

A RUSH TO RUIN

The Left's Character Assassination
Campaign Against Rush Limbaugh



A Special Report from the Media Research Center

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Legendary talk-radio host Rush Limbaugh recently joined a group seeking to purchase the National Football League's St. Louis Rams, which spurred the latest attempt by the American left-wing media to destroy Limbaugh, or at the very least marginalize him as an extremist – and, they hope, marginalize the millions of American conservatives who agree with him and enjoy his radio show. Some have even wished on national television that he would die or be killed – including Chris Matthews on MSNBC on October 13. Last year, HBO's Bill Maher publicly wished he had “croaked” from a drug overdose.

Almost from the beginning of his nationally syndicated radio show in 1988, Limbaugh has exposed the worst in journalists who are supposed to honor fairness and accuracy. Even today, with Obama and the Democrats numerically dominating Washington, the leftist media portray Limbaugh not as a commentator, but as a clear and present danger who must be curtailed.

Increasingly, the Left is acting on the principle that the ends justify the means. Anything goes in an attempt to demonize Limbaugh – even the basics of Journalism 101. Obvious distortion and even outright fabrications are being used in this campaign to ruin Limbaugh. The Media Research Center has repeatedly exposed how the media's loathing of Limbaugh has led to vicious incivility and utter recklessness with basic facts. The left-wing media's character assassination campaign against Limbaugh falls into three categories:

■ **Vicious Personal Attacks:** While journalists fiercely chronicle and protest the most obscure mockeries of Barack Obama, these supposed guardians of civility have insulted Rush Limbaugh as a “troll under the bridge,” a “human vat of vitriol,” and a “car-wreck-quality spectacle.” Limbaugh's admission of an addiction of Oxycontin in 2003 wasn't an occasion for media compassion, as most addicts receive, but a chance for

anchormen to declare they were wearing a “permanent smirk.” Journalists even assigned Limbaugh’s “anti-government” rhetoric as a cause behind the bombing of an Oklahoma City federal building in 1995.

■ **Distortions of Limbaugh’s Quotes:** “News” reporters have often deliberately twisted Limbaugh’s words in TV interviews and radio routines beyond recognition. Limbaugh’s declaration that he wanted President Obama’s liberal policies to fail was presented as Limbaugh wanting the nation to fail. They mangled Limbaugh’s politically incorrect parodies, like the song “Barack the Magic Negro,” in which an Al Sharpton impersonator sings about how Barack Obama isn't an authentic black. It didn’t matter than the parody was based on a black film critic’s *Los Angeles Times* article titled “Obama the Magic Negro.” Some journalists even compared Limbaugh to Sister Souljah, a rapper who suggested after the Los Angeles riots in 1992 that the country needed “a week to kill white people.”

■ **Outright Falsehoods and Fabrications:** When leftist authors and bloggers circulated fabricated Limbaugh quotes, “news” networks and columnists picked them up without giving the slightest appearance of checking for an air date or an audio clip. Opponents of Limbaugh’s Rams bid are currently claiming Limbaugh said the slavery of blacks “had its merits,” and even claiming that Limbaugh praised James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of Martin Luther King. Supposedly professional cable networks used empty, undated citations like “Rush Limbaugh On The Radio” (CNN) and even sourced a linebacker: “Cited by James Farrior, Pittsburgh Steelers” (MSNBC). In 2007, the liberal media and Democrats in Congress rose up as one and claimed Limbaugh said that soldiers speaking in the media against America’s wars were “phony soldiers,” when Limbaugh was referring to men who made false claims of serving abroad.

Liberal media figures suggest it is a national injustice that Limbaugh has the popularity and influence that he has when his words are so vicious. But while they suggest he needs to be marginalized by the media and the Republican establishment, their coverage and analysis and mockery of Limbaugh has crossed every line of civility and now shows contempt for the elementary rules of evidence.

October 2009

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BY TIM GRAHAM
MRC DIRECTOR OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

P.J. O'Rourke: "It's the twilight of the radio loudmouth, you know? I knew it from the moment the fat guy –"

Host Bill Maher: "You mean Rush Limbaugh and Sean –"

O'Rourke: "– from the moment the fat guy refused to share his drugs...."

Maher: "You mean the Oxycontin that he was on?...Why couldn't he have croaked from it instead of Heath Ledger?" – HBO's Real Time with Bill Maher, February 8, 2008.

Democrats inside and outside the Obama White House have declared a Public Enemy Number One, and it isn't some vague concept like Poverty or Terrorism or Cancer. It's a radio talk show host named Rush Limbaugh. Over the years, liberals haven't just wished his wildly popular radio program would fail. Some have wished he were dead, on national television.

On October 13, MSNBC host Chris Matthews compared Limbaugh to Mr. Big, a villain in the James Bond movie *Live and Let Die*: "I have to tell you, Rush Limbaugh is looking more and more like Mr. Big, and at some point somebody's going to jam a CO2 pellet into his head and he's going to explode like a giant blimp. That day may come. Not yet. But we'll be there to watch."

On May 9, Obama-supporting comedian Wanda Sykes was selected by the White House Correspondents Association as their annual dinner entertainment. It was unclear whether Sykes was joking or just editorializing when she claimed that when Limbaugh said he hoped Obama fails, she declared, "He wants the country to fail. To me, that's treason. He's not saying anything differently than what Osama bin Laden is saying. You know, you might want to look into this, Sir [to Obama], because I think maybe Rush

Limbaugh was the 20th hijacker, but he was just so strung out on Oxycontin he missed his flight....Rush Limbaugh, I hope the country fails, I hope his kidneys fail, how 'bout that?"

The media's guardians of civility, the same people who arranged this national stage for death wishes, could barely speak a discouraging word. NBC briefly cited the joke "some say" went "too far" as they highlighted their story's larger theme on screen: "Is Limbaugh a Liability To The GOP?" (It wasn't: "Is Sykes a Liability To the National Media?") CNN offered both Sykes and Limbaugh their award for "Wingnuts of the Week."

Limbaugh recently joined a group seeking to purchase the National Football League's St. Louis Rams, which spurred the latest attempt by the American Left to drive Limbaugh off the radio and far away from a place in the mainstream of American life. Limbaugh and his tens of millions of listeners are routinely placed by the media on the menacing fringes.

Almost from the beginning of his nationally syndicated radio show in 1988, Limbaugh has brought out the worst in journalists who are supposed to honor fairness and accuracy. They have presented Limbaugh not merely as a commentator, but as a clear and present danger who must be curtailed. Network stars have showed more neutrality toward the humanity of Saddam Hussein than they allowed for an American talk-radio host.

I. Vicious Personal Attacks

This year's attacks on Limbaugh began with an interview taped on January 19 for Fox News. Limbaugh told Sean Hannity that the media worked to elect Obama. He pointed out that the media's elders came of age during the civil rights protests of the Sixties, and they've taught young journalists to see politics through the same prism of affirmative action: "Racism in this country is the exclusive province of the Left. We're witnessing racism all this week that led up to the Inauguration. We are being told that we have to hope Obama succeeds, that we have to bend over, grab the ankles, bend over forward, backward, whichever, because his father was black, because this was the first black President. We've got to accept this." The media establishment lined up to denounce Limbaugh and demanded that Republicans distance themselves from his claims.

■ "Does President Barack Obama finally have the *cojones* that some Democrats haven't had in the past, in saying to other Republicans 'you don't have to listen to Rush Limbaugh?'...Isn't this exactly the kind of fight that Obama wants to have?...Find somebody like a Rush Limbaugh, who they can argue is on the fringe, and fight with him?"

– MSNBC's Norah O'Donnell anchoring the 3pm ET hour of *MSNBC Live*, January 26, 2009.

■ “In addition to getting his feet wet, the new President’s also learning some things along the way....Picking a fight with that corpulent Oxycontin aficionado of right-wing talk radio, Rush Limbaugh – well, that mobilizes a bunch more on the conservative right, and eventually, it will begin to bring down your approval ratings.”

– CNN’s Jack Cafferty on *The Situation Room*, January 27, 2009.

■ “Trolls under the bridge – is that what Washington Republicans have become? Gremlins hiding along the pathway, nipping at the Democrats?”

– Chris Matthews on his syndicated *The Chris Matthews Show* on February 22, 2009 teasing a segment about Rush Limbaugh criticisms of President Obama’s policies.



■ **Host David Letterman:** “What about this bonehead Rush Limbaugh?...He gets up in Washington and he’s the keynote speaker at some function, and he comes up, he looks like an Eastern European gangster. You know, he’s got the black jacket on, the black silk shirt and it’s unbuttoned, like, oh yeah, you think Rush Limbaugh, when you think, ‘Ooh, let’s see a little flesh.’ [audience laughter] Honestly, you know, what is he doing?”

CBS Evening News anchor Katie Couric: “...Although I’m thrown by the Rush Limbaugh flesh in one sentence, but I think it’s sort of indicative of this power vacuum that exists right now in the Republican Party.”

– Exchange on CBS’s *Late Show with David Letterman*, March 2, 2009.

■ “As someone who spends a lot of time on the road, I used to find Limbaugh to be an obnoxious but entertaining companion, his eruptions more reliable than Old Faithful. But now that Limbaugh has become something else – the face of the Republican Party, by a White House that has played him brilliantly – he has been transformed into car-wreck-quality spectacle, at once scary and sad....The sweaty, swollen man in the black, half-buttoned shirt who ranted for nearly 90 minutes Saturday at the Conservative Political Action Conference.”

– *New York Times* writer Timothy Egan on the *Times* “Outposts” blog, March 4, 2009.

■ “Limbaugh delivered a blistering, frothy-mouthed rebuttal on his radio show, admonishing Steele to pump his brakes and stay in his lane...Steele predictably bowed and scraped and repented. The whole sorry episode reeked of the same cowardice that the

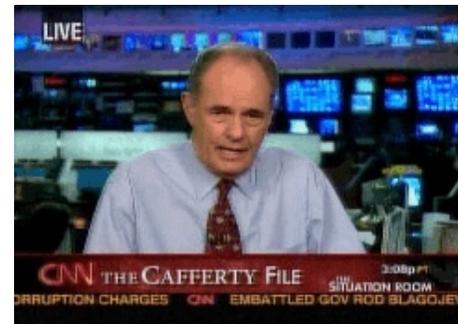
entire party is showing in the face of this howler, afraid of offending his Limbaugh-tomized minions of the far, far right.”

– ***New York Times* columnist Charles Blow on Republican Party chairman Michael Steele’s apology to Limbaugh for saying on CNN that his show was “ugly” and “inflammatory,” March 6, 2009.**

■ “If you didn’t know better this past week, you’d think Rush Limbaugh was more important than the guys in Washington....Two facts are clear about this human vat of vitriol. He relishes the attention and he sells anger as a weapon....Limbaugh’s high-handed, melodramatic, off with their heads oratory reminds me of those over-the-top movie villains. You know, the ones who issue ludicrous commands to snuff out the good guys, like James Bond’s archnemesis who wanted the supremely confident Bond – gone.”

– **MSNBC’s Chris Matthews on his syndicated Sunday program *The Chris Matthews Show*, March 8, 2009.**

■ “Michael Steele, the newly elected chairman of the Republican National Committee, down on his knees apologizing to the helium-filled poster boy of the conservative right? Pathetic....If the Republicans are ever to emerge from the long dark night they have created for themselves it will have to be without pandering to the right wing nuts that comprise Rush Limbaugh’s radio audience. Didn’t they learn anything in the last election?”



– **CNN commentator Jack Cafferty, March 10, 2009 edition of *The Situation Room*.**

Great sadness came to “dittoheads” with Rush Limbaugh’s announcement in October 2003 that he needed to take a break from his radio career to conquer a prescription-drug addiction. While liberals routinely treat other celebrities with drug addiction with great compassion and no moral judgment, Limbaugh’s fall is never forgiven or forgotten, as Bill Maher displayed at the top of this report. Even before Limbaugh’s admission, comedian Al Franken joyfully proclaimed he was “looking forward to the perp walk...I’ll be switching channels to get it from every angle.” Katie Couric mocked the radio host on the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*: “I feel actually good because I flew out here, and Rush Limbaugh sat next to me on the plane. He gave me some vitamins. Whaa! It feels good!” They were not alone:

■ “Rush Limbaugh has been more than a bit unkind to me more than once. He’s also been unkind to Al Franken, who in turn has been unkind to him. He’s taken shots at Michael Wolff, New York magazine’s media critic and Michael is hardly the retiring sort. So, here we all are, Al, Michael, and me, and the subject is Rush – made worse, no doubt, by the permanent smirk that seems to be attached to my face.”

– **CNN anchor Aaron Brown on the October 10, 2003 *NewsNight* after Limbaugh announced he was seeking treatment for an addiction to prescription pain medicine.**

■ “Empathy has never been one of Rush’s strongest suits. Do you detect anything in his broadcast yesterday that would suggest that Rush is now going to become a kinder, gentler Rush Limbaugh?”

– **CBS’s Harry Smith to Syracuse University media expert Robert Thompson on *The Early Show*, November 18, 2003, the day after Limbaugh ended five weeks of treatment for drug addiction.**

■ “I certainly have heard him [Rush Limbaugh] being very hard on the weaknesses of human beings, particularly obviously Bill Clinton, and it seems to me something like that has to change.”

– **ABC’s Charles Gibson to Bill Bennett on the November 18, 2003 *Good Morning America*.**

■ “The man behind the curtain is not the God of Family Values but a childless, twice-divorced, thrice-married schlub whose idea of a good time is to lie on his couch and watch football endlessly. When Rush Limbaugh declared to his radio audience that he was ‘your epitome of morality of virtue, a man you could totally trust with your wife, your daughter, and even your son in a Motel 6 overnight,’ he was acting....Granted, Limbaugh’s act has won over, or fooled, a lot of people. With his heartland pieties and scorn for ‘feminazis’ and ‘commie-sympys’ like West Wing President Martin Sheen (‘Martin Sheenski’ to Limbaugh), he is the darling of Red State, Fly-Over America.”

– ***Newsweek* Assistant Managing Editor Evan Thomas in the October 20 cover story, “The Real Rush.”**

The piling on Limbaugh started all over again as the legal case against him in Florida ceased three years later. The media seemed upset Limbaugh wouldn’t go to jail:

■ **Anchor Jim Avila:** “Rush Limbaugh cuts a deal. He’s smiling for the cameras in his mug shot. Was this drug suspect treated like any other Florida first offender?”

Reporter Jeffrey Kofman: “...Had he been tried and had he been found guilty, Limbaugh could have faced up to five years in prison....Limbaugh himself has not been so tolerant of other people’s problems with drug addiction.”

– **ABC’s *World News Tonight*, April 29, 2006.**



■ “Rush Limbaugh is set to sign a deal with prosecutors today after three years of prescription drug fraud investigations. But did he get off easy?... Coming up on *Good Morning America*, a rush to judgment? He’s made a deal with prosecutors. Did Rush Limbaugh get off easy?...We’re going to start the half hour with Rush Limbaugh, the conservative radio talk show host. He’s expected to sign a deal with prosecutors later today....But now there are new questions: Is Limbaugh getting off too easy?”

– **ABC’s Charles Gibson, *Good Morning America*, May 1, 2006.**

■ “Mug shot! We have mug shot! Comedian Rush Limbaugh arrested on charges of prescription drug fraud. One-half his brain, as he likes to say, tied behind his back. Symbolically, at least, both his hands cuffed behind his back.”

– **MSNBC’s Keith Olbermann on *Countdown*, April 28, 2006.**

■ “I don’t need to be lectured on ethics from a much-married, obese, drug addict.”

– **Fired CBS News producer Mary Mapes, as quoted by former reporter John Mashek in an April 7, 2006 posting to his blog on the *U.S. News & World Report* Web site.**

■ “I think Rush Limbaugh should, you know, pop a few of those Oxycontin that he probably still has laying around and go over....You know, put your money where your mouth is, O’Reilly, go do a book tour or something over there.”

– **Comedian Kathy Griffin on her own USO tour for the troops on ABC’s *Nightline*, January 20, 2006. In February 2005, Limbaugh spent several days with U.S. troops in Afghanistan.**

President Bill Clinton realized early in his first term that Rush Limbaugh was a greater obstacle to his plans for Big Government than the Republicans. In June of 1994, as Hillary's health care proposal withered, Clinton complained on St. Louis news station KMOX: "After I get off the radio today with you, Rush Limbaugh will have three hours to say whatever he wants. And I won't have any opportunity to respond. There's no truth detector." Limbaugh's success in mobilizing protests against the Clintons and the GOP takeover of Congress upset Clinton supporters in the media. They grew more aggressive in demonizing Limbaugh as a national menace, even suggesting that "anti-government" talk on radio was a key factor in inspiring terrorism like the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing:

■ "This afternoon it's not the pressure of the job that's getting to [ABC *World News Tonight* Executive Producer Emily] Rooney. It's Rush Limbaugh. Limbaugh read from a story in *TV Guide*...in which Rooney gently chastises the media for its liberal vision. It's the truth, of course - media executives know it, correspondents know it and the viewers out in TV-land certainly know it. But for a television executive to come out and say it is a real no-no, a violation of clan rules. And to have Limbaugh on your side - what could be worse? Within the liberal orthodoxy of ABC News, being championed by Rush Limbaugh is akin to being seen huddling with a child molester."

– **Writer Jeffrey Goodell in the January 1994 *Elle* magazine.**

■ "[Rush Limbaugh] is, above all, a sophisticated propagandist, an avatar of the politics of meanness and envy....He must, like all demagogues, scare his listeners, get them to believe in conspiracy, rumor....Like Reagan, Limbaugh is neither curious nor brave; he would rather tell his audiences fairy tales than have them face the world; he would rather sneer at the weak than trouble the strong."



– **Former *Washington Post* reporter David Remnick in the *Post*, February 20, 1994.**

■ "Why does anyone take Rush Limbaugh seriously?...He's entertaining. But, come on, he is to truthfulness as President Clinton is to faithfulness -- he has but a passing acquaintance with it. He's toying with you, folks, getting you all riled up with a stew of half-truths and non-truths. He's making fools of you, feeding you swill -- and you're taking it in....So keep listening if you want. But just remember that he's a charlatan."

– **Former NBC News President Michael Gartner in a *USA Today* column, July 12, 1994.**

■ “I have no doubt that if Rush Limbaugh or Pat Robertson or Ollie North ever got real power, there would be concentration camps and mass death.”

– **Radical poet Allen Ginsberg in *The Progressive*, August 1994.**

■ “The bombing shows how dangerous it really is to inflame twisted minds with statements that suggest political opponents are enemies. For two years, Rush Limbaugh described this nation as ‘America held hostage’ to the policies of the liberal Democrats, as if the duly elected President and Congress were equivalent to the regime in Tehran. I think there will be less tolerance and fewer cheers for that kind of rhetoric.”

– ***Washington Post* reporter David Broder in his April 25, 1995 column.**

■ “The bomb in Oklahoma was not ignited by Rush Limbaugh or G. Gordon Liddy, but they are significant as well as highly visible fomenters of a mood that is fairly described as hateful, i.e., full of hate...The distance between speech and action is wide and it is exceedingly difficult for anyone to understand how and why it is closed. But anyone who thinks that the right-wing zealots are merely mouthing off is fooling himself.”

– ***Washington Post* columnist and chief book critic Jonathan Yardley, May 1, 1995.**

■ “Rush Limbaugh is the king. He is also a cretinous liar, with off-the-wall opinions. And he has the audacity to call himself a journalist.”

– **Infamous anti-American CNN and MSNBC foreign correspondent Peter Arnett quoted by John Corry in *The American Spectator*, May 1995 issue.**

■ “The bombing in Oklahoma City has focused renewed attention on the rhetoric that’s been coming from the right and those who cater to angry white men. While no one’s suggesting that right-wing radio jocks approve of violence, the extent to which their approach fosters violence is being questioned by many observers, including the President... Right-wing talk show hosts like Rush Limbaugh, Bob Grant, Oliver North, G. Gordon Liddy, Michael Reagan, and others take to the air every day with basically the same format: detail a problem, blame the government or a group, and invite invective from like-minded people...Never do most of the radio hosts encourage outright violence, but the extent to which their attitudes may embolden or encourage some extremists has clearly become an issue.”



– **Today** co-host **Bryant Gumbel** adding to **President Clinton's** pointed criticism of talk radio six days after the **Oklahoma City bombing**, **April 25, 1995**.

■ “Limbaugh’s draft-avoiding, non-churchgoing, non-voting, non-fact-checking, painfully insecure triple-wife lifestyle all are topics delicately touched upon by Franken. Where I think he really hits the jackpot, though, is when he actually quotes Limbaugh directly as in: ...‘I’m sick and tired of playing the one phony game I’ve had to play and that is this so-called compassion for the poor. I don't have compassion for the poor.’ He may not have cancer, either, and I would pray that he never have to walk that particular path of pain: Yet who am I to say, or how can any of us know, the ways of God in unlocking a heart grown hard? It could happen more gently; I notice a couple of weeks ago, for instance, they shut down that ‘Rush Room’ at Blackie’s House of Beef. Limbaugh is fading right now in popularity among the restaurants patrons, according to catering manager Paul DeKoning. Is this a great country, or what?”

– **Washington Post** reporter **Phil McCombs** on comedian **Al Franken's** then-new book **Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations**, **January 19, 1996** **Style** section.

■ “Bill Clinton has not done everything right, but at least he cares for the common man. And tries to help everyone, not just the chosen rich and big business who support the conservative point of view. Anyone who would use a sticker ‘Hail to Rush Limbaugh’ shows me an incredible lack of intelligence and understanding of what needs to be done.”

– **Then-NBC Sports anchor Greg Gumbel** responding to a **February 6, 1996** letter from **Bob Wagner** of **Homer City, Pennsylvania** (who forwarded a copy to the **Media Research Center**).

■ “Kurtz dutifully recounts the extremist ravings of radio hosts, from the provincial **Howie Carr** to that nationally syndicated phenomenon **Rush Limbaugh**. These are nothing new, but Kurtz draws a few fresh conclusions....he looks beyond the controversy over Limbaugh’s half-truths and lies (which sway listeners by the millions).”

– **Boston Globe** TV critic **Frederic Biddle** reviewing **Washington Post** reporter **Howard Kurtz's** book, **Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time**, **February 26, 1996**.

II. Distortion of Limbaugh's Quotes

On Barack Obama's Inauguration Day, Limbaugh described how a "major American print publication" asked him for 400 words about his hopes for the Obama presidency. Limbaugh told his listeners he only needed four words: "I hope he fails." He acknowledged that even his staff thought that statement was controversial. "What is unfair about my saying I hope liberalism fails? Liberalism is our problem. Liberalism is what's gotten us dangerously close to the precipice here. Why do I want more of it? I don't care what the Drive-By story is. I would be honored if the Drive-By Media headlined me all day long: 'Limbaugh: I Hope Obama Fails.' Somebody's gotta say it."

Limbaugh's staff reflected anxiety at the idea of counter-programming the overwhelming wave of celebration at that moment in the media culture. Obama was lauded as a world-class sage and savior, a dramatic contrast to the media's treatment of Rush Limbaugh. What followed was a typical pattern of intentional misunderstanding. Limbaugh was portrayed as not only unpatriotic, but as beyond the pale of civility – someone the Republicans should be desperate to deny was part of their coalition.

■ "He [Limbaugh] has said, 'I hope he fails,' talking about President Obama. And Rush Limbaugh also said this, he said 'we are being told that we have to hope Obama succeeds, that we have to bend over, grab the ankles, bend over forward, backward, whichever, because his father was black, because this was the first black President.' Do you agree with Rush Limbaugh?...On that specific thing, that, 'we have to bend over because this is the first black President.' Why don't you feel like you could denounce something like that? Are you so beholden to someone like Rush Limbaugh that you can't say that?...Is that the type of rhetoric we need?"



– MSNBC's Norah O'Donnell to Rep. Mike Pence, on *MSNBC Live*, January 28, 2009.

■ "I'm really surprised about the Steele apology, because there's nothing he said in there that I found particularly outrageous. Rush Limbaugh's on the radio, he's an entertainer. Some of the things he said are ugly and incendiary. Exhibit A is 'Barack the Magic Negro' that got air time on Limbaugh's radio station. And you know, it almost seems like the Republican Party needs a Sister Souljah moment, you know, when Bill Clinton was able to stand up and break with the far left of the Democratic Party by criticizing rap music on Sister Souljah. It seems like the Republicans need somebody who's willing to stand up and say Rush doesn't represent all of the views of the Republican Party and then not rush and

apologize to him....I'll bet you whoever does that could end up as the, you know, the nominee of the party."

– *Washington Post* reporter **Keith Richburg** on **MSNBC** live coverage, **March 3, 2009.**

■ "Rush Limbaugh, the man who did more than anyone else to create the modern Republican brand in the 1990s, is now destroying it. Everyone knows he has 'jumped the shark' culturally – become a black-shirted joke even as he dominates the headlines....The truth...is that Rush's rhetoric is 'ugly' and that he was wrong to say he hoped President Obama would fail. The monster the GOP collectively created – Rush's 'dittohead' army of conservative listeners – makes life miserable for anyone who dares criticize the Great Bloviator."

– *Newsweek* senior editor **Jonathan Alter** in a column posted on **March 4, 2009.**

■ "Ari, first of all, when Rush says that all Republicans want the President to fail, Limbaugh's wrong, right?...Why are so many Republicans already kowtowing to him?...Why can't Republicans say, 'You know what, this is childish, ridiculous, Rush Limbaugh is wrong when he says Republicans want the President to fail. And we need to isolate Rush Limbaugh because we do have important issues to talk about?'"

– **MSNBC's David Shuster** to former **Bush White House** spokesman **Ari Fleischer** on **1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, March 4, 2009.**

■ "[What Republicans] need to do is to kill some sacred cows here....Taking on Rush Limbaugh would have been an impressive statement of where the party now stands. I mean, you know, for President Clinton, it was Sister Souljah. For President Obama, he had to confront Reverend Wright. This is their Reverend Wright. And unless they deal with extreme voices within their own party, within their own movement, they're not going to reach those independent voters who put President Obama over the top."



– *Newsweek's* **Richard Wolffe** on **MSNBC's Countdown**, **March 5, 2009.**

It was a seriously ideological stretch to equate Rush Limbaugh's political remarks with those of Sister Souljah, a rapper that Bill Clinton dared to criticize at a Jesse Jackson event in 1992. Political reporters credited Clinton with reaching out to the reasonable moderates and independents for denouncing the rapper, although almost

everyone did. Here's what Sister Souljah actually said to *The Washington Post* of May 13, 1992: "I mean, if black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people? You understand what I'm saying? In other words, white people, this government, and that mayor were well aware of the fact that black people were dying every day in Los Angeles under gang violence. So if you're a gang member and you would normally be killing somebody, why not kill a white person?"

Rush Limbaugh never called for racial riots or violence. To equate him in any way with a Sister Souljah is simply a smear. The media accused Limbaugh of racism based on parodies of liberal activists. "Barack the Magic Negro" was a parody of Al Sharpton, joking that Sharpton felt that Obama was making too many inroads with white voters, and wasn't authentically black. It was also a play on a March 19, 2007 *Los Angeles Times* op-ed by black film critic David Ehrenstein titled "Obama the Magic Negro," which compared the candidate to magical African-American movie characters who saved characters played by top white actors, like Will Smith in *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. But liberal media figures pretended this song was a sign of deep-seated racial animus:

■ **Matt Lauer:** "He [Rush Limbaugh] makes a living poking fun at Democrats, but now some think he has gone a little too far in taking on Senator Barack Obama...."

Reporter Michael Okwu: "Weeks before the Imus controversy, Rush Limbaugh started airing this ditty about Senator Barack Obama:"

Song parody: "Barack the Magic Negro lives in D.C."

Okwu: "Which lead some to wonder, has Limbaugh been getting a free pass?..."

Paul Waldman, Media Matters: "This is basically the radio equivalent of a black-faced minstrel show. You're going back to Amos and Andy and all of those, kind of, racist shows in the past."



Okwu: "For his part, Obama says he doesn't listen to Limbaugh but says being targeted is part of being a politician...."

Song parody: "Don't vote the Magic Negro."

Okwu: "Legitimate political satire or something darker?"

– *NBC's Today*, May 21, 2007.

Wild charges of racism also burst forth when Limbaugh worked briefly as an ESPN football analyst in 2003. He resigned after a liberal firestorm over his disparaging Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb: "The media has been very desirous

that a black quarterback can do well – black coaches and black quarterbacks doing well. There’s a little hope invested in McNabb, and he got a lot of credit for the performance of his team that he didn’t deserve.” Despite plenty of evidence of liberal sports columnists “desirous” of black advancement in the NFL (*New York Times* columnist Selena Roberts complained the NFL was “white as baking soda”), Limbaugh was glued to amateur geneticists like Jimmy the Greek Snyder and Al Campanis, who lost jobs after suggesting blacks were “bred” for athletics (Snyder) or couldn’t swim (Campanis).

■ “What must it be like to live in Rush Limbaugh’s world? A world where when anyone other than conservative, white men attempts to do anything or enter any profession, be it business, politics, art or sports, the only reason they’re allowed entry or, incredibly, attain excellence is because the standard was lowered....Edgy, controversial, brilliant. What a way to shake up intelligent sports commentary. Hitler would have killed in talk radio. He was edgy, too.”

– CBS commentator Nancy Giles on *Sunday Morning*, October 5, 2003.

■ “Derrick Jackson, who’s a columnist for *The Boston Globe*, Tim, back in July when ESPN hired Rush Limbaugh, he wrote a column about some of the comments that Mr. Limbaugh has made in the past. In the 1970s, according to this column, Limbaugh told an African-American caller ‘take that bone out of your nose and call me back.’ He goes on to say Limbaugh has always had crime and black people on the brain. He once said, ‘have you ever noticed how all composite pictures of wanted criminals resemble Jesse Jackson?’ ...Given the fact that Rush Limbaugh has made these kind of inflammatory comments in the past, was it appropriate for ESPN to hire him in this capacity?”



– NBC’s Katie Couric to Tim Russert on the October 1, 2003 *Today*. Couric did not note the source was a 1992 book by the far-left group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.

■ **Dan Rather:** “Were or were not Rush Limbaugh’s comments about an NFL player racist, a ratings grab or both?”

CBS reporter Byron Pitts: “...The debate over quarterbacks isn’t new. For decades, from little league to college, black ball players were discouraged from playing the position. The thinking was they weren’t smart enough to succeed. It was a stereotype perpetuated by the likes of one-time CBS sportscaster Jimmy the Greek.”

– *CBS Evening News*, October 1, 2003.

■ “[W]e’ve been down this road before. Jimmy the Greek Snyder lost his job with CBS Sports and Al Campanis resigned from the Los Angeles Dodgers for remarks deemed to be racially insensitive. Mr. Limbaugh is a rich and famous man, but the NAACP and at least one presidential candidate said today ESPN should can him.”

– *ABC World News Tonight anchor Peter Jennings, October 1, 2003.*

III. Outright Falsehoods and Fabrications

When the people who want to marginalize and then silence Limbaugh start a public-relations campaign, the liberal media has even ignored the basics of Journalism 101. In a September 26, 2007 conversation with a caller to his program who claimed the media never interview “real soldiers,” but just “these soldiers that come up out of the blue and talk to the media.” Limbaugh interjected, “The phony soldiers.” Less than two minutes after that exchange, Limbaugh elaborated on what he had meant, explaining exactly who he was thinking about when he offered the term: Jesse Macbeth, a left-wing hero on YouTube for describing the horrors he’d seen American troops commit – but was then charged and convicted of falsifying a military record and falsely applying for veterans’ benefits. He’d never served overseas, and was dismissed from boot camp. ABC’s Brian Ross had done a story several nights earlier, and called Macbeth a “phony soldier.”

The left and Democrats in Congress then mangled Limbaugh’s comments to claim he had said that any servicemen or women who might oppose the war in Iraq in public had been defamed by the talk show host as “phony soldiers.” They typically made no reference to the actual “phony soldiers” Limbaugh was talking about.

■ “Radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh says veterans who support withdrawing the troops are ‘phony soldiers.’ Those are his words.”

“Welcome back to *Hardball*. Democrats in Congress are going after Rush Limbaugh after the radio talk show host called those who served in Iraq but then came home to oppose the Bush administration’s war policy as ‘phony soldiers.’”

“Let me go to Ed Schultz on that. Do you think Rush Limbaugh was right to call people who opposed the war who have served ‘phony soldiers’?”

– *MSNBC’s Chris Matthews on Hardball on September 28, 2007.*

■ **Chris Matthews:** I think think you both agree that it's wrong for any commentator to refer to pol-, the political views of soldiers who come back having faced the action and been shot at and, in many cases wounded, that they have a right to speak in this country,

generally. Don't you agree with that, Heidi?"

Talk show host Heidi Harris: "Absolutely."

Matthews: "So we're agreed, so we all disagree with Rush Limbaugh."

– MSNBC's *Hardball* on September 28, 2007.

■ **Host Keith Olbermann:** "Comedian Rush Limbaugh tries to back out of his quote: Servicemen protesting the war are quote 'phony soldiers.'"

Rush Limbaugh: "I never said what you think I said."

Olbermann: "Not only did he, now he said something similar about the Congressman and Vietnam vet Jack Murtha."

– MSNBC's *Countdown*, September 28, 2007.

■ "A top Democrat is coming out guns blazing against conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh. It's an angry new shot in the dispute over the war in Iraq and Limbaugh's charge that some veterans who are criticizing the war are, in his words, quote, 'phony soldiers.'"

– CNN's Wolf Blitzer on *The Situation Room*, October 1, 2007.



■ "Why don't you just brush off these comments by Limbaugh, like an annoying gnat, instead of legitimizing them and bringing more attention to them?"

– Co-host Meredith Vieira to former Democratic presidential candidate Wesley Clark, who was pushing to get Limbaugh removed from Armed Forces Radio, on NBC's *Today*, October 3, 2007.

"Phony soldiers" was only an interesting comment when Democrats were trying to get Limbaugh marginalized. A Nexis database search at that time found no story on the scandalous, falsifying career of Jesse Macbeth on CBS, NBC, NPR, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, or *The New York Times*. Vieira wasn't kidding when she suggested NBC was going to treat his charges like he was an "annoying gnat."

Then came Limbaugh's current bid to seek ownership of the St. Louis Rams. On October 7, the demonization began with *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* sports writer Bryan Burwell, whose column demonized the entire country, as he claimed these words were Limbaugh's: "I mean, let's face it, we didn't have slavery in this country for over 100 years because it was a bad thing. Quite the opposite: Slavery built the South. I'm not saying we should bring it back. I'm just saying it had its merits. For one thing, the streets were safer after dark." Burwell then added: "I know how those words play out

in Idiot America. They are embraced as gospel.” But NFL players wouldn’t tolerate them, he said. No one asked them to tolerate them, and no one in the media seemed to ask Burwell to actually verify them with an airdate or an audio clip.

When the *Post-Dispatch* backed away from the claim, Burwell was completely unashamed of his recklessness: “So what are we left with? Well, essentially, I think we just threw a deck chair off the Titanic. There is still a huge pile of polarizing, bigoted debris stacked up on the deck of the good ship Limbaugh that he can’t deny or even remotely distance himself from.”

The *Post-Dispatch* found the quote came from a book by liberal author Jack Huberman called *101 People Who Are Really Screwing America* (a concept and title ripped off from author and former CBS News correspondent Bernard Goldberg, whose original was *101 People Who Are Really Screwing Up America*). Huberman has also written the books *Bushit* and *The Bush-Hater Handbook*, edited the book *The Quotable Atheist*, and has titled his weblog “Well to the Left of Attila the Hun.” But he was an agreeable source for the liberal media.

The national onslaught began on Monday, October 12, when MSNBC welcomed Dave Zirin of the radical magazine *The Nation* to spread the quote that Limbaugh believed “slavery had its merits.” Zirin, who was described only as a “sportswriter,” charged that players “don’t want an owner who has said slavery was a good thing because it made the streets safer.” Anchor Contessa Brewer accepted the claim as true, wondering about Limbaugh’s bid: “Is there anything the NFL commissioner, or anybody else for that matter, can do to stop it?” Zirin added that NFL players “don’t want to see a swine owning a Ram.” He closed the interview by deriding the radio host as someone who has an “open, publicly-stated contempt for people with dark skin.” MSNBC didn’t ask him why Limbaugh has often used black professor Walter Williams as a substitute host on his radio show.

Later that day, MSNBC’s David Shuster repeated a version of the fabricated quote. “An NFL spokesman says the Rams have not agreed to sell to anyone and that there are other bidders. Meantime, the Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker James Farrior says Limbaugh should be denied the privilege of owning an NFL franchise for comments like ‘slavery had its merits.’” The on-screen graphic ran the fake quote “Slavery Had Its Merits” and the source was “Cited by James Farrior, Pittsburgh Steelers.”



CNN anchor Rick Sanchez joined in on Monday afternoon: “Limbaugh’s perceived racist diatribes are too many to name. Here’s a sample. He once declared that ‘slavery

built the South. I'm not saying we should bring it back. I'm just saying it had its merits. For one thing, the streets were safer after dark.'" The on-screen graphic offered this incredibly vague footnote "Rush Limbaugh On The Radio."

On Tuesday afternoon, Sanchez returned to the subject, not to retract the quote or offer any evidence of its authenticity, but merely to note that they had run the quote the day before and read Rush Limbaugh's denial that he ever uttered the quote. Sanchez dismissed the idea of accuracy as germane, as long as black liberals remained offended: "Obviously, that does not take away the fact that there are other quotes which have been attributed to Rush Limbaugh, which many people in the African-American community and many other minority communities do find offensive."

MSNBC merely repeated the phony quote on Tuesday. Anchor Tamron Hall said NFL players "cite Limbaugh's litany of racially charged remarks over the years and those include, quote, him saying this, 'Slavery has its merits.' That is a quote." Hall then had the audacity to claim that "David [Shuster] and I are very careful about this, because you do not know a person's heart. You cannot speak for a person's motivation. But you can use their words in defining their character."

Hall's guest, Karen Hunter, compounded the fake quotes: "He even said that Dr. Martin Luther King, his killer, James Earl Ray should have a medal given to him, a medal of honor given to him. He says, 'We miss you, James.'" The absurd charge that Limbaugh praised the convicted killer of Martin Luther King also emerged from Jack Huberman's *101 People* book. On June 4, MSNBC host Rachel Maddow also used the fake quote: "When you get called racist by the guy who says the assassin of Martin Luther King, Jr. should get the Medal of Honor, consider yourself honored. Also, nauseated."

IV. Conclusion

The national media should not be expected to root for the success of Rush Limbaugh's radio program. But they should be expected to allow room for free speech, including space for the idea that some Americans do not wish that President Obama succeed in imposing a liberal agenda on the country. Instead, they have blatantly wished for Limbaugh to fail, and tried to make that failure occur. Obama had a ready ally in the attempt to transform Limbaugh into a pariah when he came to the White House.

Liberals inside and outside the media suggest it is a national injustice that Limbaugh has the popularity and influence that he has when his words are so vicious. But while they suggest he needs to be marginalized by the media and the Republican establishment, their coverage and analysis and mockery of Limbaugh has crossed every line of civility and now shows contempt for the elementary rules of evidence.

The Media Research Center

325 South Patrick Street • Alexandria, Virginia, 22314
(703) 683-9733 • www.MRC.org

L. Brent Bozell III, President

Brent H. Baker, Vice President for Research and Publications

Richard Noyes, Research Director • **Tim Graham**, Director of Media Analysis

Geoffrey Dickens, **Brad Wilmouth**, **Scott Whitlock**, **Matthew Balan**

and **Kyle Drennen**, News Division Analysts • **Michelle Humphrey**, Research Associate

Kristine Lawrence, Media Archivist

Stuart James, MRC Webmaster

To schedule an interview, please contact Colleen O'Boyle or Mary Beth Hutchins at (703) 683-5004.