

Has the Black Leadership Abandoned Roland Martin?

Written by Trice Edney Newswire
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The furor over CNN contributor Roland Martin's controversial Super Bowl tweets and his subsequent suspension by the network has, curiously, been devoid of comment by Black leadership.

"I am very embarrassed at the silence within the Black leadership community," Raynard Jackson, a Washington, D.C.-based political strategist and commentator, told the AFRO.

In a related commentary sent to the AFRO, Jackson called out civil rights leaders and Black lawmakers including Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Ben Jealous, Marc Morial and the Congressional Black Caucus.

"These are the same people who would call Roland Martin and ask to come on his TV show when they need to promote an issue or when they need him to do a column that would advance their cause," Jackson said. "But, now that he is in trouble, not one voice is to be heard supporting him."

Causing the uproar was Martin's Super Bowl Twitter commentary, including opinions on an ad depicting soccer star David Beckham in underwear.

"If a dude at your Super Bowl party is hyped about David Beckham's H&M underwear ad," he wrote, "smack the ish out of him!"

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He later wrote on Facebook, “Who the hell was that New England Patriot they just showed in a head to toe pink suit? Oh, he needs a visit from #teamwhipdatass.”

Gay rights watchdog group GLAAD immediately decried the posts, urging CNN to fire the political analyst. And, despite Martin’s explanation that his comments were not meant to be homophobic, followed by an apology and, later, a promise to meet with GLAAD, CNN on Feb. 8 decided to suspend the commentator.

In cyberspace, both support for and criticism of Martin has been effusive.

Responding to Martin’s comments that he would meet with GLAAD, Frances Marie wrote on Martin’s Facebook page: “Make sure you bring them a copy of ALL of your ‘Roland Rules’ and highlight all of the whipdatass comments made about heterosexuals and ask them why they didn’t have an issue with those.”

Juan Richardson also wrote: “In no way shape or fashion did his comment mention sexual orientation or violence against gays. It is commonplace for Black folk to use the phrase ‘smack the ish out of...’ and know perfectly well that no harm is intended. The problem is that GLAAD, while purporting itself as an organization that defends the rights of the LGBT community (as a whole) is headed by hypersensitive ‘non-Blacks’, who don’t grasp Black lingo. This is a non-issue.”

Others denounced CNN’s treatment of Martin as unfair, given its failure to punish other contributors who have made similarly controversial comments. For example, Dana Loesch recently cheered members of the United States Marine Corps for urinating on the bodies of dead Afghans and suggested if she were there, she’d do the same. Loesch remains on the air and neither she nor CNN has apologized.

“The clear difference between the two cases? A sense that CNN’s audience was offended,” and GLAAD’s well-established system for influencing public opinion, Alyssa Rosenberg wrote in a Feb. 8 article on ThinkProgress.org.

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She later added, “Loesch’s comments...offended human rights advocates and decent people everywhere. But that’s not the same as running afoul of an organization with a well-established plan to respond to these kinds of events and a well-worn path to media outlets who would cover and amplify their response.”

More recently, syndicated radio host Tom Joyner called on Martin to give an apology, regardless of the context in which he wrote his comments.

“Roland, we love you and need you full force to be able to do what you do—represent us and our views on CNN and other arenas,” Joyner wrote in an open letter to Martin posted on Joyner’s blog Feb. 10. “In order to continue your role on that show, on the speaking circuit, etc., it’s time for you to make a sincere apology to GLAAD. When people are offended by something we say or do, it doesn’t matter what our intentions are. The job of the offender is simply to apologize and learn a lesson about what to say or do going forward.”

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