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To the Editor:

**Re: "O'Reilly Eats in Harlem, Talks About It, Then Hears About It"  
(Metro Section, September 27, 2007)**

Upon listening to Bill O'Reilly remarks, it is clear to me that the recent outrage regarding his comments concerning his interactions with African Americans Sylvia's restaurant in Harlem is unwarranted and misguided.

Notably, I am one of the "far left scoundrels" that Mr. O'Reilly so frequently derides on his show. I am a New York City civil rights lawyer, and my political and social views are, in general, diametrically the opposite of those expressed by Mr. O'Reilly. Thus, when I first read about the chorus of condemnation against Mr. O'Reilly for his remarks, I was inclined to find him "guilty as charged." However, in this instance, the condemnation is unwarranted.

Rev. Sharpton has averred that he and Mr. O'Reilly dine together in Harlem on an annual basis, and that his experiences with Mr. O'Reilly have been cordial, respectful, and pleasant – adjectives that are not frequently used in media descriptions of Mr. O'Reilly. However, having worked with Rev. Sharpton on civil rights issues, I have come to respect his judgment, and there is no obvious reason why he would falsely inflate Mr. O'Reilly's sociability.

I have spent the last 14 years fighting racism and intolerance in the workplace. I have litigated cases that were based almost exclusively on racial slurs. I have learned that it is essential to distinguish between remarks that are purposely hateful, as opposed to those that are merely inarticulate or overly blunt. This is particularly true in communications relating to the issue of race, which has always been a particularly divisive issue in the United States.

In many instances, well-intentioned individuals have suffered unwarranted castigation for language that they used in efforts to dispel harmful racial or ethnic stereotypes. Indeed, it is difficult to challenge an offensive stereotype without initially

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describing the stereotypical image, trait or conduct. This is far different than referring to a stereotype as fact, or using a stereotype in an effort to denigrate or demean.

In fact, I have found that intolerant individuals generally do not (at least in public discourse) blatantly use slurs or conspicuously hateful language. For example, Patrick Buchanan -- America's most articulate hate monger and anti-Semite -- has made a virtual career of hate speech, aimed particularly at Jewish Americans, with only the most limited recourse to outright slurs.

Mr. O'Reilly's comments were not particularly artful. However, he was speaking extemporaneously on national television. Who among us would be able to carefully calibrate each word in such circumstances?

More importantly, the context of Mr. O'Reilly's remarks indicates that he was trying to dispel harmful stereotypes and commonly held generalizations. In summary, it appears that Mr. O'Reilly's heart was in the right place. I would much prefer Mr. O'Reilly's inarticulate challenge of stereotypes to Mr. Buchanan's well-crafted message of hate.



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