

Bishop ponders issue of race in Post-Obama Era

BY LAYLA FARMER
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In addition to being historic, America's selection of Sen. Barack Obama as its next president was symbolic for many, proof-positive that the country is overcoming the racial scars of its past and moving into a more tolerant society.

Two days after the election, Bishop Woodie W. White examined the state of race and racism in a nation that is soon to be led by a black man.

White, the bishop-in-residence at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., served as the second speaker in Winston-Salem State University's 2008-2009 James A. Gray Lecture Symposium. He spoke last Friday morning at the Albert H. Anderson Center on the school's campus.

Themed "Religion and Ethics in 21st Century America," the four-part lecture series has landed some of the most well-known clergymen of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Indeed, the election was on the minds of seemingly everyone who took the stage prior to White's talk.

Dr. Eric Greaux, assistant professor of Religion and Social Studies at WSSU, prayed for the President-Elect in his invocation, and the famed Burke Singers incorporated Obama's name into their rendition of "The Old Ship of Zion," singing, "It has landed, Barack Obama..."

Dr. James Feree, former district superintendent of the United Methodist Church in North Carolina, also referenced Obama in his introduction of White, who became the first African-American bishop of the United Methodist Church when he was elected to the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in 1984.

"I think that (Obama) ship has landed for a whole lot of us since Tuesday," he commented. "...we have a lot to shout about this morning."

Feree, White's longtime friend, characterized the



President-Elect Obama

bishop as "an outstanding leader."

"He has been on the battlefield," said Feree. "He knows what it means to stand firm."

White's lecture, "Race, Racism and Common Ground," probed the prevalence of racism in American society and the variant forms it can take, from attitudinal and behavioral to what he sees as the most pervasive manifestation: institutional racism.

"It's important to understand the complexity of racism so we will know what we are attacking when we are attacking it," he remarked.

He stressed the importance of finding ways to eradicate racism of all kinds.

"There is this desperate need for finding common ground," said White. "The reality is we have to live together ... we depend upon and rely upon one another in ways that we're not even aware (of)."

Despite electing its first black president, America still has a long way to go in the pursuit of true racial equality, White cautioned.

"Racism has had a 400-year rootage in our system," he pointed out. "To think that it will disappear overnight ... would be naive."

Nevertheless, the election of Sen. Obama is a step in the right direction, White believes.

"God has given the world a glimpse of what we can be and do when we find common ground," he declared. "Race still matters, make no mistake about it, but I would add, not as much ... we can achieve common ground."

mental, in my mind, to the mission of this college ... we do not tolerate any kind of harassment or discrimination."

Pauly says she's heard "rumors" about the alleged incident on campus, but she is adamant that no formal complaints have been filed. Nevertheless, she fired off two campus-wide e-mails in the days following the election. The first, dated Nov. 5 at around 6 p.m., invited students to attend "a special opportunity for conversation, personal reflection and dialogue" about the election.

Though she did not attend, Pauly says administrators reported that the meeting was a success.

Pauly's second email, dated November 7, begins, "In response to questions and concerns of students, I want to be clear that Salem College is a community of honor, and students are expected to show respect for the community by behaving with honesty, integrity and civility..."

Pauly says that the e-mails were intended as a proactive response to the post-election turmoil that has been felt nationwide and not as a response to any particular incident. She urged any student who feels persecuted to report their experience to the school administration.

The penalty for a student engaging in activity that goes against the school's Honor Code of conduct is evaluated on a "case-by-case" basis, Pauly said. She declined to comment as to what, if any, ramifications might arise for a student that is found to be in violation of the code.



Bishop Woodie W. White addresses a crowd at WSSU.

WSSU Photo by Garrett Garmis



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