

Clinton and connerly's speeches on affirmative action essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



Bill Clinton was the 42nd President of the United States. Elected in 1992 and again in 1996, Clinton served as President until January of 2001, when George W. Bush became the 43rd President. Ward Connerly is the founder and chairman of the American Civil Rights Institute. He has gained national attention as an outspoken advocate of equal opportunity for all Americans, regardless of race, sex, or ethnic background. In this paper, I will discuss the position of these two politicians from affirmative action, I will highlight how each of them thinks about affirmative action, whether he sees it beneficial or harmful to the American society, and how he argues to mend or abolish this system. On July 19, 1995, in his speech on affirmative action at the National Archives, Clinton explained how men were created equal, and that they are entitled by their creator, and by United States Constitution and Bill of Rights, to certain rights such as, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

He pointed to the enduring effort throughout our history to preserve these rights, but he also referred to the gap between the plain theory and reality where the rights of minorities are still violated: There could be no better place for this discussion than here at the National Archives, for within these walls are America's bedrocks of our common ground—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. These documents are America's only crown jewels. Beyond all else, our country is a set of convictions: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our whole history can be seen first as an effort to preserve these rights and then as an effort to make them real in the lives of all our citizens. We know that

from the beginning there was a great gap between the plain meaning of our creed and the meaner [lower] reality of our daily lives. (Clinton 1)

Almost a year later, just like Clinton, on April 30, 1996, in his speech on affirmative action to the Heritage Foundation, Connerly also explained how certain rights such as liberty, the right to vote, the right to due process, and the right to equal treatment under the law were guaranteed to every citizen at birth or otherwise. These rights were valid for life and they should be honored by every government, but they had not been always honored to some citizens because of their color or race: When we become citizens of this nation, at birth or otherwise, we get a warranty. That warranty is supposed to be honored by every government franchise in every village and hamlet [town] of this nation. It is not transferable, and it is good for the life of the vehicle. We are guaranteed the right to vote; the right to due process; the right to be free, as long as we conduct ourselves in accordance with the laws of our nation; and the right to equal treatment under the law, regardless of our race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.

These are rights which attach to each of us as individuals, not as members of a group. This warranty has not always been honored for some of us. Because of the color of our skin or the place from whence [where] we came, some of us were denied the right to vote; we were enslaved; we were denied due process; and the equal treatment granted to others was not ours to enjoy. (Connerly 2) It seemed ironic to Clinton how affirmative action started to be divisive, because when it first began twenty five years ago, it was supported by all parties and was meant to achieve equal opportunity for all Americans:

It is, in a way, ironic that this issue should be divisive today, because affirmative action began twenty-five years ago by a Republican president, with bipartisan support. It began simply as a means to an end of enduring national purpose— equal opportunity for all Americans. (Clinton 1)

It seemed ironic to Connerly as well that affirmative action should be divisive. He blamed this divisiveness on those who believe that skin color and gender should entitle certain groups of people to some benefits while denying them from others for no reason but racial preferences: Do we not believe it was divisive when those from an earlier period said slavery was immoral? Was it not divisive when our nation's people fought among themselves over this very issue? Was it not divisive when we sent troops into Montgomery and Selma, Alabama to protect the rights of people like Rosa Parks and James Meredith to ensure their right to sit wherever they wanted on a bus and to attend a college that wasn't segregated? Yes, those were divisive times. But the seeds of division are not planted by those of us who seek to eliminate racial and ethnic preferences; they are planted by those who believe that our skin color and gender and how we spell our last names should entitle us to the harvest of diversity — college admission, government employment, and contracts. (Connerly 5) Clinton began to give many examples of discrimination practices that used to happen as early as the 1960s.

He explained how blacks were denied attending segregated schools and universities, how the streets in black neighborhoods weren't paved, and how the restrooms were marked WHITE and COLORED even in courthouse squares. Most of the powerful positions and even decent jobs were limited to

white men: Thirty years ago in this city, you didn't see many people of color or women making their way to work in the morning in business clothes, or serving in substantial numbers in powerful positions in Congress or at the White House, or making executive decisions every day in businesses.

In fact, even the employment want ads were divided, men on one side and women on the other. It was extraordinary then to see women or people of color as television news anchors, or, even, believe it or not, in college sports. There were far fewer women and minorities working as job supervisors, or firefighters, or police officers, or doctors, or lawyers, or college professors, or in many other jobs that offer stability and honor and integrity to family life.

(Clinton 3) Connerly, on the other hand, did not elaborate in giving examples of discrimination, although he used strong expressions like " we were treated like animals" to illustrate a dark period where blacks were not considered whole citizens and sometimes were not considered even human. Clinton saw many benefits of adopting affirmative action.

He started describing how things had changed, and how women and minorities, including blacks, began to have equal rights and equal opportunities in business, in education, in jobs, and even in space programs: Women have become a major force in business and political life, and far more able to contribute to their families' incomes. A true and growing black middle class has emerged. Higher education has literally been revolutionized, with women and racial and ethnic minorities attending once overwhelmingly white and sometimes all-male schools. In communities across our nation, police departments now better reflect the makeup of

those whom they protect. A generation of professionals now serve as role models for young women and minority youth. Hispanics and newer immigrant populations are succeeding in making America stronger. For an example of where the best of our future lies, just think about our space program and the stunning hookup with the Russian space station this month.

Let's remember that that program, the world's finest, began with heroes like Alan Shepard and Senator John Glenn, but today it has American heroes like Sally Ride, Ellen Ochoa, Leroy Child, Guy Bluford, and other outstanding, completely qualified women and minorities. (Clinton 3) Unlike Clinton, Connerly believed that affirmative action was destructive when it became a system of racial preferences that can destroy fundamental democratic values of self-reliance, individualism, and equal opportunity for all: The challenge is to end the corrosive [destructive] system of racial preferences that has evolved in our nation, a system that has the potential to fatally damage the most fundamental values of our democracy, and to do so in a way that does not unleash the meaner [lower] instincts of some and the fears of others. The opportunity is to resume that noble journey of building an inclusive family of Americans in which men and women of all races and colors can work and play in harmony, with mutual respect and expecting nothing more than an equal opportunity to compete, and from that competition to build that more perfect union of which our forefathers dreamed. (Connerly 4)

Clinton believed that laws alone do not change society. According to him, these changes were the product of the Americans' personal efforts to change

their own ways and the pressure of laws and administrative power. He then talked about his own personal experience with affirmative action when he was attorney general and as a governor. He appointed a record number of women and African-Americans that no one ever questioned their qualifications or performance. And as a president, many government agencies in his administration were doing more business than ever before with qualified firms run by minorities and women. He believed that it was necessary that quality and diversity should go hand in hand. He also believed that affirmative action not only opened the doors of opportunity to individual Americans, but also, as most economists agreed, played an important role in closing gaps in economic opportunity in our society, thereby strengthening the entire economy.

Unlike Clinton, Connerly believed that affirmative action was just a technique for jump-starting the process of integrating black Americans into the fabric of American society, for changing the culture of America from an exclusive society into an inclusive one. He believed that our nation had a passion for fairness. This passion "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" was the centerpiece of all our religious beliefs. He believed that it was the time to place our faith in the American system of democracy and in America's passion for fairness. He also believed that no one's rights were secure under a governmental system of preferences based on race. Every conceivable racial conflict was present. There was no dominant majority and there was no single oppressed minority. It was not just black and white. There were black and Korean, black and Hispanic, white and Hispanic,

Russian and Hispanic. How, then, could we decide who among us should receive a preference?. Clinton answered those who argued that affirmative action is no longer needed by highlighting some facts and statistics about women and minorities that required the continuation of affirmative action: The unemployment rate for African-Americans remains at twice that of whites. The Hispanic rate is still higher.

Women have narrowed the earnings gap, but they still make only 72% as much as men do for comparable jobs. The average income for a Hispanic woman with a college degree is still less than the average income of a white man with a high school diploma. According to the recently completed report of the Glass Ceiling Commission, sponsored by Republican members of Congress, in the nation's largest companies only 0.6% of senior management positions are held by African-Americans, 0.4% by Hispanic Americans, and 0.3% by Asian-Americans; women hold between 3 and 5% of these positions. White men make up 43% of our workforce, but they hold 95% of these jobs. Just last week, the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank reported that black home loan applicants are more than twice as likely to be denied credit as whites with the same qualifications, and that Hispanic applicants are more than one and a half times as likely to be denied loans as whites with the same qualifications. (Clinton 5)

Connerly, on the other hand, answered those who argued that affirmative action was still a necessity to protect the rights of the minorities by addressing their passion for fairness: There are those who say that racism and sexism are not dead in America, and they are correct. But racism and

sexism in our society do not justify our government giving a preference to Jose over Chang because Susan's father discriminated over Willy's father fifty years ago. Not in America. (Connerly 4) It is apparent that Clinton argued that the system of affirmative action needed to be mended, rather than abolished or ended altogether.

Clinton argued that affirmative action could be used as a system of racial preference, but it should not be called affirmative action, and it should be considered illegal as it is nothing but another form of discrimination. He admitted that affirmative action alone would not solve the problems of minorities and women, but he believed that the task of ending discrimination was not over and that affirmative action, if properly done, could help us come together, go forward and grow together. On the other hand, Connerly argued that the system of affirmative action should be abolished altogether, because it was meant to be a temporary action to protect the rights of blacks at the time of discrimination, but since it became a system of racial preferences, we should abandon it and have faith in our own sense of fair play.

Works cited

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