegations that he intentionally edited the video. He explained that he posted the video in response to recent attacks made by the NAACP against the Tea Party. Noting the support Sherrod received from the crowd as she told the story, Breitbart remarked, "If the Tea Party is going to be held to the lowest possible standard that a sign in Ft. Worth may or may not be planted by infiltrators means that the entire Tea Party has to apologize for itself, then I'm holding the media and the NAACP accountable for the standards they set."

He adds that it was never his intention for Sherrod to be fired, but that he is "fighting back against the malicious alliance between the NAACP and the media to try to destroy the Tea Party based upon the false charges of racism."

Sherrod has been offered a new position by the USDA, "something in civil rights with the Office of Outreach," she told CNN. She contends that she "needs to think about it" further.

However, the story does not end there. When Sherrod was exonerated for allegations of racial bias, the mainstream media and the NAACP turned their attention, and blame, to Fox News and Glenn Beck, who was cited as a reason for Sherrod's resignation.

Ironically, while Glenn Beck was touted as a reason for Sherrod's termination, he came out in defense of Shirley Sherrod, accusing the White House of "rushing to judgment" because they had not examined her story in "context."

Despite the White House being solely responsible for its own hasty decision, the NAACP issued a statement claiming, "We have come to the conclusion we were snookered by Fox News and Tea Party Activist Andrew Breitbart into believing she had harmed white farmers because of racial bias."

On the [July 22 episode of Glenn Beck](#), Beck discussed the timeline of events from the posting of the video to the moment Sherrod was offered a new position for the USDA. Since the White House forced Sherrod's resignation hours before the story appeared on Fox News, and an entire day before she was discussed (and defended) by Glenn Beck, claims that Fox News is to blame are unfounded.

The truth, however, is apparently [unwelcomed by media outlets like MSNBC](#), which continues to blame Fox News for Sherrod's misfortune.

"We've got a White House that reacted to a blog story that was reported, promoted, and sold on Fox News," said MSNBC anchor Ed Shultz. "They're not a news organization. They're a propaganda organization."

Sherrod apparently shares similar sentiments. "When you look at [Fox News'] reporting, this is just another way of seeing that they are [racist]. But I have seen that before now."

While neither Fox News nor Breitbart can be blamed for Sherrod's former bias, or for her public admittance of it, she recently told [CBS's Early Show](#) that she "would definitely consider" pursuing legal action against Andrew Breitbart.

The Associated Press reports that when President Obama contacted Sherrod to voice his regrets for the way her situation was handled, he defended Vilsack's hasty decision by claiming, "We now live in this media culture where something goes up on YouTube or a blog and everybody scrambles."



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The President's comment leaves Beck to believe, "This is about power and control of the media."

Photo of Shirley Sherrod: AP Images



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