

“Rational Responses to Irrational Actions: Black Americans and the Media”

By

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Recent events have brought Don Imus to the chopping block for broadcasting a statement—which you already know and which I will not repeat here—about members of the Rutgers University women’s basketball team. Mr. Imus has willingly acknowledged that his statements were irrational—“way out of line.” So did Michael Richards after his November of 2006 tirade. MTV, which broadcasted a cartoon “Where my Dogs At?” last August falls into this category as well. After the fact, after reality sets in, people and networks get religion. Nevertheless, these are not the first or the only occurrences of irrationality when it comes to speaking negative imagery about Black Americans; and I doubt they will be the last.

As rational economic agents, Black Americans should recognize that there appears to be a proclivity for these events to occur. Consequently, why operate at the end of a yo-yo; rising up when deplorable statements are made, protesting, and threatening boycotts or firings? Why not organize a watchdog organization to monitor all of the media for vile remarks against Black Americans and establish a systematic and rational mechanism for addressing them when they occur. The Anti-Defamation League, the National Italian American Foundation, and La Raza are such organizations. Why don’t Black Americans have such an organization?

Some might argue that such an organization is not required. Well, we have tried other approaches, but they haven’t stopped the deluge. Let’s try building an organization with sharp teeth.

A significant portion of the membership fees for such a watch dog organization could be used to purchase shares in a media stock fund. Therefore, Black Americans who join this organization would also make an equity investment and receive concomitant returns. Most importantly, however, as ownership of media corporation shares increase, Black Americans would gain votes in these corporations. These votes could be cast not only to effect the firing of the likes of Imus, but they could also help ensure that negative images of, and statements about, Black Americans cease to be a part of America’s media landscape.

Black Americans should discontinue their irrational responses to media events and take rational action.

Black Americans must realize that they are losing employment and other opportunities each day because of the types of statements broadcast by Mr. Imus and made by Mr. Richards, and the types of images broadcast by MTV. These statements and images reinforce in the minds of certain non-Blacks the view that Blacks are ignorant and inferior. Moreover, these events can have a negative subliminal effect on Black Americans. When we come to these realizations, we’ll respond rationally, as many other ethnic groups have, and form a watchdog organization that can bring immediate and permanent rationality to seemingly irrational broadcasters and networks.