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*Think Piece  
The Double Standard of Righteous Indignation  
by Edward Rhymes*

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Some time ago as I was manically flipping through the cable channels (yes, I know, a very *male* attribute) when I happened upon a talk show that had as one of its guests, an actor from the HBO hit series *The Sopranos*. During the course of the interview the host asked, rather giddily, "Who will be the next person to get 'whacked' on the show?" This question, initially, had little or no value to me because I'm not a big fan of the series. However, as my search for that nirvana-like channel continued (nirvana-like meaning a channel that could hold my attention for a solid 10 minutes), I began to remember the furor and outrage that *gangsta* rap was met with some years ago. I began to reflect on the query of that talk show host. I began to recollect how the mainstream media, conservative and liberal politicians and pundits condemned it as being too "brutal" and too "violent" (an assessment, by the way, I didn't totally disagree with).

Nevertheless, I saw a clear ethnic double standard in how sex, drugs and violence is viewed and addressed. This discussion becomes even more important as 50 Cents is being castigated as a promoter of violence and gunplay in his new movie "Get Rich or Die Tryin'." If the brutality and violence in gangsta rap was truly the real issue, then shouldn't a series like *The Sopranos* be held to the same standard? If we are so concerned about bloodshed, then how did movies like "The Godfather," "The Untouchables" and "Goodfellas" become classics? How did these films escape the wrath of *righteous* indignation? I tried imagining Ice T, Ice Cube or NWA, in their heyday, being asked (in the same lighthearted fashion as the above-mentioned talk show host): "So who are you going to 'smoke' on your next album?" Somehow I couldn't imagine that happening.

Bill O'Reilly aimed his media WMDs at the hip-hop artist Ludacris when Pepsi made him a spokesperson for their soft drink. O'Reilly encouraged all people concerned with Ludacris' unflattering characterization of women as sex objects and his potential to "further negatively" impact our nation's young people to boycott Pepsi. Many of O'Reilly's loyal followers jumped on the "Ludacris-bashing" bandwagon and Pepsi eventually dropped Ludacris as a spokesperson. However, in all my research, not once did I discover that Ludacris was

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ever sued for sexual harassment or charged with sexual misconduct. The same cannot be said of Mr. O'Reilly and yet he still holds a position as a moral authority with millions of Americans. This episode, once again, showed this country's propensity to embrace an ethnic double standard and a hypocritical use of *righteous indignation*.

"Sex & The City," a series that focused, by and large, on the sexual relationships of four white women, was hailed as a powerful demonstration of female camaraderie and empowerment. This show, during its run, was lavished with critical praise and commercial success while hip-hop and rap artists are attacked by the morality police for their depiction of sex in their lyrics and videos. The don't-blink-or-you'll-miss-it appearance of Janet Jackson's right bosom during the Super Bowl halftime show a little less than two years ago, caused more of a furor than the countless commercials (also aired during the Super Bowl) using sex to sell anything from beer to cars to gum. Not to mention the constant stream of commercials that rather openly talk about erectile dysfunction medication. Yet, not a peep or a murmur of *righteous indignation*.

Let's take a look at a quote made by a certain political pundit: "There's nothing good about drug use. We know it. It destroys individuals. It destroys families. Drug use destroys societies. Drug use, some might say, is destroying this country. And we have laws against selling drugs, pushing drugs, using drugs, importing drugs. And the laws are good because we know what happens to people in societies and neighborhoods, which become consumed by them. And so if people are violating the law by doing drugs, they ought to be accused and they ought to be convicted and they ought to be sent up." This statement was made Rush Limbaugh on October 5, 1995 on his now defunct television talk show. Fast forward to October of 2003 and we discover that *Rush was exposed for buying illegal drugs from his former housekeeper. He had become addicted to a drug called "baby blues" (OxyContin pills), which he started using because of chronic, severe pain. Supposedly, the housekeeper met Limbaugh in parking lots where they exchanged sandwich bags of pills for cigar boxes filled with cash. He then admitted on his radio show that he is addicted to drugs that are usually prescribed for pain. Besides OxyContin, the drugs in question also include Lorcet and Hydrocodone. Mr. Limbaugh has since completed a 30-day treatment program. His minions, who had castigated and ridiculed others who were bound by addiction, staunchly stood by him. The Limbaugh faithful continued to look to him as a beacon of political and moral clarity. There was practically no moral outrage from the same people who rarely passed up an opportunity to bash low-income and minority addicts. Rush escaped the judgment of righteous indignation – and according to Rush himself he should have been "sent up."*

*Finally, as we embarked upon this new NBA season the media had been all-abuzz with the NBA's new dress code – no t-shirts, no jerseys and absolutely no bling. This new approach to attire in the NBA was said to be a mandate from corporate sponsors who believed that professional basketball was badly in need of a facelift to give it more respectability. Last season's melee in Detroit notwithstanding; is corporate America really the one that NBA should be taking its moral cues from? Did the business attire of certain TYCO executives make their embezzlement and mismanagement of funds any more acceptable? Ask the shareholders of now-defunct ENRON if the loss of their hard earned money was easier to swallow because those guilty of squandering and pilfering their life savings were wearing three-piece suits. Martha Stewart has done more prison time than Ron Artest, but let's just take a wild guess as to which mainstream America deems a more suitable choice as a paragon of virtue.*

*One of the aspects of white privilege is to have immunity or special freedom from some liability or burden, which Blacks and other groups are subject to. By this I do not mean that whites are not punished for crimes or are totally exempt from hardship. However, when a white person is found guilty of a crime, they as a group do not carry the stigma of that crime. When a white person displays what might be considered negative or anti-social behavior, it is usually that person's burden to carry alone and not seen as endemic "white" behavior. These perceptions are entrenched in the practice of minimizing and/or excusing the faults and flaws of those in the privileged group, while simultaneously magnifying and vilifying those same*

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*faults and flaws in people of color. This article was not written as a proverbial tit-for-tat piece, but rather as a means for us to examine the continuing inequities in how people of color are perceived in comparison to their white counterparts. Until those who practice it abandon this double standard, we are only paying lip service to the ideas of equality and justice. In the final analysis, the practitioners of this most destructive hypocrisy only prove that their indignation is any thing but righteous.*

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