

But let me explain what the difference is. The military affirmative action program does try to get results by race. But it simultaneously prepares people. So that if—what they try to do is they have these education and training programs and then they hope when you go from lieutenant to captain that there will be a group of the captain pool, of potential captains, that reflect the racial composition of the lower rank as well. But they do prepare people.

The problem is that you have different schools. When you go from high school to college, the college doesn't have control over the seniors in high school to do that. If they did that, you could have exactly the same program and we wouldn't have this anxiety. Instead we have a system where we assume that the only reliable predictor of success in college is how you did on the SAT or how you did on the grades. So the trick is, since I think our schools would be much poorer if there were no racial diversity—look around here at the schools here—the trick is to find a way of doing this that people believe is merit-based and that—so they don't think someone is getting something they're not entitled to and, not only that, knocking somebody out of a spot to which they are entitled.

But I think it's very important. A lot of people haven't analyzed this—no one criticizes—very few people criticize the Army program. It's given us the highest quality Army in the world. The only real differences between the Army program and college admissions is that you're in continuously in the Army program, whereas you go from a high school that may or may not be adequate into college with the affirmative action program. We need to really think this through as a country. And that's why I dropped the bomb at the end, because we can't possibly resolve it today anyway.

Congressman, do you want to go? And then we'll quit.

[Representative Thomas Sawyer thanked the President for participating in the discussion and stated that the initiative is an important start to the process of improving race relations in the country.]

The President. Thank you.

I would like to—I'd like to thank our scholars, David and Abigail and Beverly. I would like to thank the students who spoke in the beginning and all the people on the panel.

To me this is a simple issue that has all kinds of complex manifestations. But the simple issue is, we live in a country that is the longest lasting democracy in human history, founded on the elementary proposition that we are created equal by God. That's what the Constitution says. And we have never lived that way perfectly, but the whole history of America is in large measure the story of our attempt to give a more perfect meaning to the thing we started with—the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

And now we have been given this enormous new world to live in with these enormous opportunities and which, as you heard our business executive say, we do not have a person to waste. We're given a world that is much more interesting and exciting if we know and relate to people of different racial and other backgrounds. And it's up to us to decide what to do with it.

Our country has never really dealt with the race issue before except in an atmosphere of crisis and conflict and riots in the cities. So a lot of people, I will say again, think I am nuts to be doing this. You know, what's the end, what's the point? The point is, making a more perfect Union. The point is, proving we can have one America. The point is, it will be a lot more interesting, a lot more fun, and far more noble if we do it right.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 12:10 p.m. in the E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall at the University of Akron.

Remarks to the Community in Akron *December 3, 1997*

Thank you very much, Dee Hammonds, for that introduction and for the welcome to the University of Akron. I have enjoyed being here very much, and I'm very grateful to President Ruebel and to all the officials and the students who did such a good job today. Mr. Mayor, County Executive Davis, Senator Glenn, Congressman Sawyer, Congressman Stokes, members of the city council, the

State legislators and other officials, I hope you were proud of your fellow Ohioans today. I thought they were great on the town meeting.

I want to say a special word of appreciation to all the people in Akron who have been a part of the Coming Together Project because it's one of the reasons we came here. We wanted to come to a place in the heartland of America which could embody the best of America's past, present, and potential for the future and where people have been honest in dealing with issues of racial difference, and I compliment you on that.

Let me also say that I really was very moved, as I have frequently been in such settings—but I was so impressed by the people who were part of our town meeting today, by their conviction, by their sincerity, by their passion, by the life they've lived, and by the good things they want for our country. And you must have been proud of them as well. I hope they spoke for all of you.

I want to say again that this dialog, as part of our initiative on race, is something I decided to do because I think that we ought to be thinking about this not only today but what we're going to look like over the next 30 to 40 years. Most Americans have not even come to grips with the fact that we already have 5—next year we'll have 12—school districts with students from over 100 different racial and ethnic groups; that we will soon have our largest State, California, where Americans of European descent are not in the majority; that within 50 years at the outside, there will be no single racial or ethnic group that will be in a majority in the United States. We have always said we were a nation built on the values of the Constitution; we were a nation of ideas, not of race or place. We are about to find out.

And therefore, every effort made in every community across the country, not only to stand up against discrimination but to reach out for understanding, for the resolution of honest differences, even to celebrate honest argument, is a very positive and important thing. And I want to say again, I want to urge you to continue this.

If nothing else comes out of this meeting today we had, this townhall meeting, I hope it will be that other communities will think

that they need some sort of permanent process like the Coming Together effort here that will go on and on and on and provide a forum for dialog for people to come in and be a part of, because all of our communities are changing so rapidly and the issues are changing that, in this case, the process really is a part of the solution. There has to be a way that people of good will can be heard on matters pertaining to racial difference and misunderstanding and problems as they come up.

Let me say one other thing to all the students who are here. You heard a lot of people say today that they thought that education was a big part of the answer to this, and you also heard a lot of people say that there were nonracial problems in America that had a disproportionate impact on racial minorities—the lack of educational opportunity, the lack of economic opportunity. One of the things that I'm proudest of, and I wanted to say this while we have Senator Glenn and Congressman Sawyer and Congressman Stokes here—and Congressman Brown may or may not still be here; I don't know if he is—but this last Congress, when they passed the Balanced Budget Act, among other things, passed the biggest increase in support for people to go on to college since the GI bill was passed 50 years ago, the biggest increase in 50 years.

I do believe it will make it possible for us to guarantee at least 2 years of college to virtually every American. Here's what they did. First of all, they raised the maximum Pell grant to \$3,000 a year and made more people eligible for it, more independent students. Secondly, nationwide, in a 2-year period, we've gone from 700,000 to one million work-study positions, adding 300,000 over 2 years. The third thing we did was to provide for families to invest in their IRA's and make it easier for people to invest in an individual retirement account and then withdraw from it tax-free if the money is being used to pay for education of a child or of the saver himself or herself. And finally, the bill provides for a \$1,500 tax credit—not deduction—credit—for the cost of the first 2 years of college and a 20 percent credit for the cost of the third and fourth years of graduate school. Or if working people lose their jobs

and need to come back and get further education and training, they can get tax credits to do it.

So when you look at all this together, I think we can really say now that when you put that with the student loan changes we've made, which make it easier to pay those loans back over a longer period of time, that you can really say now there's no reason that anybody should not at least have 2 years of college in America, between the scholarships, the loans, and the tax credits. And that's an important thing that I want to see sweep the country.

So the last thing I'd like to say is—I think the second speaker in our townhall meeting was a young student who said, "You know, this racial deal, it's basically a problem for older people, you know, people in their thirties and forties and fifties." [Laughter] And he got a lot of laughs out of it. But that may well be true. One thing is certainly true: Those of you in this audience who are students in this university, or even younger, will live the vast majority of your lives in a new century. Your children will have no direct experience with the things that have consumed the lives of all of us who are 50 or older. And in a profound way, whether we can come together across all the racial, religious, ethnic, and other lines that divide us, celebrating our diversity, being glad about it, being happy—we're a more interesting country because we are so different from one another—but still saying there are things that bind us together that are more important, that we can preserve our country as one America in the 21st century as a beacon of hope and freedom and opportunity, that will affect your lives far more profoundly than many of the other things that may grab the headlines today or tomorrow or the next day.

So again I say, I hope you will continue the spirit and the dialog manifest in this town meeting today permanently, because we will always benefit from understanding one another, from knowing more about one another, and from feeling like we can be honest with one another when we're mad or if we have an honest disagreement or we don't think we're being treated fairly. And if we do it, then the chances are very high that we will be one America and that we will be

a stunning rebuke to all those countries that have tragically taken the lives and the fortunes and the futures away from their children because they could not bridge their racial, their ethnic, their religious divides. That is not our America, and it never will be if people like you will act on what you saw and felt today.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:22 p.m. in the James A. Rhodes Arena at the University of Akron. In his remarks, he referred to Derwin (Dee) Hammonds, president, associated student government, University of Akron; and Mayor Donald L. Plusquellic of Akron.

Remarks at a Democratic Party Reception in Chicago, Illinois

December 3, 1997

Thank you. Thank you for being here, and thank you for being in such good spirits. I want to begin by saying a very special word of appreciation to Gary LaPaille for 8 years of leadership of the Illinois Democratic Party, during which time, among other things, the State of Illinois voted by large margins, twice, for Bill Clinton and Al Gore. We are very grateful for Gary and for all of you.

I want to thank Senator Dick Durbin for many things, but especially I want to thank him for his leadership in the fight to protect our children from their illegal and often deadly exposure to tobacco. We are going to win that fight next year, thanks to Dick Durbin. And we thank him for that.

And I want to thank Senator Carol Moseley-Braun for many things, but I want you to remember when we approach this election how much difference a vote can make. There were no votes to spare in 1993 when the economic future of our country hung in the balance. Don't forget what it was like when I was elected in 1992 and why I was elected: 20 years of stagnant wages, a long recession, despair that we had any kind of plan for dealing with the global economy. And when I presented my economic plan, I said, "Look, the first thing we've got to do is get the deficit down. But we can't cut education or health care or investment in the