



# Burying Don Imus: Anatomy of a Scapegoat

*Michael Awkward*

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"That's some nappy-headed hos." With these now-infamous words, uttered in 2007 to describe the supposed appearance of the Rutgers women's basketball team, the radio talk show host Don Imus became the improbable focus of a heated national discussion on race, gender, and the power of language. Excoriated in the media as racist and sexist, Imus quickly lost the corporate sponsorships that had made his show so lucrative and, despite a public meeting with the Rutgers athletes and their coach to apologize for his comments, was fired by CBS two weeks later. In *Burying Don Imus*, Michael Awkward provides the first balanced, critical analysis of Imus's comments and the public outrage they provoked.

Written from the singular perspective of a black intellectual with both a long-standing commitment to feminism and a deep familiarity with-and appreciation of-*Imus in the Morning*, this book contends that the reaction to the insult ignored the nature of Imus's contributions to popular culture and political debate while eliding the real and very complicated issues within contemporary racial politics. Awkward's probing account analyzes the responses within the African-American community as reflective of deep-seated anxieties rooted in the collective trauma resulting from centuries of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial violence. Placing the controversy in multiple contexts, he addresses Imus's public persona and the satirical intent of his show, and delves into such charged topics as the perception of women athletes in American culture, the tradition of racist humor, the sexist language of hip-hop, and the politics of black hairstyles. Awkward also juxtaposes the Imus incident with other recent controversies, including the rape accusations leveled against white players on Duke University's lacrosse team in 2006, in order to demonstrate how sensational spectacles of racism play out in the media again and again.

Highly personal, eclectic, and illuminating, *Burying Don Imus* examines American society's predilection for self-congratulatory, ineffective hand-wringing over issues of race and racism and its inability to engage productively with the historic oppression of African Americans.

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