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Pulitzer Prize winner Jon Meacham

Talks turbulence, Trump and presidential literacy before main event

By Calum McAndrew
Managing Editor

Before his sold-out evening lecture in the Porter Center concert hall, former Newsweek editor in chief Jon Meacham took to the Scott Commons in the Porter Center to host a question and answer session for students and faculty of Brevard College, in an event that lasted a little over an hour.

Meacham is currently a contributing editor for TIME magazine and is a Pulitzer Prize winner for his 2009 biography on Andrew Jackson. Meacham has also written biographies on other former U.S. Presidents, ranging from Thomas Jefferson to George H.W. Bush.

The event was free for all to attend and drew an attendance of approximately 30 students, faculty and staff. The Scott Commons Center was abuzz with intrigue, as Meacham answered the burning questions from both BC students and faculty alike.

The questions Meacham faced ranged from light-hearted issues such as who his favorite president of all time was, to whether or not he believes the Republican Party, and the nation, can recover from recent turbulence, both in the party and around the nation.



Photo by John Padgett

Jon Meacham answers student and faculty questions in a Q&A in the Porter Center's Scott Commons on Thursday, Sept. 28.

Meacham presented his scholarly knowledge with a wit that constantly drew laughter from the audience, as well as ideas and statements to ponder throughout the Q&A session.

BC history professor Margaret Brown introduced Meacham to the colloquium, who was at the college as a guest of both Brevard College and the Transylvania County Library. Meacham lightheartedly opened the colloquium by saying, "I don't think I've ever been at a colloquium before, so this is neat."

The first question Meacham faced included which President he found most interesting. His answer was Andrew Jackson, the subject of his Pulitzer Prize winning book. "Whenever he got mad, he just shot people," Meacham said as he explained his decision.

He added to this point by saying, "He was the first self-made man to hold office, so for all his sins and wickedness, he was the embodiment of social mobility in that period. For that time and place, he was a revolutionary figure."

"The American tendency is always to overcorrect. If we have A, we want Z."

This prompted a discussion of many other historical figures in U.S. history, before moving into a discussion of more modern issues and the current administration.

Meacham spoke in depth of his interview with President Trump prior to the 2016 election. "I interviewed the then-candidate Trump in May of 2016—it was all about what was he thinking about historically, what was he reading to prepare to be president," Meacham explained, before adding with a wry smile, "That conversation was pretty brief."

What surprised Meacham the most with his conversation with the then-candidate Trump, however, were the people Trump did not mention. "I was trying to coin a phrase: presidential literacy. What is the basic level of retrieval of facts that someone should have at that level of office," he said. "(Andrew) Jackson never came up. He mentioned Reagan, he mentioned Nixon. The Jackson imagery in his (Trump's) life is really a product of Steve Bannon."

In addition to this, Meacham also shed light on Trump's opposition during the 2016 race, Hillary Clinton, before mentioning the changeable voting tendencies of the American electorate. "Hillary Clinton had almost all of American elective history working against her," Meacham said. "With the exception of the early republic (Jefferson, Madison, Monroe),

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