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*Freedom Rider  
Imus and Andy  
by Margaret Kimberley*

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Andy Rooney is a very lucky man. He is paid a very large sum of money to say absolutely nothing at all. For many years he has appeared on 60 Minutes and commented on the most inane subjects imaginable. He will begin his weekly dose of foolishness with a statement such as, "Do you ever think about shoe laces?" No, Andy, I don't. No one else does and it is truly amazing that CBS pays you to do so.

Don Imus is also very lucky. He masquerades as a political commentator for MSNBC, a network that clearly isn't concerned about reporting any real news. For years Imus has made blatantly racist remarks, some directed at all black people, others directed at any black person who rises above his or her station and manages to make more money than he does.

Imus had a bizarre fixation on Bryant Gumbel when Gumbel was riding high on the Today Show. He extended his hostility to Oprah Winfrey, and at one point even called her a racist, incorrectly asserting that her book club only features black authors. Of course the race of Oprah's featured authors isn't really the issue for Imus. Oprah is black and wealthy. In his twisted world her blackness makes her undeserving of wealth. That is reason enough for him to hate her.

Neither Imus nor Andy has anything to offer in the realm of public discourse. The corporate media have allowed them to do quite well for themselves in spite of their worthlessness. When the two useless commentators got together recently, they exposed themselves as racists and the American news media as their willing accomplice.

For some strange reason Andy Rooney chose to opine on how black people choose to refer to themselves and Imus felt the need to join in.

Rooney: "I object every time I hear the words 'African-American,' you know? I don't know why we have gotten caught with that."

Imus: "Yeah, I don't either."

Rooney: "I mean, am I an 'Irish-American?'"

Imus: "What should I say, just 'black' right?"

Rooney: "Well, I don't think there's anything wrong with 'black.' Growing up, it's funny how words get to be opprobrious. The word 'negro,' perfectly good word. It's a strong word and a good word. I don't see anything wrong with that. Mostly it's not necessary to identify anyone by skin color. But I don't care for 'African-American.'"

Imus: "I won't use it anymore."

It is all very simple. No one cares what Andy Rooney or Don Imus think of the term African-American. The term doesn't refer to either of them, so their opinions are of no consequence.

There are of course differing opinions among black people about terminology preference, but that is none of Andy's business. It would be equally presumptuous to question why some Hispanics became Latino or some Orientals became Asian, or why some didn't feel the need to change. It doesn't matter what outsiders think of another groups' decisions on terminology, or of the inevitable disagreements that will arise in inter-group relationships.

The conceit and presumption of superiority exhibited by Rooney and Imus is truly astounding. It is the end result of a system that has done quite well by both of them. They have actually concluded that their little thoughts are of some importance. Imus attracts a large audience in part because he is blatantly racist. Millions of Americans know they can tune into his program and find a safe haven for their hatred.

Despite Imus' race baiting, politicians and celebrities never turn down a chance for an interview with him. This particular conversation began with a reference to Rep. Harold Ford, Jr., who loves appearing with Imus. Ford loves many things that most black people do not.

Rooney is so busy telling black people what to say about themselves that he apparently doesn't know much about his own group. His comment, "I mean, am I an 'Irish-American?,'" is just plain stupid. Millions of Americans use that term. The appeal of the words African-American began with the realization that identification with place of origin was more self-affirming for many people than a reference to skin color.

Imus doesn't care one way or the other. He would use the word "nigger" if he could get away with it and be done with any other niceties. As for Rooney, why does he pine away for the days when "negro" was more acceptable? I suspect that there is something about that time that makes Rooney nostalgic and not the meaning of any word. The embrace of the word black was an important step in the fight for civil rights and full citizenship. Black people were a lot less accepting and a lot more demanding than negroes were. The Andy Rooneys of the world never got over the change.

If CBS wants to waste money paying Andy Rooney to say nothing at all, that is their business. MSNBC should have a bigger problem on its hands with Imus. If John Kerry insists on appearing with Imus, he should be taken to task for it. Imus should have been shunned a long time ago. Butting his nose into other people's business is actually the least of his offenses.

This Imus/Andy conversation should not just be forgotten, or deemed insufficiently important for comment. Sadly, both men are influential. That means they must be taken to task when they forget their place.

The Black Commentator – Freedom Rider: Imus and Andy

*Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in **BC**. Ms. Kimberley is a freelance writer living in New York City. She can be reached via e-Mail at [margaret.kimberley@blackcommentator.com](mailto:margaret.kimberley@blackcommentator.com). You can read more of Ms. Kimberley's writings at [freedomrider.blogspot.com](http://freedomrider.blogspot.com).*