S CONTROVERSY

Washington

n Imus was publicly criticized for making racist,
lorning. Mr. Imus referred to the Rutgers Women's
he resulting public outcry, Mr. Imus issued
his comment was inappropriate, he is not a racist
preted within its comic context.
nd Al Sharpton and other high-profile members
ers and future guest stars distanced themselves
eled his radio show.
r. Imus are inappropriate and should not be
ce relations and sexism, we cannot afford to
to turn back the clock and offset what social
while corrective action taken against Mr. Imus
ss the root of the problem?
the Rutgers Women's basketball team to personal-
f Rutgers stated that they were curious to know
on national radio could make such a negative
ce to women whom he did not even know.
ctly could an experienced radio announcer so

context.

Apparently, due to the historically-oppressive use of such terms as nigga, bitch and hoe by the dominant culture to degrade and dehumanize African-Americans and women, this subculture has re-defined and "taken ownership" of these and other terms in an attempt to neutralize them. Further, this supposedly re-vamped terminology has been taken mainstream, popularized, and even made fashionable through certain forms of hip-hop music and other mediums.

It is around this issue that the current controversy really revolves because in "taking ownership" of this language, a double-standard has been created; for, when used within certain parameters within and approved by this subculture, this language is understood as benevolent. However, when and if used outside of this context, especially when used by white folk, it takes on a different meaning and is interpreted as having the traditional, degrading, racist and sexist connotations. This has created a rift, not only between hip-hop and the white majority, but between hip-hop and many African-Americans.

Can you say "divide and conquer"?

Before going further, return to Mr. Imus. While he certainly crossed the line with his reference to the beautiful, dignified sisters of the Rutgers basketball team as "nappy-headed hoes," this language was certainly not his invention, nor did it appear in a vacuum. And extending the benefit of the doubt to Mr. Imus, one can even accept that he did not intend to offend the women of Rutgers or African-Americans. No, it may well be that a sixty-six year-old white shock-jock with fifty years' experience on radio may have actually attempted to come off as "hip" or "in the know" with regard to the lingo of popular African-American and/or hip-hop culture.

This is an important distinction for several reasons. First, in breaking down the phrase he used, the term "nappy-headed" did not apply to any of the women; all of them have straightened

n reference to women— terms popularized through
l to hip-hop music and culture. African-Americans
erted that there was no justification for the
ly agreed upon that the issue of hip-hop music
ssed.

lic forum in which many Black intellectuals as
ne hip-hop music industry took the stage and ex-
n, the main charge leveled against the hip-hop
f violence, its misogynistic and degrading repre-
contribution to the image of Black folk in general

corically arrayed against African-Americans, much
irresponsible, shameful, and counterproductive
y, especially when these negative images are
lines. A day does not go by where Black folk
oes the sun set without young Black women being
s 'hoes' or 'bitches.' What's more, the greeting,
racial lines. And unfortunately, many such
classroom, the work place, the local mall—

of.

of the worker. The larger the profit, the more exploited the worker becomes; the logical and extreme extension, then, of this capitalist logic is outright slavery where the capitalist takes everything owed to the worker and pays nothing.

The profit-driven system of capital led in this way ultimately to slavery in the U.S.— an economic system of profit. But even when the slaves were freed after the Civil War, so-called "freed" slaves were free to compete with established capitalists, industrialists, bankers, and corporations that already owned the means of production and had already established a status quo that excluded, among others, those same freed slaves who had gotten the capitalists and bankers and corporations wealthy. As a result, freedom became another form of slavery, of exploitation and injustice in new ways. Freed slaves were still only free to do as they were told, bossed by the wealthy and powerful.

So, again, the system of capital was at the basis of the problem.

After decades of pseudo-integrationism, in the 1960s the Black Panther Party emerged and recognized the system of capital as the central problem. The Black Panthers proposed an alternative to capitalism, one that required a revolution, the violent overthrow of the existing order, in order to be instituted. This violence, this revolutionary violence, would be necessitated by the capitalist oppressor's refusal to surrender his privileged position under any other circumstances.

So as a result of this awakening, the U.S. government engaged in a Dirty War, committing genocide against the Black revolutionary, neutralizing conscious Blacks with bullets and prisons and illegal, state-sponsored, domestic terrorism (FBI COINTELPRO). And, ultimately, the government's repressive response was in defense of itself as a tool of the capitalist and, indirectly,

ABOUT THE WRITER: Travis
cerated for seventeen

exploited the worker becomes; the logical and
: is outright slavery where the capitalist takes

4

s way ultimately to slavery in the U.S.— an
aves were freed after the Civil War, so-called
shed capitalists, industrialists, bankers, and
duction and had already established a status
d slaves who had gotten the capitalists and
freedom became another form of slavery, of ex-
ves were still only free to do as they were

sis of the problem.
1960s the Black Panther Party emerged and recog-
em. The Black Panthers proposed an alternative
he violent overthrow of the existing order,
revolutionary violence, would be necessitated
er his privileged position under any other cir-

ernment engaged in a Dirty War, committing geno-
ng conscious Blacks with bullets and prisons
(FBI COINTELPRO). And, ultimately, the govern-
elf as a tool of the capitalist and, indirectly,

ABOUT THE WRITER: Travi
cerated for seventeen ar

repeated terms many African-American men use in reference to women— terms popularized through hip-hop music —national attention again turned to hip-hop music and culture. African-Americans in general responded to this and correctly asserted that there was no justification for the degrading remarks. However, it was collectively agreed upon that the issue of hip-hop music and its influence seriously needed to be addressed.

The Oprah Winfrey show was turned into a public forum in which many Black intellectuals as well as some high-profile representatives of the hip-hop music industry took the stage and expressed their views on the issue. Led by Oprah, the main charge leveled against the hip-hop industry was its promotion and glorification of violence, its misogynistic and degrading representations of women, and its overall negative contribution to the image of Black folk in general through its lyrics and videos.

Fully conscious of the oppressive forces historically arrayed against African-Americans, much of the message spilling out of hip-hop music is irresponsible, shameful, and counterproductive to overcoming the real obstacles facing us today, especially when these negative images are promoted mainstream across racial and cultural lines. A day does not go by where Black folk do not refer to one another as niggas. Never does the sun set without young Black women being referred to by Black men or other Black women as 'hoes' or 'bitches.' What's more, the greeting, "What's up, my nigga," is casually used across racial lines. And unfortunately, many such "greetings" and conversations take place in the classroom, the work place, the local mall— right out in public for all to see and hear.

Just twenty-five years ago, that was unheard of.

But somehow, in 2007, it has become cool to be [illegible]

use of such terms as nigga, bitch and hoe by
rican-Americans and women, this subculture
other terms in an attempt to neutralize them.
s been taken mainstream, popularized, and even
music and other mediums.
versy really revolves because in "taking owner-
n created; for, when used within certain para-
is language is understood as benevolent. How-
specially when used by white folk, it takes
ng the traditional, degrading, racist and sexist
between hip-hop and the white majority, but

e he certainly crossed the line with his refer-
utgers basketball team as "nappy-headed hoes,"
r did it appear in a vacuum. And extending
n accept that he did not intend to offend the
y well be that a sixty-six year-old white shock-
ve actually attempted to come off as "hip"
lar African-American and/or hip-hop culture.
asons. First, in breaking down the phrase
any of the women; all of them have straightened

ON THE IMUS CONTROVERSY

By Travis Washington

In April, well-known white radio shock-jock Don Imus was publicly criticized for making racist, sexist comments on his radio show, Imus in the Morning. Mr. Imus referred to the Rutgers Women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hoes." After the resulting public outcry, Mr. Imus issued a perfunctory public apology stating that while his comment was inappropriate, he is not a racist or a sexist and that his comment should be interpreted within its comic context.

As a result of the public outcry led by Reverend Al Sharpton and other high-profile members of the African-American community, many advertisers and future guest stars distanced themselves from Imus, and CBS eventually fired him and canceled his radio show.

Certainly, comments such as those uttered by Mr. Imus are inappropriate and should not be tolerated. As a nation still struggling with race relations and sexism, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to such incidents that threaten to turn back the clock and offset what social gains that have been made on these issues. But while corrective action taken against Mr. Imus was indeed merited, does censorship really address the root of the problem?

Days after the Imus comment, Don Imus met with the Rutgers Women's basketball team to personally apologize and discuss the issue. The women of Rutgers stated that they were curious to know how an individual with fifty years of experience on national radio could make such a negative and irresponsible comment, especially in reference to women whom he did not even know.

Indeed, this is a very good question. How exactly could an experienced radio announcer so