



The Rev. John Mendez makes a point during Sunday's discussion. Beside him are the Rev. Veronice Miles and Mütter Evans.

Local panelist defend Sen. Obama's ex-pastor

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

The Rev. Jeremiah Wright's infamous "Goddamn America" sermon and many of his remarks in recent week have ignited a nation.

Wright has garnered so much attention because, as the former pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, he was Democratic Presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama's pastor for about two decades. Rev. Wright married Obama and his wife, Michelle, and baptized the couple's two daughters.

When confronted about the his sermon, Wright has lashed out at members of the media, calling their dogged pursuit of him "an attack on the black church."

The Rev. Sir Walter Mack, pastor of Union Baptist Church, says he was struck by the words of his fellow man of God, and felt Wright's assertion warranted greater introspection. To this end, a forum was held at Union Sunday evening to address the Wright hubbub.

"We just want to have a good ol' barber shop / beauty salon discussion," Mack said to a packed house at the start of the dialogue.

Titled "Is the African American Church Under Attack?" the forum featured seven prominent community members, each with a unique perspective on the issue.

"This controversy opens the ancient questions that we revisit in regard to the black churches and the white churches," said Wake Forest Divinity School Dean Dr. Bill Leonard, who is white.

State Rep. Larry Womble said the black church has helped the black community through times of slavery, Jim Crow and other injustices.

"Without the black church, we would not be where we are today," he declared. "We many times are invisible people in this society ... we're still marginalized, we're still not respected. Without the black church to recharge our batteries, we would be frustrated people."

Wright's infamous sermon was given soon after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. In it, he said that America welcomed the attacks because of the injustices that exist in this country and the nation's callousness toward

other countries.

The Rev. Veronice Miles, a religion professor at Wake Forest University, believes Wright's comments were taken out of context. To prove her point, she read a longer excerpt of the sermon to the audience, who responded with murmurs of "amen" and "yes."

"In black preaching, we have always brought boldness and passion," she declared. "People learn best when they are able to touch and sense and feel the biblical text."

The Rev. John Mendez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, is quite familiar with the strong emotions and words that are uttered by Wright and legions of other black preachers. Mendez is a longtime community activist who has used his pulpit to speak up for the downtrodden and to speak out against injustice.



Wright

He joked that he was glad none of his congregants are running for president. Mendez, who has known Wright for more than 30 years, said that the firestorm of controversy the sermon has sparked is politically-motivated.

"I think that it's important that we see the pressure that society puts on everyone, especially a person of color. We're not allowed to be who we are and have a sense of self consciousness," he said. "They were under attack ... by a vicious system, a vicious group of people who wanted to keep a changing of the guards from occurring."

The release of the pastor's remarks, which were made more than four years ago, is just an attempt to distract and confuse the public, according to Dr. Tobias LaGrone, pastor of Christ New Life Community Church in High Point.

"There's an attempt being made to divide the African American community," he remarked. "...in the end, once again, the house Negro is left fighting with field Negroes."

Mütter Evans defended the news media. Evans is the owner of Mutter D. Evans, Inc. and former owner of WAAA radio station. She says that the media is only selling the product that its consumers want to buy.

The Rev. Cardes Brown, pastor of New Light Baptist Church of Greensboro, railed against critics who have deemed

Wright's remarks "un-American." Pastors have an obligation to speak the truth as they know it, he maintained.

"Our responsibility first and foremost is to God," he asserted. "It is not always easy to understand that role. I am only the mailman; God is the postmaster."

The forum was followed by an impassioned sermon delivered by Dr. William Barber, president of the North Carolina NAACP. It is always the obligation of the pastor to speak the truth, even if his words are not well received, Barber said, referencing passages from the Old Testament's Book of Amos.

"If you're not holding the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand saying, 'Thus says the Lord,' then what are you really preaching?" he boomed. "Preachers have to find the courage and the willingness to speak out."

News Clips

Class of '58 gives UNCG largest reunion gift

The class of 1958 has presented The University of North Carolina at Greensboro with the largest reunion class gift - \$1,080,663 - in the history of the university. This is the first time a reunion class gift has exceeded one million dollars.

The gift was presented to Chancellor Patricia A. Sullivan during the 115th meeting of the UNCG Alumni Association held during reunion weekend, Friday and Saturday, May 2-3.

Presenters were Rascha Sklut Kriegsman of Greensboro, Pat Shore Clark of Winston-Salem and Sue Sigmon Williams of Atlanta who served as reunion chairs. Williams received the Distinguished Alumni Award at the reunion. This year is Sullivan's last reunion as Chancellor. She is retiring July 31.

Class members were encouraged to give to whatever program, fund, scholarship or other designation had special meaning to them from across the six schools, the College of Arts and Sciences and other parts of the university.

More than 12 major gifts have been established by individual classmates. Forty-seven percent of the 350 classmates have donated to UNCG, some for the first time since graduation said Miriam Blackwelder Fields, director of development for the School of Music.

Funds from the gift will go towards the Students First Campaign, UNCG's \$100 million capital campaign that is underway, which has raised more than \$95 million to date.

Airman Peterson completes training as honor graduate

Air Force Airman Justin J. Peterson has graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.

During the six weeks of training, the airman studied the Air Force mission, organization, and military customs and courtesies; performed drill and ceremony marches, and received physical training, rifle marksmanship, field training exercises, and special training in human relations.

In addition, airmen who complete basic training earn credits toward an associate degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

Peterson earned distinction as an honor graduate. He is the son of Ruhiya Peterson of Winston-Salem. The airman is a 2004 graduate of Parkland High School.



Peterson

web site one of the best in Congress. The redesigned site builds on the success of the previous web site and introduces new user-friendly features such as RSS feeds and comprehensive sections dedicated to groups like seniors or students.

Foxx also has a Congressional YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/RepVirgini aFoxx.

Boko, Weinstein are Fulbright Scholars

Wake Forest University announced that Sylvain Boko, Zachary T. Smith Associate Professor of Economics, and David Weinstein, professor of political science, have won fellowships from the Fulbright Scholar Program.

Boko has won a fellowship to Uganda for the 2008-2009 academic year. He will conduct research on the topic "Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development: The Role of Decentralized Governance" and will teach at the Makerere University Institute of Social Research in Kampala.

Weinstein has received a fellowship beginning in April 2009 to conduct research and teach at the Simon Dubnow Institute at Leipzig University located in Saxony, Germany. The institute is devoted to the study of Central European Jewish history and culture. Weinstein's research will focus on Jewish political philosophers, including Karl Popper and Leo Strauss, who were forced to flee from Germany and Austria in the 1930s.

The Fulbright Scholar Program was established in 1946 under legislation introduced by the late Sen. J. William Fulbright of Arkansas to build mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Foxx redesigns her Web site

U.S. Representative Virginia Foxx has launched a completely redesigned Congressional web site at www.foxx.house.gov. The new site incorporates web video, the latest congressional news, information about constituent services and background on legislation and votes in Congress.

"My new web site uses a variety of technologies to keep constituents informed about the issues before Congress, including videos, e-mail and online legislative search tools," Foxx said.

Web-design experts at the non-partisan Congressional Management Foundation recently named Rep. Foxx's

Where are you going to go when you retire,
the beach, the woods or the water?

No matter where you want to end up, we'll sit down with you and make sure you've got a plan that fits your plans. We'll go over all the benefits of our IRAs and other retirement accounts, and give you a simple and clear path to the green. And help you avoid the usual traps.

Piedmont
FEDERAL
SAVINGS BANK

MORTGAGES | SAVINGS | SOLUTIONS

PIEDMONTFEDERAL.COM • 336.770.1000 • Member FDIC Equal Housing Lender

Warren Dental Center

"Thank You For 20 Years of Community Service"

William R. Warren D.D.S.
2606 New Walkertown Rd.
Winston Salem, N.C. 27101

Mon-Thurs. 9-4 pm
Fri 9-1pm
724-5055

- General Dentistry
- Dentures
- Preventive Care
- Teeth Whitening
- Crowns/bridges
- Cerec Crowns (in Only One Visit)

Major Credit Cards / Insurance Accepted