

ing a similar negative ad campaign in 1992?

The President. Well, you asked me at a time when this is in the heightened attention of the American people, isn't it? I look across at the Democratic primary, and anything that happened in 1988 is pale in comparison to what's going on there. We've tried to have most of ours positive.

You may recall an ad we ran in Michigan that triggered the famous line I used at the Gridiron Club, "*Ich bin ein Mercedes owner.*" [*Laughter*] But that is a negative ad. Now, I don't know whether you consider that a turnoff or not, but just by the genesis of that ad came about that the opponent in this case was talking about protection and jobs and American jobs and American workers and all of this, and he was driving a Mercedes. Nobody was pointing it out. A lot of editors here—and I don't remember a brutal revelation of this terribly important fact. So we brought it out.

Now, I don't know if you consider that—I don't want to get into a debate since you might clearly win it—[*laughter*]—but is that a negative ad or is that fair in the way—everybody now that puts on the television at least have a thing—and the newspapers, too—here's why the ad was fair or unfair. I can't remember what they said about that one. I think when you define a person on issues, that's very, very important. I think some would consider it negative. But just seriously on that one. Then I can maybe answer your question a little better.

Q. I think what it does is set the tone.

I guess people maybe care whether the opponent drives a Mercedes. But I guess we get into discussions of other character issues. I think that's really where the—

The President. Well, as I've said, I would like to see it on the issues and not on some of the sleaze questions. I've said that before, and I'll keep repeating that. I know that we will try hard, but I also know that this is about the ugliest political year I've ever seen already. And I don't know what it's going to hold, but I will try to keep my head up and try to do my job as President, and try to do it with a certain sense of decency and honor.

But we've seen it start off that way in the early primaries, and then something else evolved for reasons I'm not quite sure I fully understand. But I don't want to make you a firm statement because I don't know what's negative and what's not these days. If it's just ripping down somebody's character or tearing them apart, I don't want to do that. If it's factual and brings out something that hasn't been brought out, I think that's fair. And so we have to just use your judgment, I guess is the answer to that one.

Well, I guess I really do have to go. but thank you all very, very much. I appreciate it.

Note: The President spoke at 1:53 p.m. at the J.W. Marriott Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to David Lawrence, Jr., president of the society.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua

April 9, 1992

President Chamorro. It's a wonderful visit. It always is, but I think we feel even more united now than ever.

President Bush. Well, I think so.

President Chamorro. We always come to the United States feeling at home, just as we are awaiting your visit in Nicaragua.

President Bush. We weren't sure our Assistant Secretary, Bernie Aronson, was going

to make it. He was down in Peru. He can tell us. He can tell us, yes. He's coming over. He's going to wait for these cameras.

Manuel Noriega Verdict

Q. Mr. President, your reaction to the Noriega verdict?

President Bush. Noriega was convicted, I think, on 8 out of 10 counts. Well, I think

it's a major victory against the drug lords. We're going to continue the fight against drugs in every way possible. But I think it's significant that he was accorded a free and fair trial, and he was found guilty. And I hope it sends a lesson to drug lords here and around the world that they'll pay a price if they continue to poison the lives of our kids in this country or anywhere else. And so, in my view, the case was a solid case. And I've not commented on it since it began in the court, but now that he has been convicted I think it's proper to say that justice has been served.

Q. Was it worth invading Panama to get this verdict?

President Bush. It was certainly worth bringing him to justice. It's certainly always worth it when you protect the lives of American citizens. And when a part of the result of that is democracy in a country, it makes it doubly worth it. But yes, I'm glad he's out.

Q. Are you sorry things are not better for the Panamanians these days?

President Bush. I wish things were better for the Americans, for the Panamanians, for the Nicaraguans, and for everybody. But we're going to continue to work to see that that is true.

Q. Mr. President, are you surprised by

the verdict, given the fact that it almost ended in a mistrial?

President Bush. No, because I've felt that from what I understood that the case was very solid. But I think it's a good thing, and I think the main thing is it sends a message to the drug lords that they are going to be brought to justice. And I salute those countries that are waging a good fight against narcotics in their countries, and many in this hemisphere are doing just exactly that.

British Elections

Q. Mr. President, have you heard from John Major?

President Bush. No, I haven't. Any exit polls here? They don't start—we talked to the—

Mr. Scowcroft. They don't cast anything about exit polls until the polls close, which is 5 p.m. our time.

President Bush. Ten p.m. their time, yes. They stay open late over there. Big British election, as you know.

Okay, you guys, you're out of here.

Note: The exchange began at 3:13 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. President Chamorro spoke in Spanish, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Statement by Deputy Press Secretary Smith on the President's Meeting With President Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua

April 9, 1992

The President met this afternoon with President Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua. President Bush congratulated her on the success of her economic reform program and her efforts to bring all Nicaraguans together in national reconciliation. The President reiterated his full support for President Chamorro's efforts to strengthen democracy in her country.

President Chamorro thanked the Presi-

dent for the generous assistance to her country from the United States, including substantial debt relief. She indicated that Nicaragua is committed to a strong economic stabilization program that will set the stage for economic growth. She also outlined her plans for reforming the police and resolving the problems surrounding property rights in her country.