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August 28, 2012

Ms. Janet H. Brown
Executive Director
Commission on Presidential Debates
1200 New Hampshire Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ms. Brown:

We are writing regarding the Commission's failure to choose a journalist of color as a moderator for the upcoming presidential debates. We join with journalists of color and civil rights groups in urging the Commission to remedy this situation.

The Commission's decision not to select a journalist of color is hard to justify. People of color make up more than 35 percent of the U.S. population, and there are many prominent journalists of color who would make excellent moderators. Furthermore, the Commission's initial response to the criticism of its selections failed to acknowledge legitimate concerns about the importance of ensuring that moderators will ask questions about issues impacting communities of color.

Mainstream media outlets — including the very outlets the debate moderators work for — have an unfortunate history of marginalizing these issues in their coverage. Our nation's media inequality extends to ownership of broadcast properties. People of color own very few media outlets and own none of the national news networks on which the debates will air.

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Notwithstanding these continuing problems, we were encouraged that Commission Co-Chair Mike McCurry met with the National Association of Hispanic Journalists to discuss this topic. NAHJ President Hugo Balta reported that Mr. McCurry welcomed feedback from journalists of color in suggesting potential questions for the debates.

We sincerely hope that this outreach succeeds in generating meaningful discussions during this year's debates, and that the Commission will correct this situation going forward by ensuring that our nation's diversity is reflected in future moderator selections.

Sincerely,

Craig Aaron, president and CEO, Free Press
Joseph Torres, senior external affairs director, Free Press