



ABRIDGED TRANSCRIPT

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## "Religion & Race: A Historical & Contemporary Perspective"

Dr. Eddie S. Glaude Jr.  
Princeton University

December 2008

**MICHAEL CROMARTIE:** Professor Glaude is a professor of religion and African-American studies at Princeton University. He did his Ph.D. at Princeton under Cornel West, with whom he now team-teaches several courses. His most recent book is *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America*. We asked Professor Glaude to speak to this whole question of religion and race, put it in historical perspective and obviously bring it around to contemporary significance of our recent years in politics.

**DR. EDDIE S. GLAUDE:** Thanks, Mike. Appreciate it. The talk is divided into three parts. The first part is kind of philosophical. I'm trying to think about appeals to religious tolerance or religious pluralism in relation to some notion of public reason and how such religious commitments play themselves out in the public domain. The subject of that section will be Obama's talk in June of 2006 and Governor Romney's talk, both of whom appealed, although in very different ways, to the tradition of religious liberty.

Then I'm going to tell a brief story historically. A brief historical account about this notion of religious pluralism and the distinct ways we undermine it — how this has always been the case since our inception as a nation, particularly when it comes to race. At the end I'll glance at the difficult case of Jeremiah Wright and the question of which church will President-elect Obama attend. Is that okay?

So let me direct your attention to two important moments during the presidential primaries. One involved President-elect Obama's fascinating talk at the Call to Renewal conference in June of 2006. The other is Mitt Romney's important speech about religion in December of 2007. Both candidates sought to address the incredibly difficult topic of the role of religion in the public square. Obama's remarks served as a call of sorts to Democrats to take seriously religious commitments. He asserted the claim that folks

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like Alan Keyes, or more generally the religious right, do not hold a monopoly on religion. It was okay, particularly for progressives, to declare one's Christian commitments in the public domain. His Christian commitments were even further specified in terms of the central and prophetic role of historically black churches.

Obama recognizes the power of religious belief in the lives of persons and grants that those beliefs animate public deliberation. But he insisted in this talk, "Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal rather than religion-specific values." So you could hold your commitments as long as those commitments are translatable into something that's more universal, that's not sectarian. In other words, religious adherents cannot retreat behind the inerrancy of their truth claims in public. Those claims, like all reasons according to Obama, must be subjected to public scrutiny. And here Obama appeals to a grand tradition of religious pluralism that requires, in some significant way, a deliberative language that allows us to talk across sectarian differences. So even as President-elect Obama insists on the role of religious beliefs in the public square, he circumscribes how appeals to those beliefs must work in democratic conversation. I'm not quite sure what he resolves in this move.

Interestingly, Governor Romney made a similar move. Romney struggled mightily during the primary to shake off a standing suspicion, particularly among the base of the Republican Party, about his Mormonism. For many, Romney's candidacy was shrouded in the mystery of his religious commitments. Is Mormonism a cult? Will Romney be beholden to the religious leaders of his church? He sought to allay any concerns about his faith by appealing to the legacy of religious liberty and pluralism in the United States. He insisted on the centrality of his faith to how he understands himself and the world, but that faith was consonant, in his view, with a commonly shared creed of moral convictions that define the nation.

As he noted, "Each religion has its own unique doctrines and history. These are not bases for criticism but rather a test of our tolerance. Religious tolerance would be a shallow principle," Romney goes on to say, "Indeed if it were reserved only for faiths with which we agree. And where the affairs of our nation are concerned, it's usually a sound rule to focus on the great moral principles that urge us all on a common course. Whether it was the cause of abolition or civil rights or the right to life itself, no movement of conscience

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can succeed in America that cannot speak to the convictions of religious people." But that "speaking" must exemplify a commitment to religious liberty and democratic value. So in similar ways, he makes a similar move to Obama. Now, I'm not so convinced that either move — that President-elect Obama's take on the role of religious commitments in public deliberation clarifies much.

His position sounds a lot like that of Father Richard Neuhaus' in his classic or infamous work, *The Naked Public Square*, in which Father Neuhaus argues, that we Christians have an obligation to translate our commitments into terms accessible as far as possible to our fellows who happen not to hold those commitments. Now, of course, there are different kinds of religious claims: those that reason is fully competent to justify and those that derive their force, at least in part, from revelation. So there are obviously enough, even among those faith communities that unite in resisting liberalism, different theological reasons for their positions. There may even be, in the end, substantive disagreement about policy outcomes based in those theological differences that many appeal, for example, to different sorts of authority to justify their public acts. So there's a sense in which Neuhaus and, if I'm right, President-elect Obama insist that religious claims, or more specifically Christian claims that have public implications, must be accessible to public reason.

Now, this may be a bit worrisome because it runs up against the stated commitment to religious tolerance and plurality that supposedly frame the discussion in the first place. Such a view denies an important plurality and the possible conflicts that might emerge from that among religious believers, who are themselves critical of liberalism. That is to say, there are only certain kinds of religious commitments — those that can be justified by natural lawyers that can gain access to the public space. But those folk who justify their political positions in light of certain kinds of religious claims that are not subject to public reason — the authority of revelation according to Neuhaus and I believe according to Obama — they have to engage in some kind of translation or otherwise, they can't speak. This doesn't resolve anything. In fact, this is the exact spur in the side of certain religious communities to mobilize in light of liberalism's attack against it.

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President-elect Obama took himself to be making an intervention. And that intervention had everything to do with saying that Democrats can be believers too. The Christian right doesn't hold a monopoly on what it means to be a professed believer in public. And so he urges Democrats to take up faith claims. But then he says, you must take them up in a particular sort of way. That particular sort of way means that it has to be subject to a certain kind of public scrutiny. So I can't just simply say that X is wrong because the Bible tells me so. That's not enough.

So only those Christians who can offer public arguments for their positions are allowed a public role. Others are relegated to their own communities, to talking with those, at least when they are invoking revelation or making certain kinds of faith claims, who share their commitment. So even though Obama and Romney assert the value of religious toleration and pluralism, they do so in a way that, in my view, constrains certain expressions of religious faith. Appeals to public reason or universal value as a response to the diversity of religious claims limit, it seems to me, religious voices. This fails to address the dissatisfaction with public life of many members of faith communities, and it results oftentimes in an anemic conception of the public good.

Beyond this, I worry that these attempts to tidy up the mess of democratic conversation might result in bad faith on the part of many who hold religious beliefs based on revelation and who nevertheless want to impact public life beyond their specific communities. I worry that the Christian, like my evangelical sister who believes that homosexuality is a sin and is prohibited by scripture, will not offer that as the reason for her opposition against same-sex marriage. But who instead will appeal to some notion of the sanctity of marriage. I worry that it will decent folk with commitments that we may or may not agree with to mislead in order to secure their desired ends. And to my mind, that would be a terribly unchristian result.

So I direct your attention here because both President-elect Obama and Governor Romney appeal to a certain story about America's religious history in order to put forward this value of toleration and pluralism. I am convinced that American religious history is American political history and American political history is American religious history. They're intertwined. So this story is grounded in the toleration of religious differences. What is the typical story of America's religious beginnings?

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One version is that religious liberty was placed at the center of our nation's religious life the moment the pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. Another is that the adoption of the Constitution and the passage of the First Amendment instantiated a normative religious pluralism in our nation; or the story goes that the Constitutional separation of church and state initiated a process in which the nation would come to embrace genuine religious plurality, and perhaps this embrace was made in the 1960s. But at no point in our nation's history, no matter how the story is written, has the mere fact of religious plurality yielded an uncontested normative vision of pluralism.

In our nation's early history, Protestants had come to accept doctrinal differences among themselves as a kind of acceptable diversity, but rarely was this tolerance extended to others, like Catholics or Jews or Mormons, on the same basis. Washington's belief that an old age of intolerance had passed away betrayed a naïve optimism about this fragile democracy. Washington knew of the many forms of religious bigotry in the new nation. Perhaps, like Jefferson and Madison, he hoped that enlightened persons would eventually shed such prejudices and be satisfied to practice their religion in private.

But we know this isn't or wasn't the case. In many states, some form of establishment continued well into the 19th century. Connecticut and Massachusetts, for example, continued to encourage local governments to make suitable provision "for the institution of the public worship of God and for the support and maintenance of public Protestant teachers of piety, religion and morality." For these Congregationalists, the idea of a religious grounding in our public living was central to how they imagine the relationship between religion and the state. A holy commonwealth is the phrase that comes to mind.

When we situate the discussion of religious pluralism within the larger context of American religious history, at least two themes emerge. First, we see the difficulties surrounding religious and cultural difference. We have difference erupting, disrupting a certain kind of American imagery. And second, we see religiously-informed efforts — I suppose this is part of our Puritan inheritance — to define and achieve some exemplary state of public morality. Now, one can immediately see that efforts to define public morality in terms of a specific religious tradition militate against affirming religious pluralism.

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But let me quickly mention a third theme that might emerge. What can be called, as David Wills, the historian at Amherst, says, "the encounter between black and white." Now you can begin to see, I'm beginning to turn back to that body that Obama inhabits. Here we have a group of Christians who are for the most part within the dominant religious traditions of the nation. They are, at least religiously, a part of us. Yet because of their color, status as slaves and subsequently second-class citizens, they are often viewed as wholly other. What is interesting is how these peculiar modern folk to whom religious freedom was neither offered nor given seized upon the idea of religious liberty and forged an independent church movement.

The presence of black Christians in American religious history indeed complicates the story of our nation's religious past and present. Part of what we see here are the very ways in which race over-determined how one understands one's relationship to God and how that over-determination then impacted the very ways in which these particular Christians could articulate their commitments in public — precisely because race impacted the very ways in which they were understood to be Christian. We have to understand African-American religion or African-American Christian churches in some substantive way as the site of black civil society because they are locked out politically, locked out economically, locked out demographically. African-American religious institutions become the site whereby the infrastructure of black communities begins to take shape, the germ of them.

We begin to think about voluntary associations, burial societies: black folk who attended predominantly white churches could not bury their dead in the same burial grounds. So white supremacy cuts so deep that it even went to the grave. So part of this tradition of African-American Christian expression involves an institutional space that's reflective of a kind of marginal status.

And so there's this intimate relationship that's kind of, shall we say, partitioned by the realities of race. Even though they are seen, they are not known. They're wholly other. There's this tradition of Christianity within the United States, the African-American tradition that has this prophetic wing. It proceeds on the assumption that white Christianity is idolatry. There is an investment in whiteness that over-determines one's

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commitment to God. This tradition begins to define in interesting sorts of ways the African-American church that was once an invisible institution and in post-Reconstruction becomes a visible institution. It is then transformed with the Great Migration as these folks move from rural countrysides to urban spaces in the south: going from country-rural side of Mississippi to Mobile, Alabama and then moving from Mobile to places like Chicago, to places like New York — and having a different sound, a different timber. It was becoming in interesting sorts of ways this unique American expression. The prophetic black church of the 19th century takes on a much more pronounced role.

And we see African-American religion informing African-American struggle in interesting sorts of ways. But there's a moment in the context of black power in which African-American Christianity is characterized as the religion of white folks, that it's conservative. And what do you see? You see people like James Cone in 1969 beginning to translate the prophetic black church tradition into the idiom of black power. So he publishes a text in 1969 entitled *Black Theology and Black Power*. And what happens is that Cone takes the prophetic dimensions of black Christianity, and he places it in the language of black power where God is on the side of black people. Jesus is on the side of the oppressed; and wherever there is evil, wherever there are oppressed people, that's where we find Jesus. Jesus is not locked into some distant past; he's present in the lives of those who suffer. And so there is this interesting kind of a reinterpretation of the Bible — there's a high Christology in black liberation theology. There is a sense that this particular iteration of the black church tradition takes on a particular kind of life in light of the kind of register of African-American politics at the moment. Jeremiah Wright comes out of this tradition, and so I want to make a turn to him for a brief moment.

Wright's Christianity for some served as a proxy for the claim about Obama's otherness. The argument is kind of loose. Obama appeals to pluralism as a way to allow for religious belief, but then he cordons it off. He constrains it by appeal to public reason. You tell a story about religious toleration and pluralism in the United States; that story reveals a highly racialized religious landscape in which blackness and Christianity are disciplined in particular sorts of ways. We tell a story about how that particular form of Christianity erupts in the public domain to challenge the state in light of the second-class status of black folks. And then it gets rearticulated in a particular sort of way, let's call it black

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liberation theology. And so here we have Obama claiming in the beginning the power of the black church, and then here we have Jeremiah Wright coming back on the backside.

Wright's version of African-American Christianity bore the imprimatur not of Martin Luther King's message of love but of the fiery rhetoric of black power — the effort on the part of black theologians to translate the African-American church tradition into the idiom of black power. And it's precisely in Obama's connection to the so-called "rabid sectarian voices of black power" that potentially undermined for some his claims to universality. Remember Patrick Buchanan's blog, "A Brief for Whitey," said Obama, unlike his marketed image, is really black. And is therefore a candidate only for them, because black candidates can only be niche candidates.

In this instance, the theological orientation of Wright stands in for African-American Christian communities as such. How many times did we see, not only on the part of Wright, that the press represented in interesting sorts of ways Jeremiah Wright as a stand-in for African-American churches? And what is obscured by such broad strokes, it seems to me, is the amazing religious diversity of African-American communities.

There is an interesting cross-fertilization between certain expressions of African-American Christianity, particularly African-American religious fundamentalism, a story that hasn't been told, with mainstream white fundamentalism that goes all the way back to the '20s and '30s. But we can't tell that story because of the hegemony of a certain vision of what African-American Christianity is. That is, it's always already tied to a certain understanding of King, that prophetic tradition. There is much more diversity. There's a tendency to think that mainline black Christians are, by definition, progressive and prophetic. So we have to begin to disrupt a certain kind of narrative.

Now, we see a similar logic at work in the rather crazed attention given to the question about which church will President Obama and his family attend. Will he join a black church or not, and what might it suggest if he does or does not? Such questions, I believe are freighted with the weight of our current national malaise, not just our economic woes. But there is the fact — and a dangerous fact it is — that we can no longer without fear of recrimination talk about race explicitly, at least when it comes to President-elect Obama.

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So the choice of place of worship, its cultural locus, becomes a critical site for the continued interrogation of his identification. Is he really black after all? And what better way to signal his true identity than his presence in a place, during the "most segregated hour" in American life? But if he decides not to attend a black church, learning the so-called lessons of his Trinity experience, is this an indication that we have truly arrived at a post-racial moment?

The somewhat manic character of this hand wringing bears the burden of a historic neurosis: the fantasy of a black-less America. This wishful fantasy of absolving our national sins by getting shut of blackness has reached a crescendo with Obama's ascendance, only to be snatched back to the ground by the ever-present realities of race in our daily doings, and, in this case, our worshipping. But as Ellison noted, and as I believe with all my heart in this most critical of moments, that the nation could not survive, "deprived of their presence because, by the irony implicit in the dynamics of American democracy, they, black folk, symbolize both its most stringent testing and the possibility of its greatest human freedom." And it's precisely within this paradox that we find ourselves at this moment; and once again as it has always been, or often been, religion stands as a primary space where the mess gets worked out.

**KEVIN ECKSTROM, Religion News Service:** Obama himself has been a little skittish on the gay question, and he doesn't want to get into it very much. But at the same time, he's also talked about when he addresses black clergy, he says that they need to get over their own homophobia. But if you look at the exit polls from Prop. 8, it was black churchgoers who really voted for this in whole heart. Do you see any of that changing under Obama? Will he be able to move the black church on these issues at all? Will he even try to?

**DR. GLAUDE:** Given his skittishness, I don't think so. I think part of what needs to happen is that there needs to be a much more vibrant conversation among progressive black Christians with other Christians who hold positions that lead them to vote for Proposition 8. We have a conversation within the black community that's driven by two extremes: revulsion or indifference. That frames how the discussion takes place in interesting sorts of ways within African-American religious communities. And this is particularly dangerous given the AIDS epidemic that's destroying communities across the nation — not to

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identify AIDS with gay communities. But there is a sense that unless we begin to have a much more vibrant conversation within black churches about sexuality, more broadly, we can't muster up the resources to respond to the epidemic or the crisis that's really consuming our communities.

So that said, I don't know if President-elect or President Obama will lead the way in this conversation precisely because I think he's a bit skittish, not only on the gay issue. I think he's a bit skittish in terms of being identified with a certain, particular kind of cultural locus. That is to say, if he finds himself in the middle of that discussion, he's going to find himself in the middle of a much broader discussion about race. I think there's a kind of general evasiveness vis-à-vis this issue. This is why the issue of which church he's going to attend is so freighted, it seems to me.

**RACHEL MARTIN, ABC News:** I hear you saying that if religion shapes or informs your opinion about an issue like abortion, then you owe it to your religion to make that argument in the public sphere in that way using that language and basing it on those religious tenets. If you don't, you are somehow being un-Christian, A, and number two, you're actually never going to resolve the differences because you haven't argued it in an authentic way that truly represents your opinion. How does that work in a secular society?

**DR. GLAUDE:** We have to challenge the premise that it's actually secular, that's the first thing. We know that "God talk" organizes much of our deliberations, even though there is a kind of presumption of methodical atheism informing public deliberation. We know "God talk" circulates throughout. So I want to challenge the notion that we live in a secular society that requires, in some significant way, the disciplining of "non-secular commitments." If we are going to create a space for genuine democratic deliberation, people need to be explicit about the reasons that they actually hold for the positions that they are taking. And we need to be able to engage in a kind of conversation about those reasons. It is incumbent upon me, or me as a kind of "secularist" to make an effort to understand the position of the non-secularist who is putting forward a view that same-sex marriage is evil or homosexuality is an abomination.

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**MR. MARTIN:** I wanted to ask you about the role of black churches. If this country is to ever get to a point where it has made peace with its past and its present, when it comes to racial divides, what is the role of religion and in particular the black church? Can we have segregated churches at all and be in a country where racism doesn't exist?

**DR. GLAUDE:** It seems to me that part of what we have to be very careful of as we aspire to a genuine post-racial moment, is that we not lose sight of the cultural differences that matter. I am African-American, I've been raised in a particular tradition; there's a particular tradition of struggle that's crucial to how I understand myself. It offers me a certain set of moral vocabularies in order to understand the world and my interactions with my fellows. And I don't think that tradition is reducible to racism. It might be an outgrowth — it might be an outcome of racist practices but it's not reducible to it. So I could still make the case for culturally specific institutions that are treasures, but are not reproductions of a certain kind of racist logic.

There's an old 19th-century argument William Whipper and others used to use that we need to rid ourselves of race language if we're going to rid ourselves of racism. We can't identify difference. We need to stop using language of black, white, color and these sorts of things. And beyond portraying a kind of peculiar sense of the way in which language works, in some significant way, you rob yourself of the kinds of tools to specify the specific conditions under which you live your life. So part of what I'm saying is that we don't need to get beyond cultural, specific institutions that have rich histories that are meaningful in order to get to a post-racial moment. We need to begin to think about how these can be valued apart from the hierarchical arrangements that white supremacy instantiates. If we can do that, then I could be black and proud without that being interpreted in a particular sort of way.

**MS. POWERS:** I'll be brief. I just keep hearing you say that people are being kept from saying something. I just don't think people are being kept from saying anything. I think Christians are free to say whatever they want. Muslims are free to say whatever they want. The idea that they don't have to offer any other reason I think is problematic. I have a problem when people cherry-pick issues. They come out and just announce, we have to have laws against this; we have change the constitution because I believe this.

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**DR. GLAUDE:** The initial problem is religious difference — religious plurality, religious claims bumping up against each other. You don't tidy up the mess by excluding certain kinds of claims from bumping up against each other. We have to create a much more vibrant deliberative space so that we can begin to interrogate those sorts of claims to ask for further reasoning. What I don't want are folk retreating to their private domains and then entering the public domain stealthily — doing things under the guise of different kinds of reasons as opposed for the reasons that they actually hold.

**MATTHEW CONTINETTI, *The Weekly Standard*:** I find it a little bit hard to believe that Christ wasn't adopted or appropriated on behalf of the oppressed up until James Cone wrote his book. You said that this was the first time that this happened, that that's what he's expressing. What are some of the precedents leading into black liberation theology? What else was in the political mix when he wrote his book in the middle of the 20th century? Then, speak to the larger black church today, besides the Reverend Jeremiah Wright. He's clearly descended from that line of theological thinking, but clearly, he's not the only option. So what are some of the alternative options?

**DR. GLAUDE:** So the first point was that Cone writes in 1969 *Black Theology and Black Power*, and it's an effort to translate the prophetic black church tradition into the idiom of black power. It's a response, in interesting sorts of ways, to the secularization of black public space. And what I mean by secularization is not the privatization of religious belief, but the kind of pluralization of belief. So these new rituals of blackness that were emerging at the time that, in some significant way, called into question the relevance of a certain kind of Christian witness — black preachers as hucksters, as hustlers and the like.

What are some of the alternatives? Remember, I said that one of the interesting things about the Jeremiah Wright instance is that not only did he say that he was defending the black church, in which there was an identity established between him and the black church as such, he became a stand-in for the black church — a shorthand among those of us who were writing about this moment. What happened as a result was a kind of a flattening of all of the differences within black church life. So the fact is that we have black

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televangelism, the black electronic church — folk like T.D. Jakes, folk like Creflo Dollar, folk like Bishop Eddie Long — a kind of interesting development within black religious life that's not reducible to some kind of socially charged, liberal, Christian orientation.

**JACQUI SALMON, *The Washington Post*:** On the stories that were done about what church Obama was going to go to....we called probably 16 or 18 churches in Washington, D.C., and talked to them. The white churches responded. They showed us the letters they were sending him; they really wanted him to come to their church, made a pitch. Black churches did not return our phone calls. When they did, they said they hadn't written those letters, didn't want anything to do with this. They didn't want to go anywhere near this. I wanted to know whether you had any insights on this. Why were they uncomfortable with this?

**DR. GLAUDE:** I can't say anything definitive about why they were uncomfortable. My intuition is a kind of suspicion about the motivation driving the question. They didn't trust you. That's my intuition.

**MARK KATKOV, CBS News:** When you were presenting Romney and Obama in the same group — this notion that religiosity and revelation can be separated in the public sphere. During the campaign, I talked to a lot of both liberal and conservative evangelicals after those speeches. And, the liberal evangelicals said, yes absolutely right. The conservative evangelicals, by and large, were very cynical about both of them. They said, no, what they're really saying is that their revelation is not our revelation. How would you respond to their response? Are they right?

**DR. GLAUDE:** No, I think at that point it becomes the occasion to begin to have an argument, to begin to have a conversation. On what grounds would you say that their revelation is not your revelation. Both of you identify as Christians. How would you then differentiate your view from theirs? Are you making the claim that they're not Christian? If not, then what role might their understanding of revelation play? In other words, it becomes the occasion for a substantive and hopefully nuanced discussion.

My interest has always been throughout this process, how do we talk about the civic energies, civic democratic energies, requisite to keep us from falling over the precipice?

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How can we begin to talk about everyday, ordinary folk engaging in a democratic process in such a way where they not only feel invested, but they're making meaningful decisions and engaged in meaningful exchange about their well-being?

**SALLY QUINN, *The Washington Post*:** I want to get back to your opening statement about Obama's speech because I'm not totally sure I understand what you were talking about. I read that speech a lot. I thought it was completely embracing of everyone and totally pluralistic in a way that I have never heard any sort of public personality speak about religion in this country. Compared to Romney's speech, which I thought essentially disenfranchised anybody in this country who basically was not a Christian. I couldn't compare the two. Also, where do you think Obama should go to church?

**DR. GLAUDE:** Wherever, whatever is best for his children. As he's raising these babies, I hope he takes that as the paramount consideration as opposed to the political question.

In terms of the first question, I can concede this claim that Obama's speech was pitched perfectly and Romney's was off-key. I can concede that. But I think there are elements of exclusion in the strong version. My thinking is that the stronger claim is that religious claims in public spaces must be accessible to public reason. To the extent that he's making that claim, a certain kind of fundamentalist belief will have a hard time being expressed in the public space, and that's an exclusion.

**DAVID KUHN, *Politico*:** Obviously the black church eventually rose out of the fact they couldn't worship with whites. But there was also immediately a cultural component. It wasn't simply segregation. You would argue today that these traditions aren't simply racially based, but they're almost a branch of Christianity themselves in a very small sense. And therefore, as we become more integrated and if a white person goes to these churches. Just because a white person would go to these churches, it'll still maybe be a different form of Christianity in practice in how the church service goes than the white Methodist service occurring two miles away.

**DR. GLAUDE:** There is of course a way to talk about the emergence of black denominationalism as being an outgrowth of racist practices within white-American

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churches. But those denominations are also reflective of an increasing maturation of black communities within the United States. When we begin to think about black churches as the site for the formation of the beginnings of black civil society, they're not reducible to racist practices but they cannot be talked about apart from them. Because in fact it is that context which calls it all into being. So black churches provide in interesting sorts of ways the first public space for African-Americans to engage in the kind of deliberations around the circumstances of their conditions of living.

And to that extent it becomes a site for a certain kind of exercise of citizenship, a certain kind of democratic participation.

**MR. KUHN:** Do you think it's incumbent on Barack Obama to not attend a mostly African-American church because of the visual symbolism it gives out at a superficial level certainly? He's the president-elect. And so symbolism matters, no?

**DR. GLAUME:** But couldn't it very well be as symbolically meaningful for Obama to say I'm attending a black church and it shouldn't matter to you? That would be a great gesture. I'm going to go to this black church, we're going to worship and you know what America? It doesn't mean that much. I would prefer that he did that. But I would also prefer that he attends a church, that fills his soul, that fills his needs. Because he's the most powerful man in the world, and he's going to need some soul-filling.

**CATHY GROSSMAN, USA Today:** I actually think that people react very differently when a politician says Jesus Christ than they do when they say God.

**DR. GLAUME:** I agree.

**MS. GROSSMAN:** People react very differently to those terms. The people who opposed Proposition 8, the people who did not want to see Proposition 8 pass, and did not manage to recognize with the clear onrush of black vote, Hispanic vote, Mormon vote in various corners that there needed to be some communication with those communities — was their failure to reach out to these communities just ignorance? They just thought, well, black people are going to vote for this and we don't have to worry about it. Or was it

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racism or just incompetence on their part that they did not speak to these concerns and make their case to the evangelical block and Hispanic communities?

**DR. GLAUDE:** I don't think it was racism — to remove the second issue. I think there was a sense in which the proponents for Proposition 8 out-organized the opponents. I can't remember — as I recall there was a last-minute effort that recast the initiative in such a way that inclined people to vote for it. In other words, I thought that what's at the heart of it is that they were outspent and they were out-mobilized. Thirdly, there was and there remains a decidedly conservative dimension to African-American evangelicals and African-American churchgoers who came out in dramatic numbers in support of Obama and that extended to their position on Proposition 8.

Part of what needs to happen, of course, is a kind of vibrant debate among African-American Christians who opposed Proposition 8 and their friends, with their fellow citizens on this issue. That's how I would begin to answer that question. I think they were out-organized.

**BARBARA BRADLEY HAGERTY, NPR:** Then-Senator Obama said Jeremiah Wright's mistake was basically that he didn't acknowledge the progress that's occurred. I'm wondering what kind of percentage of the black church would side with Wright or would agree with Wright versus Obama.

The second one is, I really did notice something fundamentally different in this election. You heard about the Matthew 25 Network and you saw white Protestants, many of them white evangelicals, organizing around this notion of social gospel — which is huge in the black church. Then on the other side we have seen in the last couple elections conservative black leaders, religious leaders, siding with more of the evangelicals — mainly on the gay rights issue and on abortion. Are we actually seeing a kind of realignment or a more powerful knitting together of progressive black and progressive whites — motivated by social gospel ideas on the one side — and then the knitting together of conservatives on the other?

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**DR. GLAUDE:** The moment that I think we're in — in black communities — is that the languages, the vocabularies of struggle that were generated under the conditions of the '60s and '70s have been fundamentally transformed by the successes and failures of the '60s and '70s and by the transformations in the material conditions of black living since then.

There's this interesting sense that something has fundamentally changed and transformed that we're trying to mark. The term post-racial, as I said earlier, is a kind of lazy, American way of marking something that's shifted. When Obama talked about Jeremiah Wright as not acknowledging the progress, he was marking a generational divide that is confounding black communities right now. That's really confused an established black political class that is really impacting the various ways in which people imagine struggle. Black folk, particularly Obama, are now using the language of governance as opposed to the language of struggle. So it's really a fascinating moment of transition.

**MS. HAGERTY:** Do we see this new alliance between white and black?

**DR. GLAUDE:** Absolutely. Precisely because then-Senator Obama, now President-elect Obama has ascended to the White House, it will fundamentally change the very nature of African-American politics. We know that the voting trends have shown that African-American voters when you control for race tend to actually trend to the right in interesting sorts of ways around issues — around capital punishment, around, shall we say, core social value issues. African-American communities tend to trend towards the right in terms of ideological spectrum.

**MICHAEL PAULSON, *The Boston Globe*:** For those of us whose responsibility it is to write about religion in politics, what do you think we ought to be watching, vis-à-vis Obama and the black church over the next few months and years? What is it that we should be doing instead of chasing down where he'll worship?

**DR. GLAUDE:** There's an extraordinary transformation taking place within African-American churches that is not only formal — the way the churches actually look — the data showing that these mega-churches are showing up in vast numbers. And they're non-

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denominational. We're beginning to see the Pentecostalization of much of African-American religious life — that the worship services are bearing the imprimatur of the impact of Pentecostalism in interesting sorts of ways. The relationship between market, media, theology and the generational impact is really having a substantive impact on the form and content of African-American religious life. How do we think about that in relation to President Obama? I'm not sure. But it certainly suggests that this institution that has historically been seen as the site for so much political work — recognizable political work — is changing dramatically. And so then we have to ask ourselves, what sorts of political work will follow from that?

**PERRY BACON, *The Washington Post*:** Traditionally, a white politician who's trying to win a lot of black voters would go and meet the religious leaders in the community. Hillary Clinton did all of this and got a lot of black pastors to endorse her, a lot of congressman that were black endorsed her, and won a very, very small percentage of the black vote — more than you would have expected, even. Do you think that's going to change how the politicians appeal to the black vote? And then, two, how the religious leaders — traditional people who are older — how their power is perceived and how they're perceived now? Does Charlie Rangel have less power in his community because he endorsed the wrong person? How do you think it affects these traditional leaders in both churches and African-American leaders in politics as well?

**DR. GLAUME:** I think black churches will remain extraordinarily important sites for political organizing and mobilizing. There is nothing about black religious institutions that is inherently progressive or prophetic. I think the prophetic voice is always in the minor key, and that's just a theological position that I hold. And so these churches are not inherently anything; they're made something by the people who inhabit them — and the person who leads that institution.

The extent to which these churches are important to communities — although, they're increasingly not important to the communities in which they're located. We've seen the disappearance of the niche church in interesting sorts of ways; the neighborhood church is quickly disappearing because people drive in from outside the place to go to their churches as opposed to the church being down the street like it used to be — but it's still

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a site for organizing. What we see, also, is that even within major — even within mega-churches or large congregations — that the members are making decisions reflective of their interests, that they're not just blind followers. The pastor, from the pulpit, could say I'm going to support Republican candidate X, Y, and Z, which a lot of mega-church pastors did not do this past election cycle, but the election cycle before. We saw in interesting ways that the congregants didn't follow them. People were saying mega-churches are inherently conservative, but there's some interesting data to make that a little more complex.

You still have to organize; so they're going to remain a site of organization. Going back to the claim that I'm making about generational shifts — the post-soul babies, of which I'm one — we're all finding our political voices now, our intellectual voices now. There will be an array of challenges to an established, black political class in every locale. One of the collateral effects of Obama's run is that he's made space for a new generation — a different cadre — of political voices. So the traditional brokers of African-American politics are vulnerable. They're vulnerable in very interesting sorts of ways, in my view.

In each instance, there will be vulnerability. They will have much more viable challengers. Constituencies will be much more critical. Precisely because the demographics of those constituencies are changing, given this kind of influx of young, new voters as we saw in the national election. That's going to play itself out in local areas in very interesting ways. In terms of the kind of cultural logic within which politics plays out, the kind of cultural space, it's beginning to take on a kind of tone — timbre, pitch, resonance — that's not reducible to the aesthetic of a '60s-inflected struggle.

Part of what we're beginning to see is that those of us who were shaped under different conditions and who have, historically, been locked out of black politics, we now have Ph.D.s and J.D.s. And not only that, we're also starting non-profits and grassroots organizations around hip-hop. It's going to be a really complicated moment, and at every level, they're vulnerable, it seems to me.

**PETER BOYER, *The New Yorker*:** That strain of the prophetic tradition, as expressed by Jeremiah Wright at Trinity, has elected a black man, but not just any black man, but a congregant at Trinity to the highest office in the land. Does that rob that strain of its juice?

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**DR. GLAUME:** It certainly complicates it. You know, we've just experienced this extraordinary ritual of racial expiation called the Obama campaign, where we tried to shed the ghost of our racial past in this really fascinating way. To the extent that he's won, the question of how will black suffering speak publicly is now a pressing one. Whether or not the traditional rhetorical modes will be as effective — I hope they will be — we would have reached an interesting phase in the maturation of African-American politics if one could rail against Obama as one has railed against Bush, without recourse to language, which historically has been the language of racial authenticity.

I think there will be a role for prophetic voices; wherever power is operating, there's a role for the prophetic voice. It's going to be complicated because there's a black man running the empire.

**MR. BOYER:** But that particular strain that also contains maybe even as aspect of conspiratorial thinking, that talked about the CIA and AIDS and stuff, of which, one gathered, there was something of a receptive ear. That's premised on a certain view of this country — a country that, perhaps, God might indeed damn. It's so striking to me that he wasn't just a black guy; he was a black guy who was in this congregation — this preacher with that strain of theology — reared up his babies. Now that this country has chosen that man to lead it, what happens to that particularly, in my view virulent, strain of thought? Does that go away, now?

**DR. GLAUME:** No. I don't think so. It's going to express itself at various registers. I don't see, with the election of Obama, the end of that. The Pew data has already shown us this extraordinary gap between those African-Americans who are living in hyper-concentrated spaces of poverty, where, as William Julius Wilson says, work has simply disappeared, and those of us who have gained access to mainstream social capital in ways that black America could never have imagined. And so among those folks who are living in resource-deprived communities, blackness is still circulating in particular sorts of ways — a certain kind of ministry continues to work, continues to have power. So I don't see it disappearing anytime soon.

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**MR. DIONNE:** On the one hand, I do think there's an obligation on the part of a believer to express his or her political views in ways that are accessible to nonbelievers or people who don't share the faith tradition. On the other hand, I also think that people should be free to say that they, in fact, have religious reasons for taking a particular political position. I sense you're struggling with this sort of contradiction, too; I'd just love to hear you out more on that.

I remain, at the end of all this, mystified by the Wright we ended up seeing. I'd like your sense of him, before he became really famous.

**DR. GLAUDE:** One of the striking things about Jeremiah Wright's ministry is that it's within the United Church of Christ. And I mean, what's the percentage of black folk in UCC? So I mean, Jeremiah Wright hadn't just simply brokered this little space within UCC just for himself and Trinity to do weird things. So there was a kind of interracial dialogue that was taking place within that denomination that Jeremiah Wright was at the forefront of. So he's a very complicated figure; he has an extraordinary social ministry that has done amazing work in Chicago, where he's garnered extraordinary respect. But Chicago is a unique space, particularly in terms of African-American politics.

In any black church — and of course, I would say, in any church setting — there's an insider's discourse and an outsider's discourse. There are ways in which we talk at home, and then there are ways in which we talk outside. And that line was blurred, and he suddenly became Louis Farrakhan. I mean, he was elevated to the kind of figure in the American public imagination, that — you mention Jeremiah Wright's name, and he becomes a lightning rod.

I think what happened was a ministry that had been defined in interesting sort of ways by a profound commitment to the social gospel. It was often articulated within the context of a black community that is subject to particular kinds of forces, a ministry that is also influenced by the languages of black nationalism. Through his own theological orientation, it went public; and it went public in the National Press Club and got in all sorts of trouble. So I would want to say that those elements were always a part of his ministry. It's just, when they're voiced publicly, certain elements stand out and others don't. So we

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see and hear that which is recognized as incendiary language, as opposed to seeing and hearing what's often said alongside of it — that which we might be committed to as well.

I think all of my colleagues at Princeton, we're all struggling with this. We're committed to expressive democracy, and part of expressive democracy involves, for the most part, this insistence on the exchange of reasons. And to the extent to which I can believe that fellow Christians who express their commitments differently than I do are committed to democracy, I want to engage them in a way that doesn't force them to deny who they are, at root. Attention is there, but the overriding value, again, is my commitment to expressive democracy.

**ELEANOR CLIFT, Newsweek:** The tradition, in this country, when a new president is sworn in is that his full name is used. I'm assuming he's going to go with his full name; I just wonder what your perspective is on the message that sends, mostly around the world, but also here at home?

**DR. GLAUME:** I think it sends a powerful message. I think by having Barack Hussein Obama said as his hand is on a Bible will be a profound symbolic moment. I know my son will revel in it, and I will revel in it. So I think it will be wonderful. And for some, it will be a sign of the apocalypse, but that's okay.

**MR. ECKSTROM:** Obama's relationship with the black church...what do you see happening over the next four or however many years, in terms of how he deals with them and how, perhaps, the black church deals with him? Do you think the black church, as diverse as it is — do they expect something from him, since he's sort of one of their own? Do they have an ally there, or is he under any sort of special obligation to reach out to them?

**DR. GLAUME:** He's going to be attentive in interesting sorts of ways. What comes to mind is, Obama allowing *Ebony* to have him on the cover as the man of the year. His folks had to be mindful of how that would be perceived. You know, *Ebony* is like, our magazine, and so for him to do that is to suggest that he will be attentive to various institutional manifestations of the black community.

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I think he's going to engage in a kind of interesting cost-benefit analysis of that connection; it doesn't cost him much to be on the cover of *Ebony*. What will it cost him to affiliate with particular black churches, when he hasn't seen all of the tapes of that particular minister, he might be attending? So that's the first thing. The second thing is that I think African-American communities have already been primed by his campaign to not expect anything from Senator Obama, or President-elect Obama, because the campaign provided African-American communities with this response when African-American communities wanted him to specifically address their issues: "I cannot be the president of black America. I am the president of America. I will be the president of America." I don't think this is a good thing for African-American politics, by any stretch of the imagination. I will go on record as saying I think we might have seen the Obama campaign set African-American politics back a generation.

What I mean by that is for the first time in 40 years, we had an opportunity to re-imagine African-American politics apart from the issues and themes and personalities of the 1960s and '70s. There was a gaping hole there. And Obama's campaign stepped in with a kind of wink-and-nod politics. That wink-and-nod politics was, in effect, I can't be a black politician; but he appealed to the sentiments that have driven African-American politics for generations, for decades. So at that very moment in which we had an opening in order to generate a more vibrant deliberative space for black folk of a variety of interests to engage in the back and forth, Obama would come into black communities and talk about personal responsibility as opposed to policy. He would come into black communities and one time, at Howard University, he gives that extraordinary talk about the criminal justice system; we don't hear any more about it.

We don't hear about how his healthcare policies actually impact these folk whose infant mortality rates, hypertension, diabetes — we can go down the line. And when black folk wanted to ask, specifically, how these policies will affect black communities, the response was, "I can't be the president of black America; I'm the president of America." And so that becomes an interesting — at the moment in which space is open, it contracts almost immediately. I think communities have been primed not to expect anything, because he

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can't give it. That was the condition for him being elected. I really believe that. Now, are those costs too high? I think so.

**MS. QUINN:** There was an entire day of appreciation for Jeremiah Wright. His whole family was there. One after the other of educated Ph.D.s, lawyers — but older blacks talking. Each one spoke about slavery and the pain of slavery, each one. But I don't see that happening any more. That's why I'm interested in this whole fight in the Trinity church between Otis Moss and Jeremiah Wright and how he's managed to ease his way back in. Because Otis Moss is clearly the voice of the future, and this thing of slavery and where we've come from just doesn't seem to be relevant any more.

**DR. GLAUDE:** We have a challenge, and the challenge is that we're about to see, for the first time in the history of the African-American sojourn in the United States, a cadre of leadership that has no biographical experience of slavery or Jim Crow. It's the first time ever. And so we sound differently, we look differently, the rhythm of our speech — our tone — our voices are different. And so folks are having a difficult time wrapping their minds around it.

**MR. BOYER:** Can you imagine your sister winning that argument on the terms that you would have her argue it?

**DR. GLAUDE:** I imagine — no, probably not — but I imagine my sister having a conversation with those of us who might not hold her position whereby she's asked to explain more fully what she believes and how I could engage her, and you might engage her, on different grounds. So, for example, she might make the case that scripture views homosexuality as an abomination, and I might argue with the resources of Eugene Rogers, a professor at the University of North Carolina, who makes the case that on scriptural grounds, same-sex love is actually justified — on scriptural grounds.

**MR. YORK:** Pollsters often ask the question, what do you think is the most important issue that the new president or the new Congress ought to address? It's an open-ended question; they don't give any choices. Race relations, from the polls I've read, is always right down at the bottom — maybe 1 percent, maybe 2 percent. We all know the issues

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in this election with the economy and before that, gas prices and Iraq and Bush-fatigue the whole time. And then you called the election of Obama — and I think it's a quote — you called it, "an extraordinary act of racial expiation." So my question is, to what extent do you think this election was about race?

**DR. GLAUDE:** It was all about race. That's why many of us were crying when we saw him in Grant Park. We couldn't say it was about race during the election, but it's historic, why? It's historic precisely because he's the first black man to be elected to the office, so it was all about race, in my view. The question is, how do we deal with the ghastly ghosts of our past? America has this extraordinary ability to retreat into its innocence — or its perceived innocence. These ghosts are constantly reminding us of how earthly and human this fragile experiment in democracy has been. So I think it was all about race. I think his election, for African-American communities in particular and for the nation more generally, is a signal that the true work now begins, as opposed to, we should all pat ourselves on the back. I think the true work begins January 20.

**MR. CROMARTIE:** Let's thank Professor Glaude for a wonderful presentation.

♦ END ♦

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or contact Michael Cromartie at [crom@eppc.org](mailto:crom@eppc.org)