

Senator GRASSLEY. Do any of you have any questions or doubts in your mind about Clarence Thomas' commitment to civil rights and equal opportunity?

Mr. JACKSON. Absolutely not.

Mr. WOODSEN. Absolutely not.

Reverend SOIRES. I don't, and I feel comfortable saying that because, while we may differ within the African-American community and within the religious community and the overall community about priorities and approaches, I think we all agree on goals. It does concern me that many of us are willing to place things as priorities that I don't think should be priorities. As I mentioned to Senator Hatch, if we have a 53-percent dropout rate out of the public high school in our community, I think our priority should be that issue and not whether or not the bank downtown hires our kids. I think we have to deal with the bank downtown, but we have got to start with first things first.

So I think what you will discover is that when you talk to all of us long enough, we will agree on the problems and we will agree on the goals. The question is: What are our priorities and approaches? Therefore, Judge Thomas is as committed as Jesse Jackson, as Bob Woodsen, as anyone else who is doing anything else relative to civil rights. But the priorities and the approaches may differ.

Mr. WOODSEN. I think what Judge Thomas is doing, Senator, in my relationship with him, is to probe different questions. We need different questions asked. One of the questions that he asks, and I do too, is: If race alone were the principal culprit, how is it that blacks control 8 of the 12 major cities, the school systems, the health systems, the housing systems, and yet poor blacks are no better off now than when they were controlled by whites, according to the numbers. The downtown is booming, even in the Reagan era. Eighty percent of the development dollars going to those cities went to reconstruct the downtown, not in the neighborhood. Those were local decisions.

And what Clarence Thomas and others of us are asking is how are those local decisions made to build a Hyatt Regency downtown instead of a business incubative facility with retail shops in low-income neighborhoods that could serve as an anchor for the restoration of those neighborhoods.

I think that these are the kinds of critical questions that the Thomas nomination is causing to be debated within the black community, and I think this is a healthy occurrence.

Mr. JACKSON. May I add something? And I will probably try to be a little more simplistic about it. In a speech that I was giving in Colorado about 2 months ago, I simply said, as Reverend Soires said—and which I think is so important—and this was an issue dealing with where are we going in the year 2000 and how effective affirmative action has been in the African-American community.

The question that I posed at that time—or the person posed, I should say, that I had to answer, they simply asked: Are African-Americans better off today than they were 20 years ago? And I will not call the person's name because they are a noted civil rights person, automatically said no. My answer at that point in time was to the moderator: Which group of African-Americans are you

speaking in reference to? If you are speaking in reference to me, yes; or the three members of this panel, yes; or the leadership of the NAACP, yes; or the leadership of the Urban League, yes. We are better off. If you are speaking about the public housing residents in Dallas, Texas, no. They are not better off.

So when you pose the question, you have to ask: Who is better off? There are a group of us that are, and we have benefited greatly from affirmative action. And we took advantage of it. But the question today, which I finally answered to the person, was simply this: Let us not use affirmative action as a facade, because that is what we are using it as in these hearings as I hear many of my African-American brothers and sisters, many of my Anglo brothers and sisters speak.

What we should be asking ourselves more crucially than anything else is: What do we do about the educational deficit that exists in our inner-city communities? If tomorrow we decided that affirmative action would be only for African-Americans and that we would push it as hard as we could, it would do no good at this point in time when my young brothers and sisters are leaving high school reading at a fifth-grade level, doing math at a third-grade level. It would not help us.

So I say to you today, when you listen to testimony that has come before you and will precede us, the question should be asked: Which group of African-Americans have benefited? And those who have not benefited will not be at this table. Those of us who have will be at this table.

Senator GRASSLEY. There have been several other panels in previous days of African-Americans who have spoken, like you have, of their strong feeling of Judge Thomas' commitment to civil rights and equal opportunities. I would like to have you help me understand and all of America understand. With Clarence Thomas' commitment to civil rights, documented by so many different groups here, why do you think the so-called leadership of black organizations like the NAACP and the Black Caucus are opposed to Judge Thomas?

Reverend SOIRES. Senator, I became the pastor of a very traditional African-American Baptist Church 10 months ago. I have had a wonderful experience there for the last 10 months, and one of the new ideas that I introduced was computerizing the church's operation.

Some of the opposition that came to that was simply that we have never done it that way before. And I have this need to balance the tradition which has brought the church this far, and now innovative ideas to take the church to the next generation.

We have had 300 to 400 years of a very consistent kind of resistance movement against the racism of America. It takes a while to develop a new strategy with a broad consensus that moves from civil rights to economic empowerment. There are many organizations who have dedicated their lives and people who have dedicated their lives to the protection of the rights that were won after years of battle. And that is a legitimate pursuit.

But that pursuit should not function in exclusivity. We also need efforts as momentous as the civil rights movement to convince children not to have children. We need efforts to convince families of

the root responsibilities of families. We need efforts to convince people that laws don't change people. People change laws. Laws can change people's behavior, but it takes a new value system to change people's hearts.

The point is we are in disagreement not necessarily with the facts but with the priorities. We feel that in 1991 the priorities should be economic and educational empowerment, not race-based solutions simply, but, rather, economic conditions, economic programs, and economic solutions.

Senator GRASSLEY. And their opposition is because Clarence Thomas challenges that traditional approach?

Reverend SOIRES. Clarence Thomas comes along as a post-World War II baby. Clarence Thomas is not really a veteran of the pre-World War II leadership. He is 43 years old. I am 40 years old. I was too young to march with Dr. King. I was too young to go to jail 40 times and have my head beaten, and often perceived as someone who perhaps is not loyal to that tradition. But there does come a time—just like we did in the Persian Gulf—there comes a time when after the war is over you look at what is the next step. That doesn't mean that the war against racism is over, but we have our civil rights, we have our public accommodation rights, we have our voter registration rights. There is no need for me to lead a march on city hall to get the right to vote. My task in my community is to convince people to register and to vote.

Now, we have to protect the voting rights on the one hand, but that should not function in the absence of people who do what I do, and that is motivate people to exercise their rights. We are in partnership, not in competition.

Mr. WOODSEN. I think that part of it is ideological, too. Clarence Thomas does not fall conveniently into liberal Democratic tradition that many members of the Black Caucus have defined black Americans. They have become in one sense the police of black thinking. And there has been a gag rule imposed on the black community over the past 20 years that unless you see life through the prism of a liberal Democrat, you will be suspicious, you will be castigated. And so I think Clarence Thomas, because he does not espouse that position, is castigated.

I think members of the caucus talk about they are suddenly going to judge him based upon the content of his record and not the color of his skin. And yet there have been several black officials, including some of their own members, that have been guilty of personal indiscretions and illegal acts, and one judge in New Orleans who was guilty of accepting a bribe while on the bench and found guilty by a court. And I remember being on *McLaughlin and Company* with a member of the Caucus when John McLaughlin asked both of us: What do you think about what this man did? Do you think, as some are saying, that he was targeted by whites? And this member said yes. Not judging him on the content of his record or his character but the color of his skin.

And all of a sudden, when Judge Thomas emerges on the scene, members of the Black Caucus suddenly became color blind and wanted to judge Clarence Thomas based upon the context of his record. I think that this moral inconsistency is not really being perceived well in black America, at least the people that I talk to.