After praising Strom Thurmond’s segregationist run for president, Senator Trent Lott apologizes for "a poor choice of words that conveyed to some the impression that I embrace the discarded policies from the past. Nothing could be further from the truth."

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Citation
MLA
Trent Lott Makes Controversial Racist Remarks

TOM BROKAW, anchor:

Now to a growing controversy over remarks made last night by—last week by the incoming Republican Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott. It happened at Strom Thurmond's Capitol Hill birthday party when Lott openly embraced Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign, which was based on racial segregation.

Here's NBC's Norah O'Donnell.

NORAH O'DONNELL reporting:

Facing a storm of criticism, the Republican leader in the Senate, Trent Lott, today reversed himself after five days and finally apologized after praising Strom Thurmond at his 100th birthday party with this remark:

Senator TRENT LOTT: I want to say this about my state. When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of him. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either.

O'DONNELL: The centerpiece of Thurmond's presidential campaign in 1948 called for segregation of the races. Today, criticism came from not only African-American groups...

Mr. KWEISI MFUME (NAACP President): It does not speak well for someone who is about to become the Majority Leader. I think he should stand down from that position.

O'DONNELL: ...but also from fellow conservatives, like radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, who called Lott's comments “indefensible and stupid.”

Lott's first defense was that it was all part of a lighthearted celebration. But then late yesterday, he apologized for, quote, "a poor choice of words that conveyed to some the impression that I embrace the discarded policies from the past. Nothing could be further from the truth."

This is not the first time Lott has come under fire. In 1998 and 1999, he was forced to answer questions about his close ties to the Council on Conservative Citizens. He then repudiated the group's white supremacist and racist views. Democrats and the Congressional Black Caucus called for Lott's
resignation, but the Republicans’ only African-American in Congress defended Lott.
Representative J.C. WATTS (Republican, Oklahoma): I think he went too far. I think he probably wishes
that he would have chosen a different set of words, but I don’t think that it implies racism in any way.
O’DONNELL: The White House said the president had accepted Lott’s apology.
Mr. ARI FLEISCHER (White House Press Secretary): The president has confidence in him as Republican
leader, unquestionably.
O’DONNELL: But today, the NAACP said the president has an obligation to publicly repudiate Lott’s
comments or else African-Americans will continue to be distrustful of the Republican Party. Norah
O’Donnell, NBC News, the Capitol.