Limbaugh Attacks D.C.’s Busboys and Poets

By Valencia Mohammed
Special to the Afro

Radio personality Rush Limbaugh, known for his racist tirades, attacked popular D.C. bookstore, Busboys and Poets, because “it disses his two children’s books.” The ultra-conservative talk show host was upset that the executive director of Teaching for Change remarked on a C-Span network that it specialized in children’s books written by and about people of color and many times ignored best sellers, like that of Rush Limbaugh.

Teaching for Change, a nonprofit organization, operates the bookstore located at 14th and V. It provides teachers and parents with the tools to create schools where students learn to read, write and change the world.

Deborah Menkart, executive director of Teaching for Change, explained its concept. “Only one out of 10 children’s books being published currently is by or about people of color. These are also not the books that are on the best-seller lists. In fact, one of the books on the best-seller list for children right now is by Rush Limbaugh. You will not find that book in our bookstore,” Menkart said. “It’s also getting lots of awards. To flip the trend, flip the script. 90 percent of the children’s books that we sell at the bookstore – the independent, progressive, nonprofit bookstore here at Busboys and Poets -- are by people of color.”

Jay and Bey ‘On the Run’
 Fans Flock From All Over

or about people of color. Those are the books that we find and we feature. So we prove there is a market for them,”

Limbaugh played the audio of the remarks for his listeners. Things went wild from there. “The point here is really not that my books got dissed. I’m just taking the occasion of that here to make another point. This woman would be stunned to find out that my books have people of color in them, and she would likewise be shocked and stunned to learn that the “people of color,” as she talks of them, in my books are heroes,” said Limbaugh on a June telecast. “Who looks at the world this way? Barack Obama on down looks at the world this way.”

Limbaugh continued. “She said, ‘We’re not breaking even.’ Maybe that’s their objective. That’s right. Nonprofit means they don’t dare show a profit. They can’t show a profit. Profit’s evil. But they’re not even breaking even. And so you say who runs a business this way? Nobody with any brains runs a business this way. This is exclusionary, it’s racist, it’s bigoted, and it’s the opposite of everything they claim to be. And it’s exactly what they accuse us of being. They claim that they’re tolerant. They claim they’re open-minded. They claim that they are colorblind and all that. They are the most bigoted, racist people. They exclude here and exclude there and then they don’t make any money and they can’t figure out why.”

“Limbaugh is distorting the definition of racism,” Teaching for Change’s contributing author Enid Lee explained. “One of the things that we have to make clear is that racism is about power and the ability of one group of persons, based on their race, to control institutions like publishing and marketing. What Teaching for Change is doing is reversing trends of racism by ensuring that people of color have a voice and that their lives are represented in children’s literature.”

Limbaugh continued to rant on the airwaves. “These people are loony. They simply are dumb. They don’t have the slightest idea what they’re doing. And they happen to be running the country. And I don’t just mean in Washington. People like this are in charge of the public school system. People like this are teaching your kids. People like this are running day care. People like this show up at Obama’s fundraisers.…”

“They think that’s how the world works. And it is what the Democrat Party is becoming, and it is this demographic, the way the left or a Democrat looks at the country and sees it versus the way a conservative Republican looks and sees it, those two disparate views of the country are getting wider and wider and further and further apart.”

Menkart noted that people do come in large numbers to the Teaching for Change bookstore in search of the titles that reflect the diversity of the country we live in. In addition to featuring children’s books by and about people of color, Teaching for Change vets titles for historical accuracy. As a result, in the respect Booklist notes, Limbaugh’s books fall way short in that category.