

OpEd from Trenton (NJ) Mayor Douglas Palmer, President of The United States Conference of Mayors in Response to Don Imus Remarks

As President of The United States Conference of Mayors and the long-time Mayor of Trenton, NJ, I know that each generation of young people brings forward different critical issues for the nation – and its mayors -- to deal with. Just a month after I participated in the historic reenactment of the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, we find ourselves dealing with racial attacks by a famous radio talk show host about women who we should be honoring as mentors and heroines.

Situations such as this one regarding the remarks by Don Imus about the Rutgers ladies' basketball team challenge us to show leadership in difficult times; and though I am definitely bothered by Imus' remarks, I am equally concerned that his recent comments seem to be causing a racial chasm in America.

Instead of allowing this to divide us, we must use it as an opportunity to bring Americans together and encourage honest conversations about race and equality. Of course it is wrong for a white man to use racially offensive language, but we cannot pretend that it isn't also wrong for a black man to use the 'n' word, the 'b' word or any other demeaning language. No one has the right, regardless of the color of their skin, to sling sexually biased or racist insults.

If we are outraged about what Imus said, then we should also be outraged about what is often heard every day on America's streets. We should be outraged about what is happening in our nation's cities that causes our young people to accept degrading language and the lifestyle it depicts as their reality. At a time when many of our cities are faced with inequities in school funding, as well as disinvestment in our neighborhoods, remarks such as this one only underscore our need as public officials to ensure that public resources are distributed fairly and evenly.

We need to talk to the FCC, as well as MTV, VH1 and BET, about what is being played on our airwaves. Unfortunately, children cannot watch television anymore because it is covered with glorified violence, sexually-suggestive clothing and vile language. This is why the networks must be held accountable the same way people who commit crime are held accountable for their actions.

We cannot create strong families for strong cities and a strong America, unless we come together on this issue and finally say 'enough is enough.' We must be willing to clean up our own homes instead of being so eager to jump on others. What is happening in the black community is also

happening in the white community. Hearing young people loosely use the 'n' word is not 'cool', and unless we stand up and say, "We're not influencing our youth by continuing to buy your product," or "We're not listening to your music anymore because of its negative messages," we cannot make a difference.

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