

## Jackson's SF visit touches on Imus, Katrina

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Sitting with a group of Bay Area religious and community leaders Monday, April 23, the Reverend Jesse Jackson's voice rose and fell with its trademark cadence as he addressed issues ranging from media reform and radio shock jock Don Imus to Hurricane Katrina and the need for solidarity across racial and gender lines.

"It's not just about black bashing or gay bashing or Latino bashing or Asian bashing," said Jackson, who added that the best way to fight hateful ideologies is through collective effort. "That makes us the majority; it's about building a coalition."

Jackson, in town to speak at Stanford's annual Cesar Chavez commemoration, held a news conference and forum at the Reverend Amos Brown's Third Baptist Church, drawing approximately 75 concerned citizens, religious leaders, and community activists.

Discussion centered on Imus, who was fired from both CBS and MSNBC over controversial remarks made about the Rutgers women's basketball team on April 4.

**Jackson praised the actions taken by the networks, along with efforts from groups such as the NAACP, the National Association for Black Journalists, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which all called for his dismissal.**

**"With the Imus campaign it was important for us to say 'stop it,' no one has the right to degrade us," he said.**

"We support free speech, but there's also slander speech," he continued, adding that "public airwaves must not be used as conduits to promote racial, gender and class hatred." Imus has drawn fire for years from race, gender, and sexual equality advocates for his remarks, which in the past have attacked gays as well as communities of color and politicians. Comments made in 2006 about the stars of movie *Brokeback Mountain* drew criticism from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and an apology from MSNBC. With his most recent diatribe, organizations representing a broad cross section of communities rallied together in protest. Jackson said that he hopes this marks the beginning of a broader union that will galvanize a greater discussion around media reform and public decency, similar to the way marches in Selma and Montgomery, Alabama marked the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

"We challenge the major media outlets to refine their standards of decency. ... The poison on the air needs to be detoxified."

Jackson also criticized the government's response to victims of Hurricane Katrina and wondered how President Bush "can rebuild Iraq but he can't rebuild New Orleans?"

His critique also targeted the criminal justice system, which he said "focuses more on recidivism than education, because there's no money in education."

Before closing, Jackson again put an emphasis on solidarity in the face of opposition. "Right wing ideologues don't discriminate," he warned. "Don't limit democracy to your own situation."

In 2004, Jackson drew some criticism from the LGBT community for not supporting legislation favoring same sex marriage, but along with the Rainbow/Push Coalition – the social change organization he founded – he has long been a supporter of cross coalition unions.