

2-20-2007

Campus Report Feb 20, 2007

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Recommended Citation

"Campus Report Feb 20, 2007" (2007). *News Releases*. 2210.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/2210

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02.20.2007 | Campus and Community, Students, Culture and Society After a freewheeling, 90-minute conversation with a dozen Dayton Early College Academy students who showed up on a snow day, Leonard Pitts didn't hesitate to share a first impression.

"You're the ones who are going to run the world in 30 years. Seriously."

The Pulitzer Prize-winning Miami Herald columnist quietly spoke about music, writing and the state of the American psyche to a group of high school students who engaged him in the issues of the day and the music of the moment.

On hip hop: "It's not daring. It's about making money. Hip hop, to me, is a self-defeating formula. Most of what I hear in hip hop wouldn't be out of place at a Ku Klux Klan rally."

On writing: "If you're not a reader, you can't be a writer. It's like saying I'm a singer, and I've never listened to a song. ... This will sound strange because I teach writing classes, but you're not going to learn writing by academics. You learn writing by writing."

On the achievement gap: "What other people expect you to be goes a long way to shaping what you become."

On Iraq: "It's one of the worst foreign policy decisions in American history. It's a major screw-up. We don't have any good options — just bad, worse and worst."

Later, in a Distinguished Speaker Series address, he chastised the media and the public for allowing fear of terrorism to "nibble away, some would say gobble away" civil liberties in the name of security.

Why does he speak out so vehemently? "I would rather go down in flames knowing I did the right thing than prosper by selling out," he said. "What about next time? Will we remember the lessons of World War II, the McCarthy era, this era? Or will we force them to be relearned by a generation not born?"