

## **NEWS TALK AM RADIO: ALL WHITE, ALL THE TIME; A REPORT ON THE PAUCITY OF NON-WHITE HOSTS ON TALK RADIO**

### **Introduction and Summary**

Blacks, Latinos, and Asians are virtually excluded from AM NewsTalk Radio as talk show hosts; that's the conclusion reached by the New York Civil Rights Coalition's from its study of AM radio stations in the New York metropolitan area.

"The results are disturbing," is the assessment of Michael Meyers, the New York Civil Rights Coalition's Executive Director, who tabulated and analyzed the radio stations' managers' responses to the Coalition's eight-question survey about the employment of non-white talk show hosts in their regular line-up. "The facts are that some AM Talk radio stations are broadcasting only whites, all the time."

"The results of the survey surprised us," continued Meyers, "because of the stated and/or assumed emphasis on diversity in other media such as TV and newspapers. There are, for example, non-white journalists, columnists and editorial staff/ board members at every daily newspaper in New York; and there are non-white talk show hosts, anchors, and commentators on TV. But, AM TalkRadio in New York, at best, is practicing tokenism; at worst, AM TalkRadio reflects an indifference to racial/ethnic diversity in the employment of news talk show hosts. The question is, **why?**"

Why, indeed, are there no or so few opportunities for non-white talk show hosts on non-minority-owned AM Radio, in one of the biggest, most diverse radio markets of our nation? Moreover, the New York Civil Rights Coalition's study has uncovered a problem of racial segregation--as stark as black and white--in AM Talk Radio: The major AM radio stations employ mainly or only Caucasian newstalk show hosts, while black talk show hosts are employed mainly or exclusively at black-owned radio.

### **Methodology**

We wanted to know whether there were any non-whites (Black, Hispanic/Non-white, and Asian) talk show hosts on the regular line-ups of AM radio stations that have all-talk or mostly-talk formats. The query was first presented to us through informal complaints from listeners to TalkRadio, and in connection with the widespread "joke" that one AM talk radio station in particular was broadcasting only whites, all the time. The suggestion was that this so-called "preference for whites" was a pattern in the New York AM radio market. To ascertain and document the facts, we devised and sent a questionnaire to the station managers and hiring authorities at those New York **AM Radio** stations with all-talk or mostly talk formats--**WABC; WEVD; WNYC; and WOR Radio**. WABC, WEVD, and WOR are commercially-sponsored radio stations, and WNYC AM is a listener and corporate-sponsored radio station. All four AM radio stations have extensive, all-day, daily talk programming.

We **excluded** from our survey **WCBS, WINS**, and other AM stations in the New York metropolitan area with either all-news or mixed programming (e.g. religious or sports/talk formats).

The stations that responded to our survey were, in the order received, WEVD, WOR, and WABC Radio. WNYC-AM did not respond; accordingly, we ascertained the information about the racial profile of WNYC talk show hosts from their web-page at "wnyc.org."

We asked the station managers and their hiring authorities to assess their own employment profile, and also invited them to interpret same to us. Their responses to our survey proved illuminating--and confirmed rumors and reports that some--indeed, most-- of these AM stations, with talk formats, employ and broadcast mostly *or only* white talk show hosts, all the time. From the stations' written answers, and from interviews, we also got an impression of the attitude of the hiring authorities and station managers about the importance and/or relevance to them of racial/ethnic diversity of talk show hosts in TalkRadio.

#### **Findings (in the order we received responses from the stations):**

**WEVD-AM: ALL-WHITE, ALL THE TIME:** The station that carries the initials for Eugene V. Debbs, has no non-white talk show hosts. It has an all-white talk show host daily line-up (Monday through Friday), starting with **Bill Mazer** in the morning, and continuing with **Ed Koch** and **Sam Greenfield** in the afternoon, followed by **Alan Colmes**, at night and into the morning.

WEVD responded "no" to the question, "Do you currently employ any non-white regular talk show hosts?" To the query, "When, if at all, in the past five years, have you had at least one non-white talk show host," WEVD's executive replied, "Other than staff relief/fill-in, I don't believe we ever have."

Tom Bird, General Manager, and Alan Eisenson, Program Director, are the WEVD executives responsible for the hiring of its talk show hosts.

**WOR-AM: ALL-WHITE, ALL THE TIME:** This station brags that its call-letters-- "WOR"-- stands for "Women On Radio." It could just as well stand for "White Women On Radio," because WOR has no non-white talk show hosts in its line-up. Monday through Friday, from morning to night, its talk show hosts are exclusively Caucasians; they include **John Gambling** ("Rambling With Gambling"); **Dr. Joy Browne**, the psychologist; **Arthur Schwartz**, ("Food Talk"); **Daria and Ken Dolan** ("The Dolans"); **Joe Franklin**; **Bob Grant**; **Joan Hamburg**; and **Joan Rivers**. The only non-white with a talk show on WOR is Luther Gatling, an African-American. However, Mr. Gatling's weekend show is a brokered program; he is not paid to be on the air. Significantly, to the memory of station executive Bob Bruno, who's responsible for WOR's hiring, WOR "has never had" any non-white talk show hosts--black, Latino or Asian.

**WABC-AM: ALL-WHITE, VIRTUALLY ALL THE TIME:** The most talked about NewsTalk radio station, whose call-letters "A B C" are the subject of the "joke"-- "Always Broadcasting Caucasians"-- responded with obfuscatory information. In answering our question

about non-white talk show hosts, its program director informed us that WABC has "two" non-white talk show hosts--**Joel Santisteban**, a Cuban-American, and **Babita Hariani**, an Hindu/Pakistani. But, Joel Santisteban is not on WABC's daily talk show schedule as a talk show host; instead, he is a host of a weekend show, "Sports/Talk NFL Gameday." He also does occasional reporting on WABC's daily news talk programs. WABC also reported Ms. Hariani as one of its talk show hosts; however, the WABC response to our survey identified Ms. Hariani as a "news reporter, who frequently hosts portions" of **the Curtis and Kuby Talk Show**.

Over the past five years, WABC had only one black talk show host, **James Golden**, who co-hosted a *weekend talk show* "for over five years," according to Phil Boyce, WABC's Program Director. WABC's Monday-Friday line-up of talk show hosts, however, is all-white, beginning with **Curtis Sliwa** and **Ron Kuby** in the morning, followed by "**Dr. Laura**" **Schlessinger**, **Rush Limbaugh**, **Sean Hannity**, and, recently, The **Steve Malzberg/Richard Bey** Show. On weekends, **Lynn Samuels** is a regular newstalk show host, as is **Mike Gallagher**; both were also past daily newstalk hosts on WABC's line-up.

Phil Boyce, Program Director, is responsible for hiring of talk show hosts at WABC AM.

**WNYC-AM: TOKENISM?:** "Listener-sponsored," and corporate-funded WNYC- AM Radio did not respond to our survey, despite several attempts to get President and CEO Laura Walker to do so. Ms. Walker, who is Caucasian, is, ironically enough, a graduate of Wesleyan University, an institution with the nickname "Diversity University." She also holds an MBA from Yale. We went to the web for information about WNYC-AM's talk show hosts and about WNYC's leadership.

Ms. Walker, according to her bio on WNYC's web page, was selected as WNYC's President and CEO "for her combination of hands-on production expertise, development expertise, leadership, vision, and her passion for public radio." Still, the only discernible non-white local talk show host on the WNYC AM line-up, judging by its web page, is Jo Ann Allen, local host of "All Things Considered." Ms. **Jo Ann Allen** appears to be African-American. The rest of the WNYC-AM line-up appears to be overwhelmingly white; its hosts include such local personalities as **Richard Hake** ("Weekend Edition"); **Brian Lehrer** ("On The Line"); **Leonard Lopate** ("New York & Company"); and **Soterios Johnson** (Midday Host, "WNYC News"). Quoting from WNYC's web page, Sosterios Johnson is described as follows: "Before you ask...it's Greek. And, so is Johnson (via translation)."

Apparently, WNYC doesn't object to identifying on its web site the ethnicity of one of its hosts. For some reason, it chose not to disclose same to us, much less answer the questionnaire from this civil rights organization about WNYC's talk show hosts in terms of their race/ethnicity.

## **Conclusions**

The widely-held perception that mainstream, majority-owned AM Talk Radio stations are broadcasting mostly or only Caucasian talk show hosts daily is accurate, and raises significant questions about the underemployment of minorities as talk show hosts at these stations, stations which broadcast in the very diverse market that is New York City and its environs. The

racial data provided us of the talk show hosts--stripped bare of their accompanying explanations, "context," justifications, and rationalizations for narrow hiring-- reflect either arrogance or disturbing patterns of insidious preferential hiring on the part of those in authority at the stations. These hiring authorities, in contrast to their reputations for being visionaries and innovative programmers, don't appear to us as either visionary or innovative; but, rather, they seem awkward or clueless, oblivious or insensitive about their responsibility for inclusive hiring. This lack of inclusiveness appears to us as a failure of leadership rather than as outright racism or the intentional exclusion of minorities.

Even at stations where non-whites are employed as talk show hosts, tokenism seems to triumph. There may be "a" black talk show host, but seldom blacks, *and* Latinos, *and* Asians among the talk show host line-ups on the stations that broadcast all-day and into the night and even into the wee hours of the morning. Whether commercially-sponsored or listener, corporate-funded, these AM radio stations possibly perceive minority talk show hosts either as hard to find or not available-- or as not "as qualified" or "as entertaining" as the Caucasians they consistently employ. At least one station manager admitted to us that he'd like to hire "a" black talk show host, but that there just aren't black stars out there who fit the station's bill and marketing approach.

Whatever the reasons, the virtual exclusion of blacks and other non-whites as talk show hosts at major AM stations--in stark contrast to minority talk show hosts' almost exclusive employment at minority-owned radio stations-- indicates a disturbing racial structure in AM Talk Radio in the New York market that has to be examined and remedied. This is a problem of de facto racial segregation that is both easily recognizable and easily fixed. It is a challenge to the stations' executives-- people of good-will, to a person, we are sure-- for prompt, corrective action.

\*This special report was prepared by Michael Meyers, Executive Director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition. Questions about the report, and requests for the questionnaire sent to the radio stations, may be addressed to Michael Meyers, c/o the New York Civil Rights Coalition's headquarters, at 3 West 35th Street (PH), New York, New York 10001; telephone, 212-563-5636; fax, 212-563-9757.