

Black press queries Clinton on race remarks

By Thomas Warren Jr.
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Hillary Clinton sat with members of the Black Press of America last week for an hour-long forum, "A Conversation with Hillary."

Approximately 40 guests and a horde of media gathered in the meeting room of the Washington Hilton Hotel to hear Clinton field questions about concerns of the African-American community from correspondents associated with the National Newspaper Publishers Association.

Sitting center stage in a hot-pink wool coat and black slacks in a living room-like setting, Clinton opened by praising the Black Press saying, among other things, "Many of your publications have been at the forefront of civil rights and women's rights, and so many historical movements."

NNPA Foundation Chair Dorothy Leavell and NNPA Chairman John B. Smith Sr. Co-hosted the event in which Clinton often said she was either sorry for or regretted the racial overtones of the campaigns.

That included remarks made by 1984 vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, who resigned earlier March 12 as a member of Clinton's finance committee. Ferraro had said of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama: "If Obama was a Black man, he



New York Senator and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton answers questions.

would not be in this position."

"I regret that [the comments] were said," Clinton responded. "She doesn't speak for the campaign. She doesn't speak for any of my positions."

She also said she was "sorry if anyone was offended" by remarks made by her husband,

President Bill Clinton following the South Carolina Primary.

He compared Obama's winning the state to the 1984 and '88 wins of the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr.

Most questions from the panelists pertained to public policy issues that desperately affect African-Americans.

One that has become of considerable concern within the African-American community is the subject of HIV/AIDS. Clinton said that, if president, she would be forceful on confronting the issue.

"I would be very aggressive in going into communities and working, in partnership, with organizations such as this, with faith communities, and others, to revitalize our public education and outreach," she said, while propping up sternly in her chair.

On the topic of racial profiling, Clinton said more can and should be done to control the problem.

"It goes to the heart to ensure that our criminal justice system in particular our policing practices are held to a higher standard," she said.

The enthusiastic audience gathered to meet or ask more questions after the approximately 45-minute forum.

Martin Jones, 55, said he hopes that if Clinton is elected she follows through with her proposal of assessing more accountabil-

ity on law enforcement.

"This is an issue that, for a Black man, is a constant, everyday issue," Jones said. "I hope she does what she says if she does get in, and take it as seriously as we do."

In talking about the continuing efforts to rebuild the Gulf Coast region in the nearly three years since Hurricane Katrina hit, Clinton says that, if elected, she vows to make sure continued reconstruction is a "very high priority" for the federal government. "We owe it to the people along the Gulf Coast to continue that standard."

In addition to Ferraro's remarks, Clinton spoke about other controversies surrounding her campaign. Recently, she has been accused of insinuating that Obama may not be ready for the presidency, but would make a viable vice president.

While holding a front page headline in the *Richmond Free Press* that read "Clinton-Obama Ticket?" NNPA Editor-in-Chief Hazel Trice Edney asked Clinton the possibility of being the second in command if Obama, in fact, got the party nomination.

Clinton's response: "We'll finish sometime in June, and we'll see where we stand. Only then will someone have the nomination, and only then will the nominee have the chance to pick a running mate."

Thomas Warren Jr. writes for the *Black College View*.

Race

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progress. Some Democratic activists think he largely succeeded.

"No other person in this country, Black or White, could have given a speech like that," said Stephanie Cutter, who was John Kerry's spokeswoman in the 2004 presidential campaign.

Perhaps the trickiest part of Obama's 37-minute speech dealt with Wright, his

longtime friend and recently retired pastor. Excerpts of Wright's sermons have included "...God damn America" for its racism and "...for killing innocent people."

Obama sharply condemned such remarks Tuesday. But he defended Wright's overall ministry, and tried to put it in context for uncomprehending Whites.

He said Wright has expressed views "that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation; that rightly offend White and Black alike." Wright's comments "weren't simply controversial," he said. "They expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country, a view that sees White racism as endemic" and unabating.

But Wright "has been like family to me," Obama said.

The minister knows all too well a "legacy of defeat" among many Blacks, stemming from the days of Jim Crow and de facto segregation, he said.

The legacy "was passed on to future generations those young men and increasingly young women, who we see standing on street corners or languishing in our prisons," Obama said. For those in Wright's generation, he said,

"the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years."

"And occasionally it finds voice in the church on Sunday morning," he said, even though "many people are surprised to hear that anger" from a pulpit.

Most of the speech was fairly high-minded, with few if any overt appeals for votes.

Obama doubtlessly raised eyebrows in many circles, however, with a populist pivot that identified a new villain in the racial divide.

"Black anger" and "White resentments," he said, have "distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle-class squeeze: a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices and short-term greed."

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Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, who introduced Joyner. NAFEO had 50 Black college presidents in the audience at the NewsMaker event.

She credits him for doing perhaps more than "any individual to not only raise tens of millions of dollars for America's Black colleges and universities, but to raise awareness" of social ills and injustices through his string of programs and institutions.

Joyner also praised the Black Press, saying he concurs with its single focus on justice for Black people. "What does this mean for Black people?" he recalled a recurring question he has asked at press conferences and events since his days as a cub reporter. "Someone called and said, 'I don't like listening to your show because you're always bringing up race. You're always playing the race card.' I'm sorry. That's the hand I was dealt, and that's the only card I can play."

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YOUNG LADIES LEND HELPING HAND

Isiserettes girl's youth group went to the Harry Levy Residential Council, a senior's home, where they handed out Easter baskets to the residents. The girls, ages eight to 18, visited the complex on Saturday as part of their yearly activities. They are an auxiliary group to The Daughters of Isis, which is the female counterpart to the Prince Hall Shriners. The Illustrious Commandress is Annie R. Hall, the Directress (Adult Leader) is Daughter June Jones.