

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB SPEAKER BREAKFAST WITH THE REVEREND DR. JEREMIAH
WRIGHT,
SENIOR PASTOR OF THE TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, CHICAGO,
ILLINOIS

TOPIC: THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

MODERATOR:
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MS. LEINWAND: Good morning. Good morning, and welcome to the
National Press Club for our speaker breakfast featuring Reverend
Jeremiah Wright. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm the vice president
of the National Press Club and a reporter for USA Today.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience
today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN. And I -- we have
many, many guests here today.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards I will
ask as many questions as time permits. Please hold your applause

during the speech, so that we have time for as many questions as
possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you
hear applause, it may be from the general public and guests of members
who attend our luncheons (sic) and not necessarily from the working
press. (Laughter.) And there are a lot here today.

So I'd like now to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called.

From your right, we have Melissa Charbonneau, CBN News, and vice chair of the Speakers Committee; Frederick Douglass IV, founder of the Frederick Douglass Organization and publisher of FrederickDouglassiv.org; Jerry Zremski, past National Press Club president and a reporter for the Buffalo News -- bureau chief, actually, for the Buffalo News; Kim Chipman of Bloomberg News; the Reverend Dr. Iva Carruthers, general secretary of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference; Kevin Chappell of Ebony and Jet magazine; Reverend Ramah E. Wright, the wife of the pastor.

We'll skip over the podium and go to Angela Greiling Keane of Bloomberg News and chair of the Speakers Committee.

And skipping our guest, the Reverend Dr. Barbara A. Reynolds, president of Reynolds News Service and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event.

We have Jeri Wright, a daughter of the pastor and president of Grace of God Incorporated; April Ryan of American Urban Radio; Greta Van Susteren of Fox News; Dorothy Gilliam, director of Prime Movers Media Program at George Washington University; and Clarence Page of the Chicago Tribune. (Applause.)

The Reverend Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. has preached the Christian Gospel from the pulpit of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago for more than 36 years. When Wright became pastor at Trinity in 1972, the church had 87 members. It now has 8,000. He is acclaimed for using charismatic style, music and soaring rhetoric to attract thousands of people to the inner-city church and for developing social outreach programs for the community. The church's motto: Unashamedly black, and unapologetically Christian.

He has spoken forcefully and openly about problems in his city, his country and the world. He has spoken against U.S. involvement in Iraq and for divestment in South Africa. He pushes for African-American churches to use music traditional to black culture, rather than what he calls Euro-centric hymns.

The most widely quoted and most controversial was a 2003 sermon in which he condemned America for mistreatment of its black citizens and for racism. His quote: "Not 'God bless America,' 'God damn America,'" he said. "God damn America for treating its citizens as less than human."

In another sermon, he accused American policymakers of being under the sway of the Ku Klux Klan -- the U.S. of KKK A., he said.

Last month these fiery sermons draw unflattering media attention for Senator Barack Obama, a member of Wright's congregation for 20 years. Obama said it was Wright's sermon "The Audacity to Hope" that inspired the title of his best-selling memoir and 2004 Democratic National Convention speech. Obama is now distancing himself from the preacher.

Reverend Wright, who has announced that he is stepping down from his pulpit, says the media have plucked his comments out of context in an attempt to brand him as an extremist. He says his detractors used the comments to stoke fear among Americans who are unfamiliar with the African-American church.

Reverend Wright, we welcome you to the Press Club and to take some questions from -- (laughter) -- from this gigantic audience. We have here reporters. And so, Reverend Wright, the floor is now yours. (Cheers, extended applause.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We love you, Reverend Wright! (Laughter.)

REV. WRIGHT: Over the next few days, prominent scholars of the African-American religious tradition from several different disciplines -- theologians, church historians, ethicists, professors of Hebrew bible, homiletics, hermeneutics and historians of religions -- those scholars will join in with sociologists, political analysts, local church pastors and denominational officials to examine the African-American religious experience and its historical, theological and political context. The workshops, the panel discussions and the symposia will go into much more intricate detail about this unknown phenomenon of the black church -- (laughter) -- than I have time to go into in the few moments that we have to share together.

And I would invite you to spend the next two days getting to know just a little bit about a religious tradition that is as old as and, in some instances, older than this country. And this is a country which houses its religious tradition that we all love and a country that some of us have served. It is a tradition that is in some ways like Ralph Ellison's "The Invisible Man". It has been right here in our midst and on our shores since the 1600s, but it was, has been and, in far too many instances, still is invisible to the dominant culture in terms of its rich history, its incredible legacy and its multiple meanings.

The black religious experience is a tradition that at one point in American history was actually called "the invisible institution," as it was forced underground by the Black Codes. The Black Codes prohibited the gathering of more than two black people without a white person being present to monitor the conversation, the content and the mood of any discourse between persons of African descent in this country.

Africans did not stop worshipping because of the Black Codes. Africans did not stop gathering for inspiration and information and for encouragement and for hope in the midst of discouraging and seemingly hopeless circumstances. They just gathered out of the eyesight and the earshot of those who defined them as less than human.

They became, in other words, invisible in and invisible to the eyes of the dominant culture.

They gathered to worship in brush arbors -- sometimes called hush arbors -- where the slaveholders, slave patrols and Uncle Toms couldn't hear nobody pray.

From the 1700s in the North America, with the founding of the first legally recognized independent black congregations, through the end of the Civil War and the passing of the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States of America, the black religious experience was informed by, enriched by, expanded by, challenged by, shaped by and influenced by the influx of Africans from the other two Americas and the Africans brought into this country from the Caribbean, plus the Africans who were called "fresh blacks" by the slave traders, those Africans who had not been through the seasoning process of the Middle Passage in the Caribbean colonies, those Africans on the sea coast islands off of Georgia and South Carolina, the Gullah -- (changing pronunciation) -- we say in English Gullah; those of us in the black community say Geechee -- those people brought into the black religious experience, a flavor that other seasoned Africans could not bring.

It is those various streams of the black religious experience which will be addressed in summary form over the next two days, streams which require full courses at the university and graduate-school level and cannot be fully addressed in a two-day symposium, and streams which tragically remain invisible in a dominant culture which knows nothing about those whom Langston Hughes calls the darker brother and sister.

It is all of those streams that make up this multi-layered and rich tapestry of the black religious experience, and I stand before you to open up this two-day symposium with the hope that this most recent attack on the black church -- this is not an attack on Jeremiah Wright; it is an attack on the black church. (Applause.)

As the vice president told you, that applause comes from not the working press. (Laughter.)

The most recent attack on the black church -- it is our hope that this just might mean that the reality of the African-American church will no longer be invisible. Maybe now, as an honest dialogue about race in this country begins, a dialogue called for by Senator Obama

and a dialogue to begin in the United Church of Christ among 5,700 congregations in just a few weeks -- maybe now, as that dialogue begins, the religious tradition that has kept hope alive for a people struggling to survive in countless hopeless situations, maybe that religious tradition will be understood, celebrated and even embraced by a nation that seems not to have noticed why 11:00 on Sunday morning has been called the most segregated hour in America. We have known since 1787 that it is the most segregated hour. Maybe now we can begin to understand why -- (audio break).

And maybe now we can begin to take steps to move the black religious tradition from the status of invisible to the status of invaluable, not just for some black people in this country, but for all the people in this country.

Maybe this dialogue on race -- an honest dialogue that does not engage in denial or superficial platitudes -- maybe this dialogue on

race can move the people of faith in this country from various stages of alienation and marginalization to the exciting possibility of reconciliation. That is my hope as I open up this two-day symposium, and I open it as a pastor and a professor who comes from a long tradition of what I call "the prophetic theology of the black church."

Now, in the 1960s, the term "liberation theology" began to gain currency with the writings and the teachings of preachers, pastors, priests and professors from Latin America. Their theology was done from the underside. Their viewpoint was not from the top down or from a set of teachings which undergirded imperialism. Their viewpoints, rather, were from the bottom up, the thoughts and understandings of God, the faith, religion and the bible from those whose lives were ground under, mangled and destroyed by the ruling classes or the oppressors. Liberation theology started in and started from a different place. It started from the vantage point of the oppressed.

In the late 1960s, when Dr. James Cone's powerful books burst onto the scene, the term "black liberation theology" began to be used. I do not in any way disagree with Dr. Cone, nor do I in any way diminish the inimitable and incomparable contribution that he has made and that he continues to make to the field of theology. Jim, incidentally, is a personal friend of mine.

I call our faith tradition, however, "the prophetic tradition of the black church," because I take its origins back past Jim Cone, past the sermons and songs of Africans in bondage in the transatlantic slave trade. I take it back past the problem of western ideology and notions of white supremacy. I take and trace the theology of the black church back to the prophets in the Hebrew bible and to its last prophet, in my tradition, the one we call Jesus of Nazareth.

The prophetic tradition of the black church has its roots in Isaiah, the 61st chapter, where God says the prophet is to preach the gospel to the poor and to set at liberty those who are held captive. Liberating the captives also liberates those who are holding them captive. It frees the captive and it frees the captors. It frees the

oppressed and it frees the oppressors. The prophetic theology of the black church during the days of chattel slavery was a theology of liberation. It was preached to set free those who were held in bondage, spiritually, psychologically and sometimes physically, and it was practiced to set the slaveholders free from the notion that they could define other human beings or confine a soul set free by the power of the gospel.

The prophetic theology of the black church during the days of segregation, Jim Crow, lynching and the "separate but equal" fantasy was a theology of liberation.

It was preached to set African-Americans free from the notion of second-class citizenship, which was the law of the land. And it was practiced to set free misguided and miseducated Americans from the notion that they were actually superior to other Americans based on the color of their skin.

The prophetic theology of the black church in our day is preached

to set African-Americans and all other Americans free from the misconceived notion that different means deficient. Being different does not mean one is deficient. It simply means one is different, like snowflakes, like the diversity that God loves. Black music is different from European and European music. It is not deficient. It is just different. Black worship is different from European and European-American worship. It is not deficient. It is just different. Black preaching is different from European and European-American preaching. It is not deficient. It is just different. It is not bombastic. It is not controversial. It's different. (Laughter, applause.)

Those of you who can't see on C-SPAN, we had one or two working press clap along with -- (laughter) -- the non-working press. (Laughter.)

Black learning styles are different from European and European-American learning styles. They are not deficient. They are just different.

This principle of difference does not mean deficient is at the heart of the prophetic theology of the black church. It is a theology of liberation.

The prophetic theology of the black church is not only a theology of liberation; it is also a theology of transformation, which is also rooted in Isaiah 61, the text from which Jesus preached in his inaugural message as recorded by Luke. When you read the entire passage from either Isaiah 61 or Luke 4, and do not try to understand the passage or the content of the passage in the context of a sound bite, what you see is God's desire for a radical change in a social order that has gone sour.

God's desire is for positive, meaningful and permanent change. God does not want one people seeing themselves as superior to other people. God does not want the powerless masses -- the poor, the widows, the marginalized and those underserved by the powerful few --

to stay locked into sick systems which treat some in the society as being more equal than others in that same society. God's desire is for positive change, transformation; real change, not cosmetic change, transformation; radical change or a change that makes a permanent difference, transformation. God's desire is for transformation, changed lives, changed minds, changed laws, changed social orders and changed hearts in a changed world. This principle of transformation is at the heart of the prophetic theology of the black church.

These two foci of liberation and transformation have been at the very core of the black religious experience from the days of David Walker, Harriet Tubman, Richard Allen, Jarena Lee, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and Sojourner Truth through the days of Adam Clayton Powell, Ida B. Wells, Dr. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Barbara Jordan, Cornel West and Fannie Lou Hamer.

These two foci of liberation and transformation have been at the very core of the United Church of Christ since its predecessor denomination, the Congregational Church of New England came to the

moral defense and paid for the legal defense of the Mende people aboard the slave ship Amistad, since the days when the United Church of Christ fought against slavery, played an active role in the Underground Railroad and set up over 500 schools for the Africans who were freed from slavery in 1865. And these two foci remain at the core of the teachings of the United Church of Christ as it has fought against apartheid in South Africa and racism in the United States of America ever since the union which formed the United Church of Christ in 1957.

These two foci of liberation and transformation have also been at the very core and the congregation of Trinity United Church of Christ since it was founded in 1961, and these foci have been the bedrock of our preaching and practice for the past 36 years.

Our congregation, as you heard in the introduction, took a stand against apartheid when the government of our country was supporting the racist regime of the Afrikaner government in South Africa. (Applause.) Our congregation stood in solidarity with the peasants in El Salvador and Nicaragua while our government, through Ollie North and the Iran-Contra scandal was supporting the contras who were killing the peasant and the Miskito Indian in those two countries. (Applause.)

Our congregation sent 35 men and women through accredited seminaries to earn their master of divinity degrees with an additional 40 currently being enrolled in seminary while building two senior citizen housing complexes and running two child-care programs for the poor, the unemployed, the low-income parents on the south side of Chicago for the past 30 years. Our congregation feeds over 5,000 homeless and needy families every year while our government cuts food stamps and spends billions fighting in an unjust war in Iraq. (Cheers, applause.)

Our congregation has sent dozens of boys and girls to fight in the Vietnam War, the first Gulf War and the present two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. My goddaughter's unit just arrived in Iraq this week, while those who call me unpatriotic have used their positions of privilege to avoid military service while sending -- (cheers, applause) -- while sending over 4,000 American boys and girls of every race to die over a lie. (Boos, jeers.)

Our congregation has had an HIV/AIDS ministry for over two decades. Our congregation has awarded over \$1 million to graduating high school seniors going into college, and an additional one-half million dollars to the United Negro College Fund and the six HBCUs related to the United Church of Christ while advocating for health care for the uninsured, workers' rights for those forbidden to form unions and fighting the unjust sentencing system which has sent black men and women to prison for longer terms for possession of crack cocaine than white men and women have to serve for the possession of powder cocaine.

Our congregation has had a prison ministry for 30 years, a drug and alcohol recovery ministry for 20 years, a full-service program for senior citizens and 22 different ministries for the youth of our church from preschool through high school all proceeding from the

starting point of liberation and transformation, a prophetic theology which presumes God's desire for changed minds, changed laws, changed social orders, changed lives, changed hearts in a changed world.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah!

REV. WRIGHT: The prophetic theology of the black church is a theology of liberation. It is a theology of transformation.

And it is ultimately a theology of reconciliation. The Apostle Paul said, "Be ye reconciled one to another, even as God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's self."

God does not desire for us, as children of God, to be at war with each other, to see each other as superior or inferior, to hate each other, abuse each other, misuse each other, define each other or put each other down.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

REV. WRIGHT: God wants us reconciled one to another, and that third principle in the prophetic theology of the black church is also and has always been at the heart of the black church experience in North America. When Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were dragged out of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia during the same year, 1787, when the Constitution was framed in Philadelphia, for daring to kneel at their altar next to white worshipers, they founded the Free African Society, and they welcomed white members into their congregation to show that reconciliation was the goal, not retaliation.

Absalom Jones became the rector of the St. Thomas Anglican Church in 1791, and St. Thomas welcomed white Anglicans in the spirit of reconciliation.

Richard Allen became the founding pastor of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. And the motto of the AME Church has always been "God our Father, man our brother, and Christ our Redeemer" -- the word "man" included men and women of all races back in 1787 and 1792 -- in the spirit of reconciliation.

The black church's role in the fight for equality and justice from the 1700s up until 2008 has always had as its core the non-negotiable doctrine of reconciliation, children of God repenting for past sins against each other. Jim Wallis says America's racist -- sin of racism has never even been confessed, much less repented for. Repenting for past sins against each other and being reconciled to one another -- Jim Wallis is white, by the way -- (laughter) -- being

reconciled to one another because of the love of God, who made all of us in God's image.

Reconciliation, the years have taught me, is where the hardest work is found for those of us in the Christian faith, however, because it means some critical thinking and some reexamination of faulty assumptions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's right.

REV. WRIGHT: When using the paradigm of Dr. William Augustus Jones, Dr. Jones, in his book "God in the Ghetto," argues quite accurately that one's theology, how I see God, determines one's anthropology, how I see humans, and one's anthropology then determines one's sociology, how I order my society.

Now the implications from the outset are obvious.

If I see God as male; if I see God as white male; if I see God as superior, as God over us and not Immanuel, which means God with us; if I see God as mean, vengeful, authoritarian, sexist or misogynist, then I see humans through that lens.

My theological lens shapes my anthropological lens. And as a result, white males are superior; all others are inferior. And I order my society where I can worship God on Sunday morning, wearing a black clergy robe, and kill others on Sunday evening, wearing a white Klan robe. (Cheers, applause.)

I can have laws which favor whites over blacks, in America or South Africa. I can construct a theology of apartheid, in the Afrikaner church, and a theology of white supremacy in the North American or Germanic church.

The implications from the outset are obvious. But then the complicated work is left to be done, as you dig deeper into the constructs, which tradition, habits and hermeneutics put on your plate.

To say, I am a Christian, is not enough. Why? Because the Christianity of the slaveholder is not the Christianity of the slave. The God to whom the slaveholders pray, as they ride on the decks of the slave ship, is not the God to whom the enslaved are praying, as they ride beneath the decks on that same slave ship.

How we are seeing God, our theology, is not the same. And what we both mean when we say, I am a Christian, is not the same thing. The prophetic theology of the black church has always seen and still sees all of God's children as sisters and brothers, equals who need reconciliation, who need to be reconciled as equals, in order for us to walk together into the future which God has prepared for us.

Reconciliation does not mean that blacks become whites or whites become blacks or Hispanics become Asian or that Asians become Europeans. Reconciliation means we embrace our individual rich histories, all of them. We retain who we are, as persons of different cultures, while acknowledging that those of other cultures are not superior or inferior to us; they are just different from us.

We root out any teaching of superiority, inferiority, hatred or prejudice. And we recognize for the first time in modern history, in the West, that the other who stands before us with a different color

of skin, a different texture of hair, different music, different preaching styles and different dance moves; that other is one of God's

children just as we are, no better, no worse, prone to error and in need of forgiveness just as we are.

Only then will liberation, transformation and reconciliation become realities and cease being ever elusive ideals. Thank you for having me in your midst this morning. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: We do want to get in our questions. Thank you. Thank you, everybody.

I do want to repeat again, for those of us watching us on C-SPAN, that we do have a number of guests here today. And so the applause and the comments, that you hear from the audience, are not necessarily those of the working press, who are mostly in the balconies.

You have said that the media have taken you out of context. Can you explain what you mean in a sermon shortly after 9/11 when you said the United States had brought the terrorist attacks on itself, quote, "America's chickens are coming home to roost"?

REV. WRIGHT: Have you heard the whole sermon? (Laughter, applause.) Have you heard the whole sermon?

MS. LEINWAND: I -- most -- (chuckles) --

REV. WRIGHT: No, no, the whole sermon. That's -- yes or no. No, you haven't heard the whole sermon? That nullifies that question.

Well, let me try to respond in a non-bombastic way. (Applause.) If you heard the whole sermon, first of all, you heard that I was quoting the ambassador from Iraq. That's number one. But number two, to quote the Bible, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked, for whatsoever you sow that you also shall" --

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: "Reap."

REV. WRIGHT: Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." You cannot do terrorism on other people and expect it never to come back on you. Those are biblical principles, not Jeremiah Wright bombastic divisive principles. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Some critics have said that your sermons are unpatriotic. How do you feel about America and about being an American? (Laughter.)

REV. WRIGHT: I feel that those citizens who say that have never heard my sermons, nor do they know me. They are unfair accusations taken from sound bites, and that which is looped over and over again on certain channels.

I served six years in the military. Does that make me patriotic? How many years did Cheney serve? (Cheers, applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Please, I ask you to keep your comments and your applause to a minimum, so that we can work in as many questions as possible.

Senator Obama has -- (talk from audience members) -- please, we're trying to ask as many questions as possible today, so if you can keep your applause to a minimum.

Senator Obama has tried to explain away some of your most contentious comments and has distanced himself from you. It's clear that many people in his campaign consider you a detriment. In that context, why are you speaking out now?

REV. WRIGHT: On November the 5th and on January 21st, I'll still be a pastor. As I've said, this is not an attack on Jeremiah Wright. It has nothing to do with Senator Obama. This is an attack on the black church launched by people who know nothing about the African-American religious tradition.

And why I am speaking out now? In our community, we have something called playing the dozens. If you think I'm going to let you talk about my mama -- (laughter) -- and her religious tradition and my daddy and his religious tradition and my grandma, you got another thing coming. (Applause.)

(To audience members.) Bless your hearts.

MS. LEINWAND: What is your relationship with Louis Farrakhan? Do you agree with and respect his views, including his most racially divisive views?

x x views?

REV. WRIGHT: As I said on the Bill Moyers show, one of our news channels keeps playing a news clip from 20 years ago, when Louis said 20 years ago that Zionism, not Judaism, was a gutter religion. He was talking about the same thing United Nations resolutions say, the same thing now that President Carter's being vilified for and Bishop Tutu's being vilified for. And everybody wants to paint me as if I'm anti-Semitic because of what Louis Farrakhan said 20 years ago.

I believe that people of all faiths have to work together in this country if we're going to be build a future for our children, whether those people are -- just as Michelle and Barack don't agree on everything, Ramah and I don't agree on everything, Louis and I don't agree on everything. Most of you-all don't agree -- you got two people in the same room, you got three opinions. (Laughter.)

What I think about him, as I said on Bill Moyers and it got edited out -- how many other African-Americans or European-Americans do you know that can get 1 million people together on the mall? He is one of the most important voices in the 20th and 21st century; that's what I think about him. I said, as I said on Bill Moyers, when Louis Farrakhan speaks it's like E.F. Hutton speaks. All black America listens. Whether they agree with him or not, they listen.

Now, I am not going to put down Louis Farrakhan any more than Mandela will put down Fidel Castro. You remember that Ted Koppel show where Ted wanted Mandela to put down Castro because Castro is our enemy, and he said, "You don't tell me who my enemies are; you don't

tell me who my friends are."

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah!

REV. WRIGHT: Louis Farrakhan is not my enemy. He did not put me in chains, he did not put me in slavery, and he didn't make me this color. (Cheers, applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: What is your motivation for characterizing Senator Obama's response to you as, quote, "what a politician had to say"? What do you mean by that?

REV. WRIGHT: What I mean is what several of my white friends and several of my white Jewish friends have written me and said to me. They said, "You're a Christian. You understand forgiveness. We both know that if Senator Obama did not say what he said, he would never get elected." Politicians say what they say and do what they do based on electability, based on sound bites, based on polls -- Huffington, whoever's doing the polls. Preachers say what they say because they are pastors. They have a different person to whom they're accountable.

As I said, whether he gets elected or not, I'm still going to have to be answerable to God, November 5th and January 21st. That's what I mean. I do what pastors do. He does what politicians do. I am not running for office. I am hoping to being vice president. (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: In light of your -- in light of your widely quoted comment damning America, do you think you owe the American people an apology?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No!

MS. LEINWAND: If not, do you think that America is still damned in the eyes of God?

REV. WRIGHT: The government of leaders, those -- as I said to Barack Obama, my member -- I'm a pastor; he's a member. I'm not a "spiritual mentor" -- hoodoo. I'm his pastor. And I said to Barack Obama last year, "If you get elected, November the 5th I'm coming after you, because you'll be representing a government whose policies grind under people." All right?

It's about policy, not the American people.

And if you saw the Bill Moyers show, I was talking about, although it got edited, I was -- do you know, that's biblical? God doesn't bless everything. God condemns something. And D-E-M-N, demn, is where we get the word damn. God damns some practices.

And there is no excuse for the things that the government, not the American people, have done. That doesn't make me not like America, or unpatriotic.

So when Jesus says, not only you brood of vipers, now he's

playing the dozens because he's talking about their mamas. To say brood means your mother is an asp, A-S-P. (Laughter.) Should we put Jesus out of the congregation?

When Jesus says, you will be brought down to hell, that's not -- that's bombastic device of speech. Maybe we ought to take Jesus out of this Christian faith. No.

What I said about and what I think about and what -- again until I can't -- until racism and slavery are confessed and asked for -- we asked the Japanese to forgive us. We have never as a country -- in fact, Clinton almost got in trouble because he almost apologized at Goree Island.

We have never apologized as a country. Britain has apologized to Africans. But this country's leaders have refused to apologize. So until that apology comes, I'm not going to keep stepping on your foot and asking you, does this hurt do you forgive me for stepping on your foot, if I'm still stepping on your foot. Understand that? Capisce?

MS. LEINWAND: All right.

Senator Obama has been in your congregation for 20 years. Yet you were not invited to his announcement of his presidential candidacy in Illinois. And in the most recent presidential debate in Pennsylvania, he said he had denounced you.

Are you disappointed that Senator Obama has chosen to walk away from you?

REV. WRIGHT: Whoever wrote that question doesn't read or watch the news. He did not denounce me. He distanced himself from some of my remarks, like most of you, never having heard the sermon, all right?

What was the rest of your question? I got confused in that the person who wrote it hadn't --

MS. LEINWAND: Were you disappointed that he distanced himself?

REV. WRIGHT: He didn't distance himself. He had to distance himself, because he's a politician, from what the media was saying I had said, which was anti-American.

He said I didn't offer any words of hope. How would he know? He never heard the rest of the sermon. You never heard it.

I offered words of hope. I offered reconciliation. I offered restoration in that sermon. But nobody heard the sermon. They just heard this little soundbite of a sermon.

That was not the whole question. There was something else, in the first part of the question, that I wanted to address.

MS. LEINWAND: You weren't invited.

REV. WRIGHT: Oh, all right.

I was not invited, because that was a political event. Let me say again, I'm his pastor.

At a political event, who started it off? Senator Dick Durbin. I started it off downstairs with him, his wife and children in prayer. That's what pastors do.

So I started it off in prayer. When he went out into the public, that wasn't about prayer; that wasn't about pastor-member. Pastor-member took place downstairs. What took place upstairs was political.

So that's how I feel about that. He did, as I said, what politicians do. This was a political event. He wasn't announcing, "I'm saved, sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost." He was announcing, "I'm running for president of the United States."

(Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: You just mentioned that Senator Obama hadn't heard many of your sermons. Does that mean he's not much of a churchgoer, or does he doze off in the pews? (Laughter.)

REV. WRIGHT: I just wanted to see -- is that your question? That's your question.

MS. LEINWAND: That is.

REV. WRIGHT: He goes to church about much as you do. What did your pastor preach on last week? (Laughter.) You don't know. Okay. (Shouts, laughter, applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: In your sermon, you said the government lied about inventing the HIV virus as a means of genocide against people of color. So I ask you: Do you honestly believe your statement and those words?

REV. WRIGHT: Have you read Horowitz's book "Emerging Viruses: AIDS and Ebola"? Whoever wrote that question, have you read "Medical Apartheid"? You've read it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You are -- (off mike).

REV. WRIGHT: I --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

REV. WRIGHT: Oh, you -- is that one of the reporters?

MS. LEINWAND: Please, no questions from --

REV. WRIGHT: No questions from the floor.

I read different things. As I said to my members, if you haven't read things, then you can't -- and based on the Tuskegee experiment and based on what has happened to Africans in this country, I believe

our government is capable of doing anything.

In fact, in fact, in fact, one of the -- one of the responses to what Saddam Hussein had in terms of biological warfare was a non-question, because all we had to do was check the sales record. We sold him those biological weapons that he was using against his own people.

So any time a government can put together biological warfare to kill people and then get angry when those people use what we sold them, yes, I believe we are capable.

MS. LEINWAND: You have likened Israeli policies to apartheid and its treatment of Palestinians with Native Americans. Can you explain your views on Israel?

REV. WRIGHT: Where did I liken it to that? Whoever wrote the question, tell me where I likened them. Jimmy Carter called it apartheid. Jeremiah Wright doesn't "liken" anything to anything.

My position on Israel is that Israel has a right to exist; that Israelis have a right to exist, as I said, reconciled one to another. Have you read *The Link*? Do you read *The Link* -- Americans for Middle Eastern Understanding, where Palestinians and Israelis need to sit down and talk to each other and work out a solution where their children can grow in a world together and not be talking about killing each other; that that is not God's will.

So my position is that Israel and the people of Israel be the people of God who are worrying about reconciliation and who are trying to do what God wants for God's people, which is reconciliation.

MS. LEINWAND: In your understanding of Christianity, does God love the white racist in the same way he loves he loves the oppressed black American?

REV. WRIGHT: John 3:16. Jesus said it much better than I could ever say it: "For God so loved the world" -- "world" is white, black, Iraqi, Darfurian, Sudanese, Zulu, Kosha (sp). God loves all of God's children, because all of God's children are made in God's image.

MS. LEINWAND: Can you elaborate on your comparison of the Roman soldiers who killed Jesus to the U.S. Marine Corps? Do you still believe that is an appropriate comparison? And why?

REV. WRIGHT: One of the things that will be covered at symposiums over the next two days is biblical history, which many of the working press are unfamiliar with.

(Laughter.)

In biblical history, there's not one word written in the Bible, between Genesis and Revelation, that was not written under one of six different kinds of oppression: Egyptian oppression, Assyrian oppression, Persian oppression, Greek oppression, Roman oppression, Babylonian oppression.

The Roman oppression is the period in which Jesus was born. And comparing imperialism that was going on in Luke, imperialism was going on when Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that the whole world should be taxed -- they were in charge of the world; sounds like some other governments I know -- that yes, I can compare that. We have troops stationed all over the world, just like Rome had troops stationed all over the world, because we run the world. That notion of imperialism is not the message of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace nor God, who loves the world. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Former President Bill Clinton has been widely criticized in this campaign. Many African-Americans think he has said things aimed at defining Senator Obama as the black candidate. What do you think of President Clinton's comments, particularly those before the South Carolina primary?

REV. WRIGHT: I don't think anything about them. I came here to talk about the prophetic theology of the black church. I'm not talking about candidates or their positions or their feelings or what they have to say to get elected.

MS. LEINWAND: Well, okay. We'll give you a church question. Please explain how the black church and the white church can reconcile.

REV. WRIGHT: Well, there are many white churches and white persons who are members of churches and clergy and denominations who have already taken great steps in terms of reconciliation. In the Underground Railroad, it was the white church that played the largest role in getting Africans out of slavery, in setting up almost all 40 of the HBCUs. It was the white church that sent missionaries into the South.

As I mentioned in my presentation, our denomination, all by itself, set up over 500 of those schools. You know them today as Howard University, Fisk, LeMoyne-Owen, Tougaloo, Dillard University, Howard University. So they've done --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Morehouse.

REV. WRIGHT: -- Morehouse, Morehouse; don't forget Morehouse -- (chuckles) -- Spelman -- that white Christians have been trying for a long time to reconcile, that for other white Christians to understand that we must be reconciled is to understand the injustice that was done to our people as we raped the continent, brought those people here, built our country and then defined them as less than human.

And more Christians, more of us working together, not just white Christians but whites and blacks of every faith, and ecumenically working together -- Father Pfleger, by the way -- he might be one of the ones -- (applause) -- modeled out what it means to be reconciled as brothers and sisters in Christ and brothers and sisters made in the image of God.

MS. LEINWAND: You said there is a lack of understanding by people of other backgrounds of the African-American church. What are

some of those misunderstandings, and how would you purport to fix them, particularly when some of your comments are found to be offensive by white churches?

REV. WRIGHT: Carter G. Woodson about 80 years ago wrote a book entitled "The Miseducation (of the Negro)." I would try to fix it starting at the educational level in the grammar schools, as Dr. Asa Hilliard did in his infusion curriculum -- starting at the grammar schools to tell our children this story and to tell our children the true story. That's how I'd go about fixing it, because until you know the true story, then you're reacting to my words and not to the truth.

MS. LEINWAND: Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but through me." Do you believe this?

And do you think Islam is a way to salvation?

REV. WRIGHT: Jesus also said, "Other sheep have I who are not of this fold." (Cheers, applause.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah!

MS. LEINWAND: Do you think people of other races would feel welcome at your church?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No!

REV. WRIGHT: Yes. We have members of other races in our church. We have Hispanics. We have Caribbean. We have South Americans. We have whites. The conference minister -- please understand, United Church of Christ is a predominantly white denomination of, again -- some of you do not know United Church of Christ, just found out about liberation theology, just found out about the United Church of Christ. The conference minister, Dr. Jane Fisler Hoffman, a white woman, and her husband not only are members of the congregation, but on her last Sunday before taking the assignment as the interim conference minister of the Southern California Conference of the United Church of Christ, a white woman stood in our pulpit and said, "I am unashamedly African." (Cheers, applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: You first gained media attention -- significant media attention for your sermon several weeks ago. Why did you wait so long before giving the public your side of the sound bite story?

REV. WRIGHT: As I said to Bill Moyers -- and he also edited this one out -- because of my mother's advice to me. My mother's advice was being seen all over the -- all over the corporate media channels, and it's a paraphrase of the Book of Proverbs, where it is better to be quiet and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. (Laughter.) The media was making a fool out of itself because it knew nothing about our tradition.

And so I decided to let them make a fool as long as they wanted to and then take the advice of Paul Laurence Dunbar in "'Lias, 'lias, bless de Lawd. Don' you know de day's abroad?" Don't make me come

cross this room. I had to come cross the room because they started -- understand, when you talking about my mama, once again, and talking

about my faith tradition, once again -- how long do you let somebody talk about your faith tradition before you speak up and say something in defense of -- this was not an attack on Jeremiah Wright. Once again, let me say it again, this was an attack on the black church.

And I cannot, as a minister of the gospel, allow the significant part of our history -- most African-Americans and most European-Americans, most Hispanic-Americans, half the names I called in my presentation have never heard it because they don't know anything at all about our tradition. And to lift up those -- they did not -- they would have died in vain had I just kept quiet longer and longer and longer and longer.

As I said, this was an attack on the black church. It was not about Obama, McCain, Hillary, Bill, Chelsea; this was about the black church. This was about Barbara Jordan. This was about Fannie Lou Hamer. This was about my grandmama. (Applause.)

Q Do you think it is God's will that Senator Obama be president?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No! Come on!

REV. WRIGHT: I said I would offer myself for candidacy for vice president. I have not offered myself for candidacy of God; I can't presume to know what God would want.

In my tradition, however, what everybody has been saying to me as it pertains to the candidacy is, what God has for you is for you. If God intends for Mr. Obama to be the president, then no white racist, no political pundit, no speech, nothing can get in the way, for God will do what God wants to do.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay. We are almost out of time. But before asking the last question, we have a couple of matters to take care of.

First of all, let me remind you of our future speakers. This afternoon we have Dan Glickman, chairman and CEO of the Motion Picture Association, who is discussing "Trading Up: Movies and the Global Marketplace." On May 2nd, Bobby Jindal, the governor of the state of Louisiana, will discuss "Bold Reform That Works." On May 7th we have Glenn Tilton, CEO, United Airlines, and board member of the American Transport Association.

Second, I would like to present our guest with the official centennial mug and -- brand new --

REV. WRIGHT: Thank you! Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: You're welcome. And we've got one more question for you.

Chris -- we're going to end with a joke. Chris Rock joked, of course, "Of course Reverend Wright's an angry 75-year-old back man.

All 75-year-old black men are angry." Is that funny? Is that true? Is it unfortunate? What do you think?

REV. WRIGHT: I think it's just like the media: I'm not 75. (Laughter, applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for organizing today's breakfast. Also, thanks to the NPC library for its research.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by National Press Club Broadcast Operations Center.

I'd ask you all to stay in your seats until the program ends and also to stay in your seats until Reverend Wright has a chance to leave the room.

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For more information about joining the Press Club, please -- please, can I ask you to stay in your seats until the program ends? -- for more information about joining the Press Club, contact us at 202-662-7511.

Thank you. We're adjourned.

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