News



U.S. President Donald Trump greets outgoing President Barack Obama before Trump's Jan. 20, 2017, swearing-in as the country's 45th president at the U.S. Capitol in Washington. Two Catholic bishops called on President Trump Feb. 9, 2026, to apologize for posting a racist meme on social media that depicted former President Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama as apes. (OSV News/Reuters/Rick Wilking)



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Two Catholic bishops are calling on President Donald Trump to apologize for posting a racist meme on social media that depicted former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama as apes.

Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich and Detroit Archbishop Edward Weisenburger both released statements Feb. 9 taking issue with a White House spokesperson's comments that sought to dismiss the controversy as "fake outrage" generated by the news media.

"Our shock is real. So is our outrage. Nothing less than an unequivocal apology — to the nation and to the persons demeaned — is acceptable," Cupich said in his statement.

Weisenburger added that he bristled at the fake outrage claim, and he too called on Trump to offer "a public apology with full acceptance of responsibility."

"It is very disturbing that anyone, much less the President of the United States or his staff members, should see racist memes as humorous or appropriate expressions of political discourse," Weisenberger said, adding that they are "deeply offensive and must be condemned in the strongest terms."



Archbishop Edward J. Weisenburger of Detroit poses for a photo at the Pontifical North American College in Rome June 29, 2025, after receiving the pallium from Pope Leo XIV during a Mass for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul in St. Peter's Basilica. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Shortly before midnight, on Feb. 5, Trump's social media account on his Truth Social platform shared a brief animation of the Obamas' heads superimposed on the bodies of apes. The excerpt was from a longer video highlighting debunked claims of the 2020 presidential election being stolen.

The White House initially defended the video, but it was deleted about 12 hours later amid backlash from Democrats and Republicans. U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, a South Carolina Republican who is Black, called the meme "the most racist thing" he had seen from Trump's White House.

Questioned by reporters, Trump claimed that he only saw the "first part" of the video and not the racist image. He said he sent the video to staff ("the people") to review for posting on his account. Trump has since refused to apologize, saying that he "

didn't make a mistake."



Chicago Cardinal Blase J. Cupich processes with other prelates at the beginning of the installation Mass of Archbishop Ronald A. Hicks as the new archbishop of New York at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City Feb. 6, 2026. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

In his statement, Cupich noted that portraying human beings as animals, or less than human, is nothing new.

"It was a common way in past centuries for politicians and others to demean immigrant groups as each arrived, the Chinese, Irish, Italians, Slavs, Jews, Latinos and so on," said Cupich, who added that cartoons, newspapers and theatrical productions often carried the message that those "others" were worthy of ridicule.

"It made it easier to turn a blind eye to their privation, pay them pitiful wages and mock their 'foreign' religion even as the country needed their labor," Cupich said. "It immunized the national conscience when we turned away shiploads of refugees,

lynched thousands and doomed generations to poverty."

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Cupich said the meme that Trump shared reveals that "such blatant racism is not merely a practice of the past."

"If the President intentionally approved the message containing viciously racist images, he should admit it," Cupich said. "If he did not know of it originally, he should explain why he let his staff describe the public outcry over their transmission as fake outrage.

"Either way he should apologize," Cupich said.

Beyond Trump offering the "necessary apology," Weisenburger said the controversy should prompt people to examine their consciences, acknowledge how prevalent racism continues to be in American society, and commit themselves to counteract its harm.

"As Catholics, we believe that every person is made in the image and likeness of God," Weisenburger said. "This sacred truth compels us to treat every human being with dignity, respect, and love. We must recommit ourselves to vigilance in counteracting the wounds caused by the evil of racism as truly we are called to be one human family."

Read this next: As Trump shared racist memes, NYC Archbishop Hicks preached Bad Bunny