

March 1, 2007

Dr. Alicia Petersen, Director  
Congressional Black Caucus Institute  
227 Massachusetts Avenue, NE Suite 201  
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Dr. Petersen,

Thank you for taking the time last Friday to discuss the CBC Institute's proposed partnership with Fox News to host presidential debates. I serve as the Executive Director of ColorOfChange.org—an online citizens' lobby of 70,000 members dedicated to advocating for the interests of Black Americans. ColorOfChange.org supports the goals of the CBC Institute, and in the spirit of advancing those goals I'm writing to express deep concern over the Institute's proposed partnership with Fox News.

Fox News is not a "fair and balanced" arbiter of information or political debate, and it has repeatedly proven itself hostile to the interests of Black Americans. Fox has a documented history of airing inaccurate, slanted reporting and political smears; advancing deeply problematic framing around race issues; and launching baseless attacks on Black political leaders.

Take for example the coverage of Senator Barack Obama's entry into the Presidential race. Fox's reporting has been so inaccurate, its attacks so vicious, that the Senator has refused to speak with Fox reporters altogether. The final straw for Obama was when Fox ran as headline news a fabricated story from an unreliable source claiming that Obama had been schooled as an Islamic fundamentalist. This is representative of a troubling pattern with Fox's reporting: they offer up controversial but unverified news, legitimize it and set the stage for it to penetrate other news outlets. In this case, the story was quickly and thoroughly debunked by other news agencies, but not before it reinforced Fox's messaging that has cast Obama as foreign, "other," and dangerous. This framing is also apparent in the way Fox reporters and commentators have repeatedly harped upon Obama's middle name, "Hussein." The frame was reinforced again last night, when Sean Hannity, host of "Hannity and Colmes," played to white fears about Blacks and the accumulation of power. Hannity raised concern about rhetoric from Obama's church which espouses Black unity and empowerment; he then created a platform for the show's invited guest, Black columnist Erik Rush, to attack Obama's church as cultish and "African separatist."

The bias is not just directed at Senator Obama. Fox consistently hosts guests who espouse bigoted, hate-filled worldviews, privileging such voices above those of credible experts on relevant social issues. Fox's own commentators and reporters regularly exhibit outmoded, problematic, and prejudicial views on race and racism. For instance, Bill O'Reilly, Fox News' top-rated commentator, has advocated strict racial profiling of Muslims at airports and suggested that immigrant rights advocates have a "hidden agenda" to bring about "the browning of America." These are just a few examples among scores.

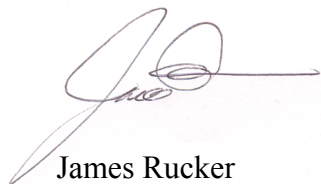
Fox has shown that it cannot be trusted to fairly and appropriately represent Black Presidential candidates or cover issues of race and racism in an honest, respectful manner. Granting Fox control over a Presidential debate would be a great disservice to any candidate of color, and more importantly, to all citizens who expect balanced, appropriate coverage of such events. To legitimize Fox News as a fair arbiter of American political debate runs counter to the CBC Institute's mission, as we understand it, and to the interests of Black Americans. Should the CBC Institute partner with Fox News, it risks

sullyng the Caucus' reputation as "the conscience of Congress" and an advocate for racial equality and justice. Whatever short-term benefits this partnership might provide for the CBC Institute could not possibly outweigh the damage done.

With the goal of enabling Black Americans to attain an equal footing in US politics, it is a priority for ColorOfChange.org to hold **all** elected officials accountable, including Black elected officials, affiliated institutions, and other allies. We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our views on this matter. We hope you will reconsider your proposed partnership with Fox News, and we are committed to working with the CBC Institute in whatever ways possible to ensure that the goal of sponsoring lively debate in advance of the 2008 election can be met without Fox News' participation.

I will follow up by phone to ensure that you receive this letter. You can reach me at [REDACTED]. I look forward to speaking with you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Rucker", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

James Rucker  
Executive Director  
ColorOfChange.org

Cc: Rep. Bennie Thompson  
Rep. James Clyburn  
Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick  
Rep. Melvin Watt

## **An overview: Fox News and its problem with African-Americans**

Fox News' race problem comes more clearly into focus when you look not only at what Fox's own reporters and commentators say, but also at which guests are invited, what kinds of ideas are given voice, and how those ideas are introduced and framed by Fox's on-air personalities. Fox's broadcasters will occasionally say something shockingly inappropriate, but more often they leave it to their invited guests to actually express bigoted opinions, while framing those guests as respectable, authoritative and mainstream, asking just the right questions, and usually giving little or no air time to anyone who would challenge their views. Other times, they frame issues to convey a racist message, without conveying the statement themselves.

It might be easy to dismiss one or two inappropriate comments by Fox's guests as the inevitable result of reporting on news and opinions in a society that has been shaped by racism. But an honest, thorough examination of Fox's record reveals an undeniable, overwhelming and consistent trend of giving a privileged voice to bigoted and problematic views on race and racism, while shutting out other views.

Our staff drew from *Media Matters* and *News Hounds* reports to create a list of examples that illustrate this trend. For live video and context, go to <http://www.colorofchange.org/fox/>. It contains a live version of this page with active links. For a video that details Fox's attack on Senator Obama go to <http://www.foxattacks.com>.

### ***Denigration of Black people and Black institutions***

On Hannity & Colmes, Reverend Jesse Lee Peterson and nationally syndicated radio host Mike Gallagher smeared the African American holiday Kwanzaa and attacked its founder. Peterson declared: **"Kwanzaa is a racist, pagan, Marxist holiday"** and then claimed that the **"so-called seven principles of Kwanzaa are socialist, Marxist, separatist ideas."** Peterson attacked Kwanzaa founder Maulana (Ron) Karenga, calling him a "racist" who "want[s] to get rid of God" and saying he committed a felony in the early 1970s and led a movement "fighting against blacks and whites uniting together." Peterson told co-host Alan Colmes that the United States has no need for Kwanzaa because "we are a Christian nation, Alan, and we already believe in Christ." He declared that **if "a white man started a white holiday, seven-day white holiday, black folks would be burning down America."** Gallagher, who was filling in for co-host Sean Hannity, asserted that Kwanzaa is a "fake holiday" that was meant to "tweak white America back in 1966" and now serves to "secularize the Christmas season."

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200412230012>

On Hannity and Colmes, host Sean Hannity attacks Senator Obama, essentially, for being Black—i.e. for being a member of a Black church that espouses Black unity and empowerment. Hannity created a platform for the show's invited guest, Black columnist Erik Rush, to attack Obama's church as cultish and "African separatist." Discussing the Church's rhetoric, Rush said that he "interpolated" the words "black" for "white" and "Suddenly, I was looking at this really scary doctrine. You know, **it was something that you'd see in more like a cult or an Aryan Brethren church...** I would go beyond saying they're Afrocentric. They're African centric. **They refer to themselves as an African people and that somewhat disturbs me from the viewpoint of well, do they consider themselves Americans? Do they consider themselves Christians? Are they worshipping Christ? Are they worshipping African things black?"**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEAC\\_PcqxAM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEAC_PcqxAM)

Commenting on Hannity & Colmes about the speakers at Coretta Scott King's funeral, Mary Matalin said, **"I think these civil rights leaders are nothing more than racists" who are keeping "their African-American brothers enslaved."** Continuing, Matalin claimed that "they're keeping [their] constituency, they're keeping their neighborhoods and their African-American brothers enslaved ... by continuing to let them think that they're -- or forced to think that they're victims."

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200602090003>

On Hannity & Colmes, Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson argued that the controversy surrounding remarks made by nationally syndicated radio host Bill Bennett, linking crime rates to abortions by blacks was simply "an attempt by the liberals to prevent white, conservative Republicans from speaking the truth about black America." Peterson then suggested that **"the root cause of crime is a lack of moral character."** He explained that "crime and out-of-wedlock birth, black folks having babies without being married, and stuff like that is out of control." According to Peterson, **"Not all ... but most of them lack moral character. Look what they did to the [Louisiana Super]dome. In three days, they turned the Dome into a ghetto."**

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200510030005>

Sean Hannity defended a controversial remark by Bill Bennett that **"if you wanted to reduce crime ... you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down."** Hannity echoed Bennett's own false claim that the remark was not his "theory" and that Bennett was **"quot[ing] from a book."** Bennett purported to explain the comment by falsely claiming that he was simply reiterating a theory presented in the book *Freakonomics* by authors Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. But, neither Levitt, nor the book, discuss "the racial implications of abortion and crime," as Bennett did.

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200603130004>

On Hannity & Colmes, discussing O.J. Simpson, former Los Angeles Police Department detective and Fox News contributor Mark Fuhrman asserted that the type of "people" he "dealt with ... for 20 years" will **"kill somebody and go have some chicken at KFC. You will catch them eating chicken and drinking a beer after they just murdered three people."** Fuhrman added that **"these people are out there. They're all over the place."**

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200611200003>

### ***Stoking white fear of loss of power***

On *The Big Story*, John Gibson urged viewers to **"[d]o your duty. Make more babies,"** because he had found out, from a recently released report, that nearly half of all children under the age of five in the United States are minorities. Gibson added: **"You know what that means? Twenty-five years and the majority of the population is Hispanic."** Gibson later repeated: **"To put it bluntly, we need more babies."**

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200605120006>

Regarding the issue of amnesty for undocumented immigrants, Bill O'Reilly claimed that The New York Times and "many far-left thinkers believe the white power structure that controls America is bad, so a drastic change is needed." O'Reilly continued: **"According to the lefty zealots, the white Christians who hold power must be swept out by a new multicultural tide, a rainbow coalition, if you will."**

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200605170006>

Referring to news coverage of the May 1 "Day Without Immigrants" demonstrations on Fox News Watch, Newsday columnist James P. Pinkerton claimed that **"[t]he media like brown people, but they like black people more."** He then added: **"[W]hat they really dislike, of course, is white people."**

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200605080017>

David Horowitz: **"The only lynch mob in America that is allowed to exist in America is a black lynch mob."**

[http://www.newshounds.us/2007/01/18/fox\\_news\\_bigotry\\_its\\_not\\_just\\_for\\_sean\\_hannity\\_any\\_more.php](http://www.newshounds.us/2007/01/18/fox_news_bigotry_its_not_just_for_sean_hannity_any_more.php)

### ***White victimization; denial of racism***

**"Most of the discrimination today is from black folks toward white Americans".** - Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson, "Hannity & Colmes", 1/2/07

[http://www.newshounds.us/2007/01/08/outrageous\\_quote\\_of\\_the\\_week\\_week\\_of\\_january\\_1st.php](http://www.newshounds.us/2007/01/08/outrageous_quote_of_the_week_week_of_january_1st.php)

Regarding Senator Biden's recent inappropriate characterization of Barack Obama, Bill O'Reilly said: "Instead of black and white Americans coming together, white Americans are terrified. They're terrified. Now we can't even say you're articulate? We can't even give you guys compliments because they may be taken as condescension?"

<http://mediamatters.org/items/200702060012>