

Our so-called conversation about the Juan Williams firing

By [Adam J. Copeland](#)

October 22, 2010

Some of the best coverage of the [firing](#) of National Public Radio news analyst Juan Williams has been [NPR's own](#). But the broader conversation has quickly become a chorus of ridiculousness:

- Republican politicians are [pushing](#) to strip NPR of federal funding-which accounts for a small portion of its budget, all [received indirectly](#) via Corporation for Public Broadcasting funding of local stations and of foundations that support NPR.
- Some commentators are saying Williams's [first amendment rights](#) have been violated, missing the distinction between one's right to free speech and one's duty as a journalist to exercise this right while upholding the standards of good reporting and analysis.
- Others have even [suggested](#) that NPR acted out of racism. (Williams was one of the organization's few senior black reporters.)
- Members of local NPR affiliates are talking about [withholding pledges](#). Pastors I know are saying they will never again give to public radio again-pastors who also argue against congregation members withholding donations because of mistakes by church leaders.

Our national conversation has become a kneejerk festival, celebrating whoever can have the most sensational reaction in the shortest amount of time. I'm all for honest dialogue about prejudice and fear, about public funding of the news, about the distinction between sound reporting and jabbering-head TV. By all means, let's talk.

But please, let's think before we speak.