

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JUAN WILLIAMS, POLITICAL COMMENTATOR  
AND FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

SUBJECT: WILLIAMS HAS VOICED SUPPORT FOR CURRENT GOP EFFORTS TO STRIP HIS  
FORMER EMPLOYER OF ITS FEDERAL FUNDING.

MODERATOR: MARK HAMRICK, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**MARK HAMRICK:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the  
National Press Club. My name is Mark Hamrick, a broadcast journalist for the Associated  
Press. And I'm the 104<sup>th</sup> President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading  
professional organization for journalists, committed to our profession's future through  
our programming, events such as this, as well as trying to foster a free press worldwide.  
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Journalism Library to the public, you can visit at [www.press.org/library](http://www.press.org/library).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those  
of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker, as well as  
working journalists who are Club members. And, if you hear applause in our audience,  
we always try to remind that we do have members of the general public attending. So, it's  
not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences today. And our  
luncheons are featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press  
Club. And that's available, free, for download on iTunes. You can also follow the action  
on Twitter, using the hash tag-- #NPCLUNCH.

After our guest speech concludes, we'll have a Q and A. And I intend to ask as  
many questions as time permits. And now it's time to introduce our head table. And I'd

ask each of you up here to please stand up briefly as your name is announced. And ask the audience to hold applause until after all are introduced.

So, from your right, Tim Young. He's a freelance pundit and comic and Chairman of our very awesome Young Members Committee. Tim, thank you for being here today. Peggy Orchoski is the Congressional correspondent for the Hispanic Outlook on Higher Education. She is Chair of our Freelance Committee. And I'm told, not that long ago, number of years ago, was actually an intern working for Mr. Williams at NPR. Then comes my colleague from Associated Press on the print side, Michelle Salcedo. And she is President of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and member of the National Press Club as well.

Congratulations to Rafael Williams, the son of our guest speaker, just having graduated from Haverford. [applause] That's fine. We can allow one round of applause. [applause] Well deserved. Jamie(?) LaBay(?), an independent freelance journalist. And she has formerly worked for NPR. And then, Delise Williams, the devoted wife of our guest speaker today.

Skipping over the podium, Bob Keith is the Senior Press Secretary for the Natural Resources Defense Council. And he is the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon, first time out. Great job. Thank you, Bob. Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Greg Mott, Bloomberg News. He is Chair of our NPC Diversity Committee. He and I worked together in Buffalo, New York many years ago, and we're both sworn to secrecy about that. [laughter] Speaking of which, my colleague from Associated Press Broadcast, a new member of the National Press Club, Lila Ibrahim, she works for Associated Press Television News.

Steve Taylor is a Fox News correspondent. Erik Wemple is media critic with TBD, but moving over, I'm told, to the *Washington Post*. Congratulations in order there, I guess. And then, Yu-Ting Wang, with Warren Communications, and a new member of the National Press Club. Please give them a round of applause.

[applause]

We begin with a quotation. "Yesterday NPR fired me for telling the truth." That's how our guest speaker started a column in the wake of his ouster from NPR, following controversial remarks that he made about Muslims. And his departure from NPR, in turn, set off a firestorm. And, just a few months later, NPR's President and CEO would resign, apparently under pressure.

After his departure from NPR, Juan explained that he "didn't fit in their box." Nor does he really fit into any box, which makes him all the more interesting, and why we're so happy to have him here today.

Our guest speaker was born in Panama, the son of a boxing trainer and a seamstress. When he was just four years old, his family emigrated to the rough-and-

tumbled Bed-Stuy section of Brooklyn. Juan would go on to earn scholarships to an exclusive Quaker prep school, the Oakwood Friends School, and later to Haverford College west of Philadelphia.

It was at student newspapers in high school and college, and as an intern at the *Old Philadelphia Bulletin*, that he had his first taste of journalism. In a column after the NPR dust-up, *Philly Enquirer* columnist Elmer Smith, who first met Juan at the *Old Bulletin* newspaper, described him as being, “cut from a different cloth.”

Juan started his career as an intern at the *Washington Post* and spent 23 years there as a reporter and the writer of a column. At the *Post*, he reported on everything, from problems in the old D.C. Public Schools-- as if they are gone-- to corruption by then-mayor Marion Barry, and going on to cover the White House and every major political campaign, stretching from 1980 to the year 2000.

His insight and reporting acumen led to numerous television and radio appearances that continue to this day. NPR initially hired him as host of its acclaimed *Talk of the Nation* show. And later, he held positions-- went on to positions such as the Senior National Correspondent and Political Correspondent there.

It also led him to regular appearances on Fox News where, on October 20<sup>th</sup> of last year, during an appearance on the O’Reilly Show, he said this, quoting here: “When I get on the plane, I got to tell you, if I see people who are in Muslim garb, and I think, you know, they’re identifying themselves first and foremost as Muslims, I get worried. I get nervous.”

In cutting its ties with Juan, NPR said his remarks were inconsistent with its editorial standards and practices. But NPR’s review of how that was handled itself revealed problems. Clearly, he’s moved on from that and just might be doing better than ever.

Along with daily journalism, he is the author of bestselling books about the Civil Rights Movement and Civil Rights icons, such as Thurgood Marshall. His next book, due out in July, is befitting of his recent experience. It’s called *Muzzled: The Assault on Honest Debate*.

Two months ago, we had the woman who ran NPR, Vivian Schiller, at this very-- at this very podium, to discuss that, among other things, just between-- or rather just before she, too, was let go. Since then, our guest has taken on an expanded role at Fox News, serving as a political analyst, a panelist, and a regular substitute host for the show where he sparked that controversy, *The O’Reilly Factor*.

Please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Juan Williams.

[applause]

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Mark, thank you very much. Bob, thank you for setting this up on your maiden voyage. I hope I hold to your high standards. Thank you. It's a pleasure for me to be here at the National Press Club. And I want to thank you all for coming out today. And, of course, I want to thank you, Mark, for the invitation to be here.

You know, I've been in this room more than a dozen times to hear speakers. I never thought I'd be the speaker-- never. Of course, I never thought I'd be in the situation that Mark described to you, just six months ago, where I found myself not having my byline or my comments on the front page or on the TV.

But it was me, the controversy was about me. And I found my picture and my voice being replayed nationwide, for being the journalist fired by NPR, accused of bigotry, and having said that I should keep my comments between myself and my psychiatrist, and the suggestion being made that maybe I should seek out guidance from a publicist-- a publicist on what it is I say to anybody in public.

And, if that wasn't enough to ruin a journalist's day-- [laughter]-- the official reason given for my firing, as Mark told you, that I violated journalistic standards, something that all of you in this room-- mostly journalists-- will understand that I hold quite dear to heart. And the idea was that, because I had made the statement that Mark described to you, I could no longer be an effective journalist.

To that extent, I was accused, therefore, of fomenting hate and intolerance. I was a black guy making fun of Muslims for the entertainment of white racists. And do not forget, that I was an unrepentant employee of Fox News. So, there was quite a list of charges against me at the time.

Given that tarring of my reputation, I again just want to emphasize how much I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and especially to you members of the press, who suggested that I be invited to speak after the former NPR President spoke here in March, as Mark described for you. Her effort to minimize my firing and the personal attacks led journalists to ask that I be given this platform today. And I thank you.

And let me remind you that, as Mark described but not in full, that when that person was here, that reporters pressed her. They refused to accept the platitudes and the efforts to minimize the idea of a major news organization silencing a commentator.

All of this fits with the great tradition of this Press Club, at the center of major debate in American life, especially debate that touches on the heart and practice of journalism. And I say that in the context of this being a moment when journalism is in the midst of such transformation, with the flood of 24-hour news creating demand for opinion and analysis, to help people make sense of the spin, the posturing, the provocateurs that line today's niche media landscape.

I also appreciate the chance to speak here. Because, in fact, when I was fired, I was not given the chance to speak. This is such a strange thing, but I was simply given a phone call and told that my contract was being terminated. And this was after working for NPR for ten years as a host, senior correspondent, and political analyst.

So, in essence, I had been muzzled, not given the chance to come in to explain myself, not being told exactly what the understanding was of the entire context that was prompting management to make the decision they made. And that context and the moment, I've got to tell you, in all honesty, I feared that my career as a journalist was over. I feared that I had lost my credibility. NPR certainly has a large microphone in every town in America. And I didn't know how this was going to play in the national consciousness.

So, to get back to my earlier point, I never thought I would find myself in this situation. I didn't think that I would ever have the opportunity to speak at the National Press Club. And, with the ensuing congressional debate over NPR funding, I found myself really caught up in a whirlwind that I think most journalists would be unaccustomed to.

I have worked, obviously, in TV since the late '80s, locally here in Washington, D.C. for CNN and then for Fox. As Mark told you, I've written bestselling books. But, by comparison, the focus brought on by the recent controversy, I got to tell you, I was fairly anonymous before all this happened.

One man came up to me, and he said, "You know, I didn't know what you looked like until I saw your picture in the front page of the *New York Times*. And, of course, NPR listeners used to say to me that it was nice to be able to put a face with the voice when they met me. In those situations, of course, I'd have to bite my tongue, because my instinct was to say to them, "Hey, you know, I didn't know what you looked like either. So big surprise for me." [laughter]

And now, I have this situation with Fox viewers that, when they meet me they said-- one guy said recently, "It's nice to be able to put a body with the face." So that's a new twist for me. [laughter]

As we are speaking here today, I wanted to ask you to engage in an act of imagination. As Mark mentioned to you, when I first went to NPR, I was a talk show host for *Talk of the Nation*. And I wanted to just play around a little bit with imagination and have you imagine that you are listening to a talk show. And let's pretend that our topic today is the firing of our guest, Juan Williams. And we'll take your call. We're going to have questions afterwards. But let's begin, first, with an update from Juan Williams.

So, since my firing, I was hired full-time by Fox News to be a political analyst there. I have-- I appreciate that. And I certainly appreciate Fox making that decision. You can imagine how scary it is, in these days, when journalists are under such economic pressure, to be told, "You're gone."

I'm also writing a column for *The Hill Newspaper* and for FoxNews.com. And I've just finished an intense four months of life in which I've been writing this book that Mark mentioned, *Muzzled*. The book will come out in late July. So that's kind of an update on where I am now.

Now, let me change hats and pretend to be the radio talk show host. And I would say, "Well, tell us exactly how you think this storm started. When did the tornado rip into your life?" And I guess my response would be: Well, I didn't even know it had ripped into my life. What happened was that Bill O'Reilly, who is the number one talk show host on cable news in America was on *The View*, and then expressed his belief that Muslims attacked us on 9/11, which prompted Joy Behar and Whoopi Goldberg to walk off the set.

And then, the following Monday, I was the lead guest on Bill O'Reilly's show. And he asked me, he said, quite bluntly, "Where am I wrong?" Well, I said there was no way to get around the fact that there is a worldwide problem with radical Islamic thoughts.

I said, candidly, that when I get on an airplane-- as Mark told you-- and see people who are dressed in Muslim garb, first and foremost identifying themselves as Muslims, it makes me nervous. That was an expression of a feeling, especially after 9/11, after the shoe bomber, after what took place in London, Madrid, Indonesia, the Christmas Bomber, the Times Square Bomber, who has declared that there is-- the first drop of blood just being shed in this ongoing war with Muslims.

But then I added to Bill O'Reilly that we cannot jump to violate the rights of American Muslims, or any Muslims from any place in the world because of religion. I said, "Think about Timothy McVeigh. Think about the Olympic Bomber in Atlanta. Think about the Westboro Baptist Church, whose members continue-- now with the Supreme Court's sanctions-- to protest at military funerals while shouting that God hates gays. We cannot violate the rights of people of any faith, based on the actions of people who are extremists."

I said all this at the time in the full context of the interview that was taking place. And I'll change that word "interview" to "debate" with Bill O'Reilly. And I made it clear that we cannot tolerate people using rhetoric and words to attack Muslims, because based on those fears, you could get into a situation such as had been recently the case in New York, where a cab driver had his throat cut by someone who was attacking him because he was a Muslim.

Now, that discussion was honest and heart-felt, and led NPR to fire me. Let me switch hats again and be the talk show host. Did I realize-- Did you realize, Juan, when you were making these comments, that people might view them as inflammatory and bigoted? I got to tell you, I've never had that thought, not to this day. Here we are, May

26, 2011, about six months later-- just short of six months later, and I've never, never once had that thought.

You know, some days you catch yourself in the shower, and you think, "Oh, I should have said this. Or I should have couched it this way." I've never had a second thought. Because, in fact, what I expressed was a genuine feeling. It was not a well-vetted analysis. It wasn't a suggestion that we base our TSA policies on the basis of such a feeling. It was simply an honest statement, a feeling, and again, coming in the aftermath of all that's taken place, in terms of terrorism in this country.

And, of course, you know, it just strikes me that, even in admitting to a feeling, how difficult it is, in this country today, to try to solve problems of racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination if people are unable to speak frankly, if people are unable to start an honest dialogue. It seems to me incredibly difficult.

In fact, subsequently, some people who wanted to criticize me said, "Oh, Juan's black." What if that had been said about three young black guys who were walking down the street late at night, and somebody said, "You know, I didn't feel comfortable because I saw these three young black men approaching." And I said, "You know what? Gee whiz. I'm black, as you can see. I'm the father of a black son. Well, if I was walking down the street late at night and I saw three young black men dressed in a sluggish manner and behaving suspiciously, I'd be nervous too."

But again, apparently, you're not allowed to say some things. But, what has been rewarding for me is that, through all of this, there has been an incredible amount of support, from left and from right, people saying that, "This is a time when political correctness needs to be called out as corrosive to public discourse and to public debate."

I'm reminded that George Washington, one of the founding fathers, said, "For if men are to be precluded from offering their sentiments on matters of central-- matters that are central, which may involve the most serious and alarming consequences, then reason is no use to us as Americans." He said this in 1783. I think it applies to this very day.

So, let me switch hats again. And, as a talk show host, ask, "Well, what have you learned from it?" And I'd say, first and foremost for me, I've been stunned by the number of people who come up to me, no matter where I am-- basketball games, supermarket, walking down the street, airports, to tell me that, you know what?

They've had the same thought. Or that they, too, feel that they can't engage in honest discussion in this country. That you can't tell people what's on your mind, for fear that someone is going to call you a bigot, a racist, a homophobe. You can't tell people what's going on, because there's a fear-- Well, as in my case, you might be fired. But, more generally, that you will be shunned.

And so, given the fact that we, as Americans, and as a nation are going through so much change-- political change, social change, demographic shifts in our population,

geopolitical shifts, dealing with so many critical issues, it just strikes me, out of keeping with our history, that we at this point would try to silence-- silence debate and silence people who are trying to contribute to a better understanding of who we are, in service to the idea of solving problems and making us a better nation.

Let me switch hats again and pretend that I'm the talk show host, and say, "Well, what most surprised you during this?" And I'd say, you know, right after I got that late afternoon phone call, I bit my tongue. I was so worried. I didn't know-- I didn't talk to anybody. I was just worried about what was going to happen. It was NPR that leaked it as a story and started the national attention.

It was the worry that, you know what? I can see where people who are conservative might decide that they want to support me. They are most familiar with this idea that, if you say the wrong thing, you might be subjected to the charge of bigotry, racism, etcetera.

But I wondered how the left wing of the country's political spectrum might react. Would this be an opportunity to simply jump on it? So, it was a big surprise to me when people like Whoopi Goldberg, Jon Stewart, and even Sarah Palin, on the far right, agreed that what had taken place was really out of bounds.

Since this controversy broke, as I told you, people everywhere say to me, "You know, I understand what it is to feel that you can't speak in this country today," and tell me that they feel that there is too much of coded speech, political correctness, and it's being enforced by-- well, enforced by political parties, enforced by lobbying groups, by advocacy groups, political correctness that is used to enforce identity, group identity in this country. It's used to raise money. Of course, it's used by donors and advertisers.

And, therefore, people in the middle-- And, let me remind you, most Americans do not identify as conservative or liberal. They identify as people in the middle. They have thoughts and thoughts that vary about different issues. And they find that, you know what? To be in the middle is often to feel as if you have no voice. You're not allowed to express reservations, concerns, worry that you've misunderstood an issue or that you are being misunderstood. Because someone could say, "You're stupid." Or, again, "You're out of line."

And, of course they worry that the people who do get to speak in the country are most often the provocateurs. The people who will say the most extreme things are given a platform, a microphone, a TV camera. And they say the most wild and out of line things. And everybody pays attention and tut-tuts it. And then we go back into our politically correct speech code, in which so much goes unsaid. This inflexibility is a defining feature of our national discourse at this moment. And it truly, to me, is tragic.

So let me shift again. And, as a talk show host, ask, "Well, when do you think this started?" And I guess I would answer that I believe that, in fact, you know, you go back to the '60s. And I think there was lots of effort to try to change the way Americans spoke



as part of fighting barriers of inequality, racial and gender stereotypes back then. And it was clearly of good intent that we want to try to eliminate bias in the way that we speak, because that's evidence of the way that we think.

But I think that we have come to the moment, now, of this inflexible debate. Let me offer you some examples. I think that, when the Obama administration refuses to call terrorists "terrorists," despite Daniel Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* journalist being murdered, I don't understand it. Think about Theo Van Gogh being killed, again, a man who had made a documentary about the mistreatment of Muslim women. But no one wants to say, "Oh, that was a terrorist act."

Or you think about a journalist and political cartoonist like Molly Norris being in hiding, to this day, because she proposed to have a day in which political cartoonists lampooned the Prophet Mohammed. Again, this is terrorism. But you see the administration being reluctant to call it such. The President has the guts to go into Pakistan to get Bin Laden, but, again, avoids speaking frankly about the source of these acts, the people, the terrorists.

As a talk show host, let me just again say, "Well, that's one example. Do you have other examples?" And I'd say, well, you know what? This kind of speech code also extends to current arguments that we see in today's papers about budgets, entitlements. I think Paul Ryan, the Congressman from Wisconsin was brave to put forward an idea for how we can get entitlements under control. I might not agree with the specifics of it. But here was an idea put forward.

Every commission or group that has looked at this nation's budget agrees that there has to be a mix of spending cuts and tax increases if we're serious about deficit reduction. But the other side of the Paul Ryan story is that the Republicans will not even allow discussion of tax increases, or even elimination of subsidies, and then cite the iconic President Ronald Reagan for refusing to raise taxes, even though, if you check the record-- and I'm old enough to know the record-- President Reagan, on more than a few occasions, raised taxes.

Even when politicians try to break out of this pattern of Republicans are allowed to say this and Democrats are allowed to say this, then they find that there are other people in the party who insist, who hammer them, into adapting the official line, the official line and message of the day. And the result is paralysis for us as a nation, in terms of-- and here is another example-- taking on major issues like immigration.

You think back to '06. President George W. Bush, the Chamber of Commerce, Senator McCain all tried to take on this issue. But, what happened to them? They were absolutely muzzled by the provocateurs, talk radio especially whipped up anger, and with accusations that illegal immigrants were being given amnesty.

And then, there were suggestions that we really didn't have so much of a problem with the illegal immigrants as the possibility of terrorists crossing the borders. And there

was talk of lepers. It was unbelievable. But, of course, it shut down the real debate, the real discussion, on a major issue in American lives, immigration. And, as a result, to this day, 2011, nothing has been done on the immigration issue.

Imagine, then again, that I'm the talk show host. And I would say to you, Juan Williams, "Well, how do we get out of this box?" And I would say, you know, day in and day out, as someone who covers American politics, I don't see an easy out. Because I see our political leaders modeling just this kind of muzzling behavior.

I remember that former Florida Congressman Alan Grayson called his opponent in the congressional race last year, Dan Webster, called him "Taliban Dan." And ran utterly misleading ads about his opponent. Apparently you can get away with it.

I remember that Sharon Angle in Nevada proposing to use Second Amendment remedies. That kind of rhetoric is not only offensive, certainly threatening violence, but again suggestion that your opponents are not worthy of being heard. They have to be shut down. And, of course, you all remember Republican Congressman Joe Wilson yelling, "You lied!" at the President in the middle of an address to a Joint Session of Congress on healthcare reform.

And I think we all know about Democrats in Wisconsin fleeing the state to avoid a vote that they knew they were going to lose. And what about Senator John Kyle recently saying that 90 percent of what Planned Parenthood does in this country is abortions. Later, when he was confronted with the facts and told this is wrong, he said he didn't mean it as a fact. [laughter] Well, how do you have a discussion when you can't express the facts?

So, as a talk show host, let me ask this question of you, Juan. "Do we need to get back to the facts? Is that one possible way for us to get out of this box?" Well, to that question I'd have to say that facts are important. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan said many years ago, "You can argue opinions but not facts."

And, in fact, it seems to me there is more room for solutions born of common ground than the provocateurs and some politicians would want you to believe, that Americans really are pretty sensible, trustworthy people. I do not believe that we are bigots. I believe that we can have a sincere conversation.

But our greatest skepticism, our greatest scorn should be for people-- for people with different-- not for people who have different ideas than we have, but for people who refuse to listen, to discuss, people that refuse to entertain any views but their own. A willingness to opine is what this country is all about. So too is a willingness to engage in discussion and debate.

When you hear about birthers and death panels and "Obama is a Muslim," all it does is contribute to the polarized, mean-spirited, and distorted political reality that we

live with today. And I think, too often, people are being rewarded with political victories and money for maintaining this dysfunctional status quo.

It was Congresswoman Gabby Giffords who said, before she was shot, that “A politician who tries to be reasonable, who tries to find ways to compromise, is not rewarded in this environment.” That’s why I think that we see today, in the course of journalism, something all of us hold so dear, that really, it’s niche journalism, today, that’s being rewarded-- far right, far left, blogs, websites, magazines.

And I think the consequence is what I’ve experienced in the aftermath of my firing, so many people expressing a hunger in America for honest, frank discussion, for people that they can trust, they can look in their eye and say, “I understand what you’re talking about. Tell me more,” people who would not simply involuntarily revert to a rigid orthodoxy, to political correctness or to speech code.

That’s why I think what happened to me became such a large issue. It was never about me. It was always about our nation’s ability to have debates, and for people to feel as if, “You know what? We’re talking to each other. We’re telling each other what we’re feeling, what we’re trying to express, in service to the larger goals of solving problems and ending the politics of polarization.”

That’s why, as I’m gathered here with you this afternoon-- and we can stop this imaginary talk show, I would hope that all of you, as practicing journalists, all of you who understand the importance of this profession to our democracy, would pick up this mantle of trying to get away from simply repeating, one more time, “This is the official message coming from left or right on X issue,” and perpetuating the idea that anybody who disagrees is, therefore, not a good conservative or not a good liberal, or doesn’t belong in the club. And, therefore, deserves to be shunned, silenced or fired.

We’ve got to get away from it. It really is essential to our future as an American people. Thank you very much.

[applause]

**MARK HAMRICK:** Thank you. He’s not going away, but we will-- I hate to tell you, Juan, but here comes the talk show host.

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** There we go.

**MARK HAMRICK:** So seven months since making those comments on the O’Reilly Show, as you said, you know, you haven’t had a lot of second thoughts about it. But, would you not have done anything differently at all, if you were able to go back in time?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** No. And Mark, let me say that I was asked, you know, when I was-- when I got that phone call, that fateful call, the suggestion was made,

“Well, do you have any remorse?” And I said, “Well no, because that’s genuinely what I feel. I can’t”--

Again, it wasn’t that I had offered some analysis that was embracing the idea that people should feel this way, or people should act this way, or people should discriminate against a certain group. I was simply telling you how I felt. And that was not meant to be provocative. It wasn’t in service to try and stir an audience.

It was in service to a larger conversation, to suggest, yeah, I understand where you’re coming from when you say, “I associate Muslims and terrorism in this society.” I understand why someone might have that thought, and then building on that as part of a logical progression, to try to achieve some understanding between two points of view. So no, I never had a second thought about that.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Someone hearing your speech said, “Not one of the Muslims that you mentioned-- the 9/11 bombers”-- I don’t know how they know that exactly-- “the Shoe Bomber, etcetera, were dressed as Muslims. So, with respect to your comment, does that still hold up if you reflect on that alone?”

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** No, it wasn’t the specific of being dressed. The dress suggested, to my mind of course, that, “Well, this person is first and foremost identifying themselves as a Muslim.” So, I mean, it’s not the case. How would I know if someone was a Muslim if they were dressed in ordinary street clothes as I’m dressed today? I wouldn’t know.

And, even if I did know, then, of course, then the question would become, you know, would I leap to that feeling, to that reaction? All I’m saying is, when I saw someone-- people who were first and foremost dressed in that way, it triggered a response in me.

And I must say, if you read the papers, every few weeks you’ll come across a story about a situation where people who are-- Oftentimes, I see Muslim clerics who might be praying before a flight, or engaging in what some people might regard as suspicious behavior, because they’re cloistered or, again, speaking a foreign language. And those people have that reaction. Then, of course, it all gets into the papers. So I don’t think it’s exactly an alien or, you know, strange feeling, on my part. No I don’t.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Any thoughts that might be different as a result of what has happened with the Arabs, in the sense that the Arab world, the perception of the Arab world has certainly been changed by the events of the past few months?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** I don’t quite see how those two would relate. Again, the focus, in my mind, you know, all of us who lived through 9/11, who have lived through subsequent terror alerts and concerns and attacks in Spain and Indonesia and the rest, and what happened in Times Square, you know what? I think that that’s the context in which

I think prompted-- the context that prompted this feeling, you know, for my mind, and seeing a pattern here that would cause me alarm as I'm getting on an airplane.

**MARK HAMRICK:** So it's an interesting intersection that you drew out in your speech about what's going on in the media, and then the ability to express one's feelings, as you put it. So, let's draw that out a little bit, about what's appropriate, let's say, on air, and what contributes to a civil debate in the society, where we value democracy, and many of the values that you enunciated so well.

So, you're going on the air. And you're in a wonderful position. You're paid to express your opinions. And some journalists in other settings have a different set of guide rules. How do you decide what to filter when you're on the air, what to say, and what not to say?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** You know, this is an interesting question for me, because I worked at Fox News before I was hired by NPR. I was working at the *Washington Post* when I was first hired by CNN and then Fox. And then, I went to NPR. And the question was put to me again, in the context of the conversation when I was told I was being fired, "Would you have said that on NPR?" And I said, "Of course I would say that on NPR. It's the way I feel."

I don't change from one set of opinions to another, based on the audience that I am addressing. And I think, in fact, that's part of the value that was acknowledged by NPR and Fox, and both hiring me to perform functions for their audiences, that people could say, "You know what? He's speaking his truth." Now, there's a clear line, Mark, to be drawn between someone who is a reporter and someone who is a news analyst, a political commentator.

I was paid in both roles as a political commentator. And I was asked, therefore, to express opinions, feelings, to try to bring people the larger picture, to give them an understanding of how political events and political ideas are being driven in this society. So I think that there is a line-- If you are paid to tell the story in a straightforward manner, that's what you should do. I don't think total objectivity is always possible. But certainly, we can strive for that goal.

But, if you are paid to be a political analyst and commentator, to screen-- I think-- did you use the word "screen" or "filter out?"-- filter out-- I think, if you start playing games like that, the audience realizes you're not authentic. You're not telling us what you think. You know what's going on. But you're not saying it. Or, you're saying it in such a way as to speak to one audience that simply wants to have its preexisting view confirmed, and they're tuning in for that.

And that's just not who I am. And I think that's why I strive for a higher level of trust with the audience, that the audience would say, "I trust you to tell me your truth." I think that's a very high goal for all journalists.

**MARK HAMRICK:** And, it just so happens that the NPR ombudsman-- or, in this case, woman, had written in her blog-- you're probably aware of this. She said, "Williams tends to speak one way on NPR and another on Fox." So, what do you think about that?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Not true. I think she's wrong. And I think, again, trying to understand her, and trying to understand what she might be talking about-- and this is the same person who made the suggestion, "Well, what if he saw three rough-looking black kids walking down the street late at night?" To acknowledge that you might be anxious about that is evidence of racism? I don't think so.

But anyway, there are different formats. Clearly, cable has a much higher value put on time, less time, much more of a debate format, much more confrontational. You're on camera. So the way that you look has value, okay. Now, on radio, when I was working for NPR, *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *Weekend Edition*, all these shows, typically my role there was as a veteran Washington journalist, someone who had worked for so long at the *Washington Post*, as Mark described, someone who had been around town, knows people, has good sources. And I was being asked specific question by a host.

But, when these-- when this formal interview-type format would break down, it was pretty much back and forth, and sometimes humorously, sometimes pointedly, but very much like what you would see, in terms of the Fox format. But that was less frequent on NPR than on Fox. But these are different formats.

That is to be separated from content. It was never the case that the content that I was delivering in one format or the other would vary, depending on the audience. I think that's like a politician, you know, who gives one speech to one group and another to another. I just don't play that game.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Not that that ever happens. But-- You're saying you don't do that? So, you know, we talked about Vivian Schiller. Ellen Weiss was, I guess, the person who delivered the message to you, correct? She was let go before Vivian Schiller. As you look back on all that, were those dismissals warranted?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Well, it's not my call to make. But clearly, I felt mistreated and traumatized. And I don't think that it was a service to the institution, NPR, which I value greatly. I think NPR is an important journalistic institution. And I think, when you are engaged in the kind of practice that would silence people or punish people for speaking their truth, I don't think that's healthy. And I don't think it's healthy for the institution, given the pressures that it has been under for many years, from people on the right who are saying, "NPR is far too liberal."

Again, I think what you have to do is make sure that you are being fair with your-- with your employees and with the audience. And it's not about catering to any one slice of the audience and saying, "We are going to simply tell people what they want to hear."

And we're not going to introduce different points of view or different stories that might contradict the existing line."

So, I did not think that she was serving the institution very well. In fact, I think, as you could tell from the subsequent debate about NPR funding, it opened up lots of discussion that I think has been debilitating to what is an outstanding brand, NPR.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Perhaps we'll get into more of that in just a moment. This is a "chicken and the egg" question. It's clear that the political debate in recent years has become much more negative in society. And it just so happens that that is reflected in radio talk shows, and on cable TV, in a way that was not present in, for example, CNN, which led the way. Now there is more time devoted to arguments. Do you see cable as setting a tone for the political debate in our country? Or is it merely reflecting it? And, what is the appropriate role for those media?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Well, I think that, first and foremost, I want to just remind you, Mark, that I was a substitute host, for many years, on *Crossfire*, on CNN. And *Crossfire* really was, I think, the progenitor of many of these kinds of debate-format shows on cable, where you get from the left and from the right. So, I'm not sure that I would agree with the premise there.

But I would say that the idea of vigorous debate should not be limited to the extremes. Sometimes I used to think, on some of those shows, some of those *Crossfire* shows, that the producers ideally-- you know, if it was up to the producers, they'd have David Duke and Louis Farrakhan as the guests, and say, "Oh, we're having a discussion about race in America tonight." Well, what kind of discussion is that? [laughter]

But, you know, I'm sure it would get big ratings. I'm sure it would be fiery, and there would be lots of nasty words said and stories about it in the morning paper. But I don't think it would be actually illuminating or serve to help us understand race relations in America.

So, when you ask me, you know, what format-- I think it's important to have debate, to hear contrasting points of view. But I really do put a high premium on having reasonable people engage in the debate, and people who have some sense of respect and trust for each other, as opposed to people who will simply delight in finger-pointing, playing a blame game, or somehow demonizing their opponent.

**MARK HAMRICK:** A questioner as, "As a liberal"-- they're characterizing you-- "how do you rationalize going to work for one of the most conservative networks? It seems fairly obvious that conservative pundits exploit you in order to maintain the notion that they are fair and balanced. Do they not?"

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Well, let me just first say that, after I was fired, the *Washington Post* wrote that I was the most conservative voice on NPR, which is a surprise to me. But, when I thought about it, maybe so. But it just tells you that, again,

everything is relative in this world. That I might have been the most conservative voice on NPR; I might be the most liberal voice on Fox.

This question about being exploited by Fox would suggest, somehow, that it might be better if I wasn't there, if I wasn't willing to engage in debate with people who do advertise themselves as conservatives. I think, again, that's an important act, in terms of saying, "Well, here is a different point of view." No one is telling me what to say. I am allowed to challenge, to debate.

Sometimes I think I get less time, I get the worst lighting and the worst seat. [laughter] But I think the debate is there for all to see. And I think that's one of the benefits of Fox-- You can hear the debate. You can hear both sides of it.

Now, the idea that I'm a foil for some of the leading personalities, I think is, without a doubt. But again, that's the format. People tune in-- In our current media landscape, people tune in to primetime personality-driven programs. And people are looking for that strong, authoritative voice of the host. That's what attracts people to that news product.

And then, to have someone come in and challenge the host, I think that's thoroughly legitimate. I don't think that's a matter of being exploited or having my credibility or legitimacy used in some-- or misused in some way. I think it's evidence, in fact, of a legitimate debate being aired for all Americans to consume. And, you know, as educated media consumers, I think that's what we should be speaking out.

**MARK HAMRICK:** You were talking earlier about the funding debate for public broadcasting. You have said you no longer-- and correct me if I'm wrong-- but essentially, you suggest that that funding should be cut off by the Congress. Can you explain that? And, is it just coincidental that you're no longer working for public broadcasting? [laughter]

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** No, it's not borne of any kind of vindictive streak in me. It's not my character. But it is borne of this moment when, in the midst of all of this, you'll recall that there was a tape made, Mark. And this tape was secretly recorded, a top NPR fundraiser, in discussion with people. And here they are, saying, "You know, we'd prefer not to have government funding." So that's apparently their genuine feeling.

But it's not expressed publicly. The public expression is, "Oh no, if we lose"-- and it's very small percentage, I think one to two percent of all overall NPR funding coming from government sources-- "Oh well, it might impact some small market, some rural market. Some stations might have to shut down." In fact, what I think you would see is a lot of stations, then, join hands. I think you would see more consolidation of markets. It wouldn't result in anybody losing access to National Public Radio.

But the point that I feel most strongly is this. And I say it to you as a journalist, Mark. That I think journalists shouldn't have to look over their shoulder as to whether or



not politicians, of any stripe-- liberal, conservative, independent, socialist, whatever they might be-- think that they are doing a good job.

And, if you look at the debate that was taking place at the time over NPR funding, there were fundraising letters being sent out by Democrats saying, "Oh, you know, Republicans want to cut funding because they feel NPR responds to Limbaugh and Hannity and the like." And I thought, "You know, oh, so when Democrats don't feel that NPR is doing the job of responding, then Democrats are going to challenge NPR's funding." I think this is a bad game for anybody who wants to do journalism. I think, let the politicians play their games. And then, let the journalists do their jobs.

**MARK HAMRICK:** So you've worked for a number of different enterprises, as we said earlier. How are news organizations generally doing on newsroom diversity, however you might define it?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Well, I don't have the statistics with me. I didn't come prepared for that. But I think, as I look around, my sense is diversity with women is doing great. That there are more and more women in the workplace. I think I see more and more women personalities. Until recently, you had Katie Couric, Diane Sawyer as two of the nightly news anchors.

And, in terms of young people coming in, I think young women are, without a doubt, far out-performing young men. In fact, I think part of a larger sociological dynamic, where we see colleges and universities now predominantly filled by young women. And, if you look at graduate professional schools, I think the difference is even greater, in terms of more young women moving up, in terms of leadership and top-scale positions in our country.

But, when it comes to racial diversity, there I find myself sometimes just shaking my head, because the racial diversity has not improved, even as you would look at the demographics of the country, and say, "Well gee, you know, there are more people of color, now, more than a third of the American population. More young people of color than even that number would indicate." If you look at the population under 32, it's now approaching 40 percent.

And so, you would say to yourself, "Well gee, it would seem like there would have been a breakthrough, by this point, in terms of representation of racial minorities in those highly competitive media jobs." But I think that, with the cutbacks that we've all been seeing in newspapers-- and, of course, it's impacted, also, TV and radio-- it has not acted in any beneficial way for racial diversity in American media.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Is it true that Donald Trump sent you a note after you signed onto a "Draft Trump" website, in the way of drafting him as a presidential candidate? And, if so, what were you thinking? And, was it racism that fueled some of his comments targeting President Obama?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Mark, I didn't know you allowed drinking at these luncheons. [laughter] I don't know what that's about.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Is that not true? Okay.

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** That's the wildest fabrication I've heard.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Okay, very good. [laughter] You said earlier this month-- and we don't-- well, maybe we do, but we don't encourage it-- You said earlier this month that Ron Paul could win the GOP nomination. Why do you believe that? And, how would the GOP ticket fare in the general election?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Well, I didn't say Ron Paul could win, I said I think we're living in the age of Ron Paul. You think of Ron Paul as, really, the father of the Tea Party Movement in this country. You think of Ron Paul-- I mean, his son is now in the Senate. You think of the debate that we're having over entitlements.

And even the Federal Reserve, and the role government plays in stimulating or trying to help to revive our ailing economy. Ron Paul has been in the forefront of so many of these arguments, so many of these conversations. And it just seemed to me, more and more, that we're living in the age of Ron Paul.

I'm amazed. I was one of the panelists for the debate held in South Carolina. And there's Ron Paul, talking about things like legalizing marijuana, cocaine and heroin, and getting applause from a conservative South Carolina Republican audience. That's stunning to me. Ron Paul suggesting, "You know what? We've been in Afghanistan too long." I think you had, on that stage, Ron Paul and Gary Johnson, the former Governor of New Mexico, both buying into this argument, coming from Republicans. That's not the party line, believe me.

So I thought, again, "This is very different." And I thought Gary Johnson was there, more as a function of Ron Paul, than the other way around. And I think Ron Paul has become-- you know, many people don't know him-- and he still is able to raise a tremendous amount of money, I might add. But Ron Paul is a power player in a way that I think, oftentimes, goes below the screen. People don't pick it up, in terms of his true power. I don't know that he would have much success as a Presidential candidate. I'd be surprised if he won the nomination.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Thank you. Well, we're almost out of time. Before asking the last question, a couple of routine housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you all about upcoming Luncheon speakers. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack will discuss how innovative efforts of scientists, farmers and others are essential to feeding a growing global population.

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, Brent Scowcroft, the former National Security Council Advisor under President Ford will speak at our Annual Gerald Ford Journalism Awards. June 30<sup>th</sup>,

Gary Sinise, the Oscar-nominated actor will announce the formation of a foundation dedicated to raising funds for charities supporting the military. And, on June 11<sup>th</sup>-- this is of interest to the general public-- the National Press Club hosts the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Beat the Deadline 5K Race, featuring Marshals Tony Horton of P90X and Suzanne Malveaux of CNN.

And secondly, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional NPC coffee mug as a token of our appreciation for you being here today.

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Thank you very much.

[applause]

**MARK HAMRICK:** Thank you. And now, I ask the last question. You've worked as a newspaper man. You've been on the radio and now television. Assume you're now better paid than you were before. But, if it wasn't about the pay but just about the work, which of those platforms would be your favorite? And why?

**JUAN WILLIAMS:** Well actually, Bob and I were talking about this. And I said-- "And I still-- If you wake me in the middle of the night, I still think of myself as a newspaper guy," because I came up as a newspaper writer. Now, I must tell you, though, that people, I think, generally don't read bylines. On TV they see you, but they see you more than they hear you. And they have a very emotional response to you and to who you are and the rest. And, you know, they will offer comments on your ties and all the rest.

And then, on the radio, it's a very interesting thing, it's such an intimate medium. When I was doing *Talk of the Nation*, I would find that people would write me letters. And they'd say, "You know, you're the other adult in the car when I'm taking the kids to school in the morning." Or, "You're the other adult when I'm gardening." Or, "You're my friend in the middle of the day." And I was like, "Wow."

And then, they'd send me pictures of myself. Now, this is very interesting because the pictures-- they were sketches, not actual pictures, but people who would draw figures, who would suggest, "Here is what I think you look like." So I ended up looking bald. Some pictures I would have a goatee. I would be this kind of thoughtful caricature of the NPR talk show host. In some of the pictures, I was white, black, Hispanic. It's as if people-- It was really a function of their imagination.

So I think you get far more into their imagination in radio than you do in the other two media. But I will say that TV really spreads you out. More people hear you. I think TV is the medium of our time. I think that's where the American public gets most of their information these days.

But, for in-depth reportage, there is nothing, in my mind, that beats a great newspaper.

**MARK HAMRICK:** How about a round of applause for our guest speaker today.

[applause]

**MARK HAMRICK:** Thank you for coming today. I'd like to thank National Press Club staff, including the Library and Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. And with that, we're adjourned. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW