

OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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WSSU and city leaders stand in front of the school's newest residence hall.

We continue to take pride in WSSU

Size doesn't always matter. Take for instance, the size of our federal government and the mounds of red tape that comes with it. It's proof that bigger is not always better. Bigger and better can go hand-in-hand, though. Winston-Salem State University is an example of that. Folks who haven't visited this town in a few years probably won't recognize the school's East Winston campus.

There was a time when only a smattering of classic-looking buildings made up the campus. Back then, it was impossible to get lost. Today, a map is needed to navigate the campus. Classroom buildings, residence halls and the like are seemingly popping up every month, so much so that a few years ago the school started an on-campus shuttle service.

WSSU is not just growing for the sake of being bigger and badder. Its success has made growth necessary. For several years, the school was the fastest growing, in terms of students, school in the University of North Carolina system. Young, eager minds have flocked to the school as a result of its growing academic reputation and on-campus amenities (such as its lush "residence halls").

New programming has also cropped up in recent years. Formerly an exclusively undergraduate institution, WSSU now boasts 12 master's level degrees. Night and weekend options have made

the school more convenient for nontraditional student populations, and enrollment has swelled to nearly 6,000.

Though Winston-Salem State has had its share of bad press in recent years, it has also seen its share of accolades. The school has ranked in U.S. News & World Report's top two public comprehensive colleges in the South for seven consecutive years, and was named in the top 20 HBCUs nationwide by the magazine last year.

Prominent alums like Stephen A. Smith, host of ESPN's Stephen A. Smith Show, also bring clout to the institution, as they continue to excel at their chosen professions. And in this city, it is hard to walk a block without bumping to a WSSU grad; most of them are at the very top of their professions.

Chancellor Donald J. Reaves is bringing his own brand of excellence to the table, resolving to tighten enrollment requirements and raise the bar of student performance campus wide. Reaves is also a proponent of empowering faculty members to have a greater voice on campus with regard to institutional decisions.

In an age where so many people have become complacent about race relations and the sacrifices of those who founded institutions like Winston-Salem State at their own peril; we are happy to see an HBCU really thrive, not just by "black school" standards, but by all school standards.

WSSU losing folksy feel

To the Editor:

The community has been observing the direction Winston-Salem State University is going under Chancellor Donald Reaves. It appears that the school is losing the "town and gown" effect it once so proudly bragged on. The new chancellor seems to have no interest in the community or he doesn't have the time. If he doesn't have the time he should say so and let the community know what is keeping him out of touch with us.

Chancellor Reaves, if you are overwhelmed with your job and the community's expectations of you, just let us know how we can help. If you are successful then the university and the community will be served and we all benefit.

Respectfully,
James Johnson

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Thank you, citizens

To the Editor:

I want to thank everyone for attending and supporting the Protest Rally on March 18. All of you came together for this great cause, and as a result, we now have an increase from four sites to nine voting sites. Special thanks and apprecia-

tion are extended to all. Because of your support and awareness of the need for more voting sites in Winston-Salem Forsyth County and the Board of Election Hearing, more voting sites were approved. We now have on the WSSU campus, in Anderson Center, a very important voting site. This allows everyone who wants to vote an accessible and conven-

ient voting site location. I am most grateful for your continued support as we exercised our rights and embraced another moment in the history of Winston-Salem's phenomenal citizens. Congratulations to all on a job well done!

Best Regards,
Larry Womble

Bush budget ignores AIDS problem



Dr. Scott Rhodes
Guest Columnist

President Bush proposed in his FY 2009 budget request to leave flat, and in some cases cut, funding for domestic HIV/AIDS programs. This proposal would put undue pressure on the already stressed domestic program for HIV/AIDS prevention and the care and treatment of HIV-positive individuals. Congress must increase funding for domestic HIV/AIDS programs if it wishes to stop the HIV/AIDS pendulum from swinging back toward epidemic proportions nationwide.

Sadly, Bush's budget proposal is a sign of growing misperceptions concerning the state of HIV/AIDS in the U.S. Recently, the Associated Press reported that HIV/AIDS peaked in the late 1990s, and some have been suggesting that HIV/AIDS funding should be shifted to other public health programs such as malnutrition, malaria, and pneumonia. Although the death rate for HIV disease has declined since 1995, the rate of decline has slowed substantially from 33 percent per year (1995-1998) to just over 3

percent per year (1998-2005). Given this sharp slow-down in the decline of the death rate, it is entirely possible that we will begin to see an increase in the death rate again in the future. It is important to note that a large part of the reason for the declining death rate was the introduction of antiretroviral medications that slow the progression of HIV to AIDS. These medications slow the progression to disease but do not stop it.

Although the number of new infections has been fairly stable since 1992 reported at about 40,000 per year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is releasing revised data this fall that suggests that the number of new infections per year is as much as 50 percent more than previously thought. Up to 60,000 new infections may be occurring each year in the U.S. This increase is based both on revised calculations and increased infection rates. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is not part of our history; it is an ongoing epidemic that has lost public and governmental attention but continues to affect all of us. Whether we know it or not, we all have friends, family members, acquaintances, and colleagues who are living with HIV/AIDS and who have died from AIDS. HIV/AIDS continues to profoundly impact our community.

For those who are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, it does not matter what the national data say. An HIV/AIDS diagnosis can be devastating. In many cases individuals are receiving late diagnoses, which means they often do not begin receiving care until they have already experienced significant (and expensive) HIV-related health problems. These health problems likely could have been avoided with an earlier diagnosis and access to care and treatment.

In addition to the medical problems facing those who are HIV positive, they must deal with the emotional stress that accompanies an HIV-positive diagnosis. Worries about their health, their personal relationships, and stigma are just a few of the burdens that weigh heavily on their minds. How to get to doctor appointments, provide for their children, pay for housing, and fund their care and treatment are increasing concerns for those living with HIV/AIDS.

Minority families are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, particularly in the Southern U.S. Here in North Carolina African-American women are 17 times more likely than White women to be infected with HIV, and African-American males are 7 times more likely to be infected than white males. The growing Latino population is also at increased risk.

Currently HIV/AIDS is the third leading cause of death for Latino males in the U.S. between the ages of 35-44 years.

The science behind HIV does not indicate a biological predisposition to HIV among ethnic groups, so it appears that socioeconomic factors play a role in the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on minority populations. In Northwest North Carolina, for example, the region served by local non-profit AIDS Care Service in Winston-Salem, over 80 percent of their clients fall below federal poverty level. In short, HIV/AIDS has become a matter of social inequity. To combat this social inequity we all must step up to the plate and make a commitment. More funding is needed, not just internationally but domestically, right here in our own community.

The HIV/AIDS crisis is not over. Much work is being done but much more work to prevent infection and provide care and treatment is needed; money earmarked for the domestic HIV/AIDS crisis is needed. This need is particularly important for North Carolina which is the in top 10 U.S. states in numbers of HIV infections.

Dr. Scott D. Rhodes is a member of the AIDS Care Service Board of Trustees and a medical researcher.

Managing Ignorance



Dr. John Mendez
Guest Columnist

In recent days, the American public has been bombarded by a series of video clips, relentless isolated sound bytes, and lots of frenzied, misinformed over-charged rhetoric by the news media, commentators, and right-wing bloggers, caricaturing and demonizing my friend, Dr. Jeremiah Wright and Trinity Christian Church. Dr. Wright is under attack for the use of language and sentiments uttered while preaching a sermon that criticized and condemned American violence at home and abroad. In my estimation, however, the real reason Dr. Wright is under attack is that he was the pastor of Senator Barack Obama and his family for over 20 years, as UCC President John Thomas pointed out. Those who sifted through hours of sermons looking for a few lurid phrases and those who aired them repeatedly were only seeking to discredit and harm Obama by associating him with the historic prophetic ministry and social gospel preaching tradition of the Black church, as if that is a bad thing; and to divide the American people along racial and religious lines by subtly playing the "race

card."

I have known Dr. Jeremiah Wright for over 25 years. He is a brilliant preacher and scholar. He was recognized by Ebony Magazine as one of the top 15 preachers in America. He has preached in Winston-Salem several times to overflowing audiences.

Trinity Church is located in Southside Chicago, where the consequences of racist public policies are manifested in a crumbling infrastructure, a failing school system, and a lack of economic development. For decades, Trinity Church has been hailed as a model church for what Dr. Martin Marty, a professor of religion at the University of Chicago Divinity School and frequent visitor to Trinity worship services, describes as a place of "hope, hope, hope."

In spite of Dr. Wright's awesome ministry and achievements, the media paints him as some kind of "fanatic" based on a few isolated sound bytes, which is tantamount to doing "image damage," which has historically appealed to those who have contempt for Blacks. Dr. Wright, like Adam Clayton Powell, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, before him, is really under attack because he refuses to emulate the king's "yes man" and bless a racist and exploitive

status quo as so many prosperity preachers do. Dr. Wright is under attack because he chose the prophetic over pseudo-patriotism, the social gospel over social accommodation, conviction over compromise, protest over prosperity, and truth over tranquility. Dr. Wright's words, though "mildly brash" were still nothing but the truth about this nation. What is ironic, everybody knows he spoke the truth, including the media. It is no secret America assassinated democratically elected presidents around the world and toppled governments to serve their interests; from Allende in Chile to Lumumba in the Congo, to a failed assassination attempt on the life of Caesar Chavez to the use of deception and lies to invade Iraq and kill its president. Dr. Martin Luther King said long ago in his Beyond Vietnam speech that America was the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world." The attack on Dr. Wright is tantamount to engaging in "selective ignorance."

James Baldwin, wrote in The Fire Next Time, "This is the crime of which I accuse my country and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them that they have destroyed ... hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it." America is imprisoned by its

own myths. It engages in an epistemology of willful ignorance. White America does not have to and does not want to have knowledge of the injuries and pain they have inflicted through slavery, terror, lynching, and racism so manifested in the everyday lives of people of color. America has no desire to know what it is about them and their institutions that have wreaked such havoc in the lives of Blacks, people of color and the poor at home and abroad. This is why white America is not able to hear or believe that Black America's grievances are real. They cannot seem to understand why we are angry or why the world hates America. It is not because of the American way of life. America cannot believe it because they cannot face what this reality says about themselves. White America has immunized and numbed itself from any kind of criticism that might correct their misunderstandings or expose their self-imposed ignorance. Worse still, neither does America have the vision to imagine a different world where justice, peace, and equality are a way of life. Such an attack upon Dr. Wright is only another attempt for the authors of devastation to play innocent, and sadly, it is playing the role of innocence that constitutes the crime.

Dr. John Mendez is pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church and a longtime community activist.

Submit letters and columns to:

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