

## **Wright, Religion, and Race**

The continuing controversy over Jeremiah Wright, Barack Obama's ex-pastor, demands further comment.

I've watched the entire broadcasts of Wright's interview with Bill Moyers and his two recent addresses to the NAACP and the National Press Club. Several things are clear:

1. Wright is very bright, knowledgeable, and articulate, with a much better fix on the biblical story and the Christian Gospel than any TV evangelist and most preachers I've ever heard.
2. Wright holds some controversial views that are not politically correct. One is that some apparently innate differences exist between African Americans and European Americans. This tends to make race a highly significant feature of the social landscape, and is particularly problematic for Obama and many liberal academics who wish to transcend race as a category for thinking about human affairs. Wright does not diminish but accents certain differences, and celebrates them, repeating his mantra that "Difference does not mean deficiency. It only means difference."
3. Wright has a low opinion of U.S. government leaders, their policies and practices. He's not unpatriotic or anti-American. He seems rather cynical about what politicians must do in order to get elected, though it's unclear that he intended to demean Obama when he explained to Moyers that Obama acted as a politician in dissociating himself from some of Wright's pulpit remarks.
4. Wright has a low opinion of the mainstream media. This was obvious in the Q&A after his National Press Club speech. The news media are returning the favor in spades.

Wright is not entirely wrong in stating that recent attacks on him are attacks on the Black Church. Much of the criticism has been either racist, or disdainful of certain forms of religious expression (e.g., terming his shouting while preaching "screaming"). It's disconcerting how many white folks are scandalized, even frightened, by his preaching. They are apparently unaccustomed to hearing either Black preachers, or prophetic biblical preaching.

Wright did himself no favors, and hurt Obama, by the way he responded to questions at the National Press Club. He should have exercised Christian charity and forbearance. Judgment of him, however, should be tempered by the consideration that he's suffered enormous foolishness at the hands of a press and "news" media that are incompetent, presumptuous, uncomprehending, and often contemptible in their smear tactics. The serious conversation about race that was hopefully envisioned after Obama's Philadelphia address seems to have fallen by the wayside.

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