The Imus disgrace

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

Even before radio-TV host Don Imus' repellent reference last week to the Rutgers University women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos," his history was so littered with disgusting racist remarks that it was already a mystery how the CBS radio network and MSNBC kept him on the payroll.

Nothing about his two-week suspension changes that fact. Imus shouldn't just be contrite, he should be ashamed - but that also holds for CBS and NBC for keeping him on the national stage.

What's stunning is the readiness of so many of his enablers in the nation's media and journalistic elites to downplay Imus' racism as a mere failure to be "politically correct." In 1997 on "60 Minutes," Imus admitted one of the reasons he hired staffer Bernard McGuirk - who also slurred the Rutgers team last week while on the air with Imus - was his proficiency at telling n-word jokes. For years, he has made a habit of singling out dark-skinned blacks for ridicule. Here's what he had to say about veteran journalist Gwen Ifill in 1995: "Isn't The (New York) Times wonderful. It lets the cleaning lady cover the White House."

This isn't "politically incorrect." This isn't satire. It is flat-out, full-on racism. Yet Tim Russert, Chris Matthews, Cokie Roberts, Sens. John McCain and Joseph Biden and dozens of other white media and political heavyweights have gone on Imus' show, admonished him for the remarks, but then appeared to act as apologists for him. Many journalists and politicians saw Ross Perot's "you people" reference in a speech to the NAACP as borderline racist, yet their leading lights tolerate offenses by Imus that are a million times worse. At some point, being willing to go on Imus and lend him legitimacy becomes a comment on these folks' character.

Enough is enough. The corporate bosses at CBS and General Electric, NBC's parent company, need to realize that the money Imus makes for them is dirty money, then act on that realization. Spewing racism is unacceptable. Period.

Reprinted from The San Diego Union-Tribune.