

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

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May 9, 2007

Jonathan Klein
President
CNN/U.S.
1 Time Warner Center
New York, NY 10019-6038

Dear Mr. Klein:

As one of the nation's most respected and influential news organizations, CNN has a special responsibility to the public to be as accurate as possible in its reporting. When CNN journalists make serious factual errors, they have an obligation to correct them.

Unfortunately, CNN's Lou Dobbs refuses to correct an irresponsible and dangerous assertion that he made about a public health issue despite unequivocal evidence of its falsehood. The error was pointed out by Lesley Stahl during her May 6 profile of Mr. Dobbs on "60 Minutes."

On his May 7 show, Mr. Dobbs said he stands "100 percent behind" the claim that there had been 7,000 new cases of leprosy in the United States over a recent three-year period – and he suggested, without evidence, that a rise in the prevalence of leprosy was due in part to "unscreened illegal immigrants" coming to the United States. He also attacked Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center, who appeared in the "60 Minutes" piece and who has been a frequent critic of Mr. Dobbs' one-sided and irresponsible reporting.

The source for Mr. Dobbs' claim of 7,000 leprosy cases over three years is the late Madeleine Cosman, described by reporter Christine Romans on Mr. Dobbs' May 7 show as a "highly respected medical lawyer." In fact, Ms. Cosman had no medical training and was well known for her specious and decidedly unscholarly rants about immigrants. She told a 2005 anti-immigration conference, for example, that "most" Latino immigrant men "molest girls under 12, although some specialize in boys, and some in nuns."



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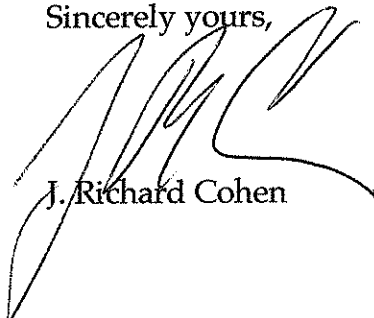
The actual facts about leprosy are not in dispute. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported last year that leprosy cases in the United States peaked in 1985 at 361 and have declined since, even as the number of undocumented immigrants in this country has increased dramatically.

It is highly irresponsible of Mr. Dobbs to rely on disreputable sources while ignoring credible information that does not support his views. And given the current anti-immigrant climate, it is dangerous to present such false claims about a serious public health issue and demonize an entire group of people in the process.

This is hardly the first time that Mr. Dobbs has chosen to rely on dubious sources with a virulent anti-immigrant agenda. He has repeatedly given legitimacy to individuals and groups who make unsupported claims like the Aztlan conspiracy theory, which asserts that Mexico is involved in a secret plot to "reconquer" seven states in the American Southwest.

Given that Mr. Dobbs refuses to retract his leprosy claim, we believe it is the responsibility of CNN as a respected news organization to do so. We suggest the appropriate place for the correction is the same place where the falsehood was promulgated: on Mr. Dobbs' show. We urge you to take prompt action in this regard.

Sincerely yours,



J. Richard Cohen

cc: Lou Dobbs
Howard Kurtz
Media Matters for America
Jim Romanesko