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Burying Don Imus: Anatomy of a Scapegoat

Michael Awkward
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In 2007, when radio shock jock Don Imus referred to the nationally acclaimed Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos," public outrage led to his highly publicized firing by CBS and provoked a heated national discussion about race, gender, and the power of language.

In *Burying Don Imus: Anatomy of a Scapegoat*, author Michael Awkward discusses much more than Imus and his predilection for shooting off his mouth on his radio show, "Imus in the Morning," and throughout his controversial four-decade career. Awkward posits that as a nation we overreact to comments such as Imus's—as objectionable as they may be—while failing to understand the historic oppression of African Americans and how it has affected all Americans, black and white alike.

What is it about hate speech humor that attracts listeners? Awkward examines the appeal of "Imus in the Morning" and widens his focus to look at other race-related controversies, such as the Duke Lacrosse team accusation and subsequent media coverage. Who delivers a message is of paramount importance to public reaction; for example, whites making jokes about blacks and blacks making jokes about themselves are two very different things.

The author has done his research; witness his ten pages of footnotes and extensive bibliography. This is an impressive look at the history of shock radio, especially Don Imus's contribution "to popular culture and political debate," and racial politics. As a thoughtful perspective on a much-publicized event, this is an important book for college race and media studies.

Michael Awkward is a Gayl A. Jones Collegiate Professor of Afro-American Literature and Culture at the University of Michigan. He is the author of four books, including *Soul Covers: Rhythm and Blues Remakes and the Struggle for Artistic Identity.*

PENNY HASTINGS (August 16, 2009)

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