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## Sherrod: I'm a Victim of Breitbart, Fox 'Racism'

July 21, 2010 11:40 am ET by Joe Strupp

Shirley Sherrod, the former Agriculture Department Georgia Director of Rural Development, says she is a victim. A victim of poor reporting and, as she contends, clear bias and racist coverage from both Andrew Breitbart and Fox News.

"When you look at their reporting, this is just another way of seeing that they are (racist)," Sherrod told me about Fox in a lengthy interview Tuesday night. "But I have seen that before now. I saw their reporting as biased during the Bush Administration and the Clinton Administration."

Sherrod was forced to resign on Monday after a portion of a taped speech she gave last March was posted at Breitbart's [Biggovernment.com](#).

In the edited tape, she spoke about how she had not initially helped a white farmer as much as she could have in 1986 when he was going to lose his farm. In the [posting](#), Breitbart made it appear as though the story had occurred during her time as a federal official and not 24 years ago when she worked for a non-profit organization.

Breitbart also did not include the entire context of the speech, in which she later explained that she learned from the situation and ended up helping the farmer, Roger Spooner and his wife. Both Spooners spoke out several times Tuesday to support Sherrod and voice that they would have lost their farm if not for her help.

Breitbart has since posted the full version of the tape, but his original posting also remains.

"It was a time when I realized that they did some of the same things to white farmers that they did to black farmers," Sherrod said about the speech. "I thought that all white farmers got the best treatment, but I found out in this case that was not so."

Explaining the speech further, Sherrod said, "I am trying to say to the people there that it is time for us to move forward. We do not want to forget the past and be in a position that racism is there and we don't see it. We want to move together. Our area of the state cannot grow and thrive until we learn to get along."

But after Breitbart posted the video clip, Sherrod said the lack of context and explanation sparked anger against her. She said she found out about the clip when someone e-mailed a link to her and asked about it.

"I couldn't believe it. I found this out when someone sent me (a link to) the tape, people who follow him, who put it out there," Sherrod said about Breitbart. "I got crank calls right away. Someone sent me an e-mail and link and said 'shame on you' and other stuff. I was sitting in a meeting and I was really upset.

"I texted back that they were so wrong and that they need to know the message and they got it wrong."

Sherrod said Cheryl Cook, USDA deputy undersecretary, called her Monday and said she had to be on administrative leave."

She adds: "People were calling and writing the Department of Agriculture in Athens, Ga., and Washington to tell them about it. That I needed to be fired. That a racist like me had no business working for the department. That is the way they intimidate people and it worked."

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Joe Strupp comes to *Media Matters* as an investigative reporter and senior editor with 21 years of news experience across newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the Internet. Most recently, he was a senior editor at *Editor & Publisher* magazine, from 1999 to late 2009, writing for its print edition, website, and blog.

Strupp, 44, started his career at *The Daily Journal* in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He has also worked at *The Argus* in Fremont, California; *The San Francisco Independent*; and *The Press-Enterprise* of Riverside, California.

He has appeared on Fox News, MSNBC, National Public Radio, and Air America Radio, among other local broadcast outlets. He also spent time as a reporter and anchor at Pacifica Radio in Berkeley, California.

Strupp has earned awards from the New Jersey Press Association, Society of Professional Journalists, Jesse H. Neal Business Journalism Awards, and Folio. He lives with his wife, Claire, and their two children in Northern New Jersey.

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By the end of the day Monday, she was forced to resign.

Sherrod, 62, said her first reaction was shock that, after a career working for civil rights and as the daughter of a father murdered by racists, she would be seen in such a terrible light.

"To have people say that I was such a racist was unbelievable," she said of the fallout from the video and Fox coverage. "My whole life, if you look into what I have done, my father was murdered in 1965. If you look at all of us, we all hurt with that and we got involved into the movement and channeled our effort into good, instead of hating.

"I am getting hate calls and e-mails at this point. I got one call last night at my house at 12:30 a.m. that said 'you lost your job, good for you' and 'bitch' There are people out there who will believe that I am a racist person, even though the story is getting out there."

She said her husband, Charles, and her two children, who also live nearby in Athens, Ga., were surprised, but have been toughened by years of seeing her work in the civil rights movement: "They had to grow up in the movement so they have had to deal with stuff like this through the years. We did not always take the easy road. They have some thick skin as a result."

But the clear damage to Sherrod comes from Breitbart, who posted the tape without context, and Fox, which ran with the story and did not seek to confirm it.

"The news media should tell it like it is and not the way they want it to be," she said.

Sherrod said Breitbart never contacted her before posting the video clip to ask about it.

"I never heard that name until a few minutes ago," she said Tuesday night about Breitbart. "He never contacted me. I think they intended it to be what it ended up being, a racist thing that could unite even more the racist people out there who follow them."

She also said Fox News never checked the facts with her before posting a story and the video clip.

"Not before they reported it," she said of Fox's negligence. "They have called me today and initially I had said yes (to an interview), but I thought about it and I did not think they intended to be fair in their reporting. They are going to say what they want to say regardless of what I say."

She said Fox showed no professionalism in continuing to bother her for an interview, but failing to correct their coverage.

"I think they should but they won't. They intended exactly what they did. They were looking for the result they got yesterday," she said of Fox. "I am just a pawn. I was just here. They are after a bigger thing, they would love to take us back to where we were many years ago. Back to where black people were looking down, not looking white folks in the face, not being able to compete for a job out there and not be a whole person."

Still, Fox continued to push for an interview with her, Sherrod said.

"It was unbelievable. I am refusing to be on there. They have been calling me and calling me. I have refused to do an interview because they are biased," she explained. "I don't think Fox News does it fairly. It is worse so now. I have sat and listened to the way they cover the news even before this administration and I saw what was going on."

Sherrod said this situation has worsened her view of racism in media coverage.

"I think it is race. You think we have come a long way in terms of race relations in this country, but we keep going backwards," she said. "We have become more racist. This was their doing, Breitbart put that together misrepresenting what I was saying and Fox carried it."

Sherrod said she has gotten no future job offers and believes this will scar her reputation forever, even if all the facts come out.

"There will be people who always think of this," she said. "I can see in the future whatever I do, this story will be recounted, no matter what. This will be brought up. People will constantly be trying to point out negative things."

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Have other job offers come up? "No, no one. People are afraid of me now, I guess, with all of this. That is the other fallout from this. Anyone would be afraid of me, maybe I am a troublemaker, a racist."

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said he is reviewing the matter, hinting that Sherrod could possibly get her job back.

Asked if she would return if asked, she said: "I think I would have to go back for a short time, even if I did not stay for a long haul. I would need to prove a point, that I can be bigger than them. I was doing a lot of good things. People had access to that office that never did before. I had reached out to the poorest counties."

Despite that, she plans to carry on.

"I will go back to doing what I was doing before, working with people, trying to build," she said. "There are a lot of projects in Georgia I have been involved in creating. I will get busy with that again."

Sherrod said she is considering legal action, perhaps against Breitbart, Fox or the federal government:

"I don't know enough to know. I wish I did. I would love to sue. I am going to talk about it. I have been getting calls from all over the country. I don't want to leave one stone unturned."

Sherrod said she has been helped by many media outlets, such as CNN and others that have allowed her to explain the truth, enough so that the NAACP retracted a statement Tuesday that had denounced her.

She said that has convinced her to trust some media outlets, noting she had plans to be on Good Morning America and NPR Wednesday.

"The only one I refused to do is Fox," she said, adding the fair coverage by others "makes me think highly of some of the media, but not any better about Fox. It is a bad taste in my mouth dealing with them. It would help some if they apologized and say they were wrong, but I don't see that happening."

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by Major Tom (July 21, 2010 12:07 pm ET)

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Sue Breitbart. Sue the SOB... and Fox if possible, surely they aren't above the law, surely they can be held accountable for **something...**

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by pete592 (July 21, 2010 4:21 pm ET)

2   2

Unfortunately, Sherrod doesn't have the financial means to do so.

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by indigo1968 (July 21, 2010 4:35 pm ET)

11   2

An attorney can always take the case pro bono.

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by kromecom48 (July 21, 2010 4:52 pm ET)

11   1

Not only pro-bono. They can take it on contingency and make millions. That's how John Edwards became a multi-millionaire for suing Tobacco companies. They'll only do contingency if they're sure they will . . . and they most certainly will.