

Lecturer Andy Ferguson focuses on Obama's rhetoric

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News Editor

As part of the fourth annual Jerry Maygarden lecture series, Andy Ferguson presented his view on the rhetoric of Barack Obama in a lecture entitled "The Wit and Wisdom of Barack Obama: A Skeptical View."

A crowd of about 70 people attended the lecture, which was held in the Music Hall in the Center for Fine and Performing Arts Oct. 13. Students, faculty and even members of the community were there to hear Ferguson speak.

"I'm here to do something unusual," Ferguson said. "I want to pay attention to what the candidates say."

Ferguson said that the focus of his lecture was on Obama, but he did mention John McCain a few times throughout.

"When it comes to the economy, McCain doesn't know his own mind," he said. "Obama's problem is with rhetoric. McCain's is with substance."

Ferguson spoke about Obama as an author, saying he had enjoyed his first book, a memoir. "Obama is obviously a talented writer," he said. "His eloquence and mastery of rhetoric is wildly crazed."

Ferguson went on to evaluate several of Obama's key campaign lines, including one of the most famous: "we are the ones we have been waiting for."

The phrase is also the title of a book written by Alice Walker. Ferguson continued to cite many examples of phrases Obama has borrowed from other writers and politicians—several of which had been borrowed over and over again by figures such as Bill Clinton, Al Gore and Bob Dole.

Ferguson did not seem particularly perturbed by the fact that Obama was borrowing a good deal of his rhetoric. Rather, he was disappointed with the people don't seem to realize it.

"Obama is getting away with murder," Ferguson said. "The public memory has shrunk to a span of days or weeks. The past is a blank. No politician has benefited from this more than Obama."

He went on to say that Obama's speeches "limp from one worn phrase to another," making Ferguson wonder what

has actually changed in the past 20 years.

"Talk like this is the elevator music of politics; it's unavoidable," he said. "But his supporters think Obama minted it fresh. His speeches are full of engaging detail, but not policy detail. Obama knows the details that catch people's attention are the details about people."

Ferguson pointed out that Obama frequently uses specific examples of Americans who are struggling, sometimes mightily.

"This gives us a shared status as victims," he said. "But who are the victimizers?"

Ferguson said Obama talks about "ideas, beliefs and forces" as if they are the things keeping America from flourishing.

"It's a world without named villains; we face disembodied spirits that are obstacles of change," he said.

Ferguson said that his argument wasn't with Obama, but with the media and press "who should know better."

"Obama may be a genius, but what he will be elected on is baloney," he said. "He's not being called on what he's talking about."

Though Ferguson remained adamantly impartial throughout his lecture, he seemed rather upset that Obama is believed to have the means to bring about a big change in Washington because of his "new" ideas.

"He is being presented as an extraordinarily different kind of candidate when he's not," he said. "Obama is an example of a textbook Democrat."

Ferguson joked that he even thought Obama should have stuck with writing. But he said the main point of his lecture was not to imply that Obama is a "bad" candidate or politician.

"I just think it's important to step back from this horseshoe of journalism and actually pay attention to the candidates and what they are saying," he said.

Ferguson is a senior editor of the Weekly Standard, and has been a freelance columnist for many papers and magazines, including the Washington Post and Forbes Life. He was a speechwriter for former president H.W. Bush, and has also written a book entitled "Land of Lincoln."

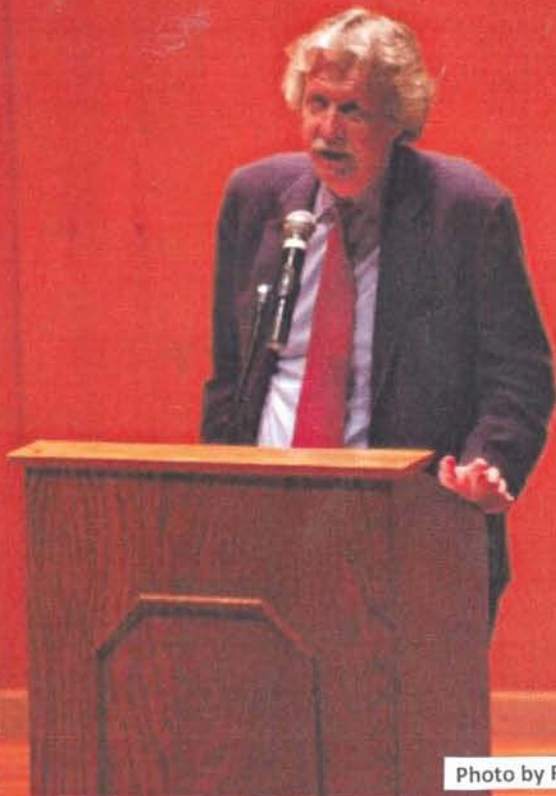


Photo by Ron Besser

Andy Ferguson gave a speech Oct. 13 on the the presidential candidates' qualifications and problems in the upcoming election. Ferguson claimed Obama's problem was rhetoric, while McCain's is substance.