

January 17, 2008

Steve Capus  
President, NBC News  
NBC Television Group  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10112-0037

Dear Mr. Capus:

During the controversy surrounding Don Imus' racist and sexist remarks this past spring, you acknowledged that, with Imus, "there have been any number of other comments that have been enormously hurtful to far too many people. And my feeling is that ... there should not be a place for that on MSNBC. This is about trust. It's about reputation. It's about doing what's right."

We commend your acknowledgement that NBC has a responsibility to demand appropriate conduct and dialogue in its programming. That is why we are writing to you concerning comments made by Chris Matthews, host of MSNBC's *Hardball*, that demonstrate a larger pattern of overt sexism when discussing women.

During an appearance on the January 9 edition of MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, Matthews said of Senator Hillary Clinton, "the reason she may be a front-runner is her husband messed around" and that "[s]he didn't win there [New York] on her merits." Matthews has referred to Clinton as a "she devil," compared her to a "strip-teaser" and called her "witchy." He has referred to men who support her as "*castratos* in the eunuch chorus." He has suggested Clinton is not "a convincing mom" and said "modern women" like Clinton are unacceptable to "Midwest guys."

Matthews' sexism is hardly limited to his comments about Clinton; such rhetoric is just the latest in a string of sexist attacks he has made against prominent female political figures.

- During coverage of the New Hampshire primary, he said that Clinton is the only viable woman presidential candidate "on the horizon." He couldn't think of a single female governor eligible to run: "Where are the big-state women governors?" he asked. "Where are they? Name one." In fact, several of the states that currently have women governors are comparable in population to the states in which the male presidential candidates serve or have served as governor.
- In November 2006, shortly after the Democrats took the majority in Congress, Matthews asked a guest if then-presumptive Speaker-elect Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was "going to castrate Steny Hoyer" if Hoyer (D-MD) were elected House Majority Leader.
- During coverage of a presidential debate last spring, NBC News chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell was compelled to remind Matthews that Sen. Barack Obama's (D-IL) wife, Michelle, is a Harvard-educated lawyer after he focused obsessively on her physical appearance.

During the Imus controversy you expressed a hope that “we don't squander this remarkable opportunity that we have to continue this dialogue that has taken place, to continue the dialogue about what is appropriate conduct and speech, to continue the dialogue about what is happening in America. I think we have, as broadcasters, a responsibility to address those matters.”

In the middle of a heated election season where, for the first time, we have both a female candidate and an African-American candidate vying for the Democratic nomination, “appropriate conduct and speech” is more important than ever. Matthews’ history proves that when discussing prominent female figures, he is prone to overt sexism rather than civil political discourse.

We appreciate your taking the time to address our concerns and look forward to hearing from you soon.



Gloria Steinem  
Activist/Author



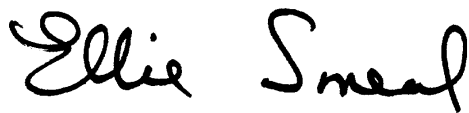
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