

No Liberal Bias at NPR – Just Ask NPR

✘ Ask most conservatives and they'll tell you that NPR is a hopelessly left-wing news organization filled with liberal biases. Ask most liberals and they'll tell you it's a down the middle, mainstream news outlet. Instead of getting into that debate, let's get into another, more nuanced one. So, consider this statement made by the co-host of NPR's *On the Media*:

“If you were to somehow poll the political orientation of everybody in the NPR news organization and all of the member stations, you would find an overwhelmingly progressive, liberal crowd.”

Those are the words of Bob Garfield in the aftermath of the conservative “citizen journalist” sting against NPR, which caught on camera a now former fund raising executive smearing the entire Tea Party movement as racist and stupid.

Mr. Garfield was not saying NPR has a liberal bias, just that it's journalists are “overwhelmingly” liberal. That is a great big problem all by itself. But more on that in a moment. Garfield's guest, a liberal named Ira Glass, who is host of the NPR show “This American Life” predictably said, NPR is a mainstream news operation and has no liberal bias. End of discussion!

But let's look it this way: Let's say, if you were to somehow poll the political orientation of everybody in the NPR news organization and all of the member stations, let's say you'd find an overwhelmingly conservative, right-wing crowd – does anyone at NPR think that would be just fine; that such one-sidedness wouldn't present journalistic problems; that such a news organization would present the news without filtering it

through a conservative lens?

I don't.

But somehow liberals at NPR think that it doesn't matter if just about everybody in the newsroom is liberal. After all, the argument goes, they're professionals. They can keep their biases to themselves. To which I have just two words: Juan Williams.

In the "overwhelmingly" liberal bubble that is NPR, executives were appalled at Juan Williams comment to Bill O'Reilly that "When I get on a plane ... 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."

This was so bigoted, in their view, that they had to fire Mr. Williams. In a statement explaining why they did it, NPR said: Williams' words "were inconsistent with our editorial standards and practices, and undermined his credibility as a news analyst with NPR."

But these same sensitive liberal souls let Nina Totenberg, NPR's Legal Affairs correspondent, go on a Sunday talk show each week and spout all sorts of liberal nonsense. Who could forget her shot at then Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, a comment for which she later apologized. If there was "retributive justice," in the world, Ms. Totenberg said, Jesse Helms would "get AIDS from a transfusion, or one of his grandchildren will get it."

Inside the liberal bubble Juan Williams is a bigot. Nina Totenberg isn't.

That's one of the many reasons it matters if a newsroom is "overwhelmingly" liberal – or conservative.

Another has to do with what a news organization chooses *not* to put on the air. It's about what it *doesn't* deem important or

interesting enough to share with its audience. Not all bias can be detected by what actually survives the gauntlet and sees the light of day. I speak from first hand knowledge.

In December 2001, my first book came out. It was called *Bias* and it was about liberal bias in the so-called mainstream media. Terry Gross, who hosts a daily interview program on NPR called *Fresh Air*, showed no interest in having me on – despite the fact that *Bias* was number one on the holy grail of liberal booklists, the New York Times best seller list. And that's perfectly fine. I have no right to be on any program. Terry Gross can pick and choose her guests as she sees fit.

But not long after the book came out she had a liberal professor on her show criticizing it. She never gave me a chance to defend my work. And then a full year after *Bias* came out, I got a call from NPR telling me that Terry Gross wanted me on *Fresh Air*. Why now, so long after my book came out? Because a liberal had just published a book condemning *Bias*, that's why.

So I was of no interest to Terry Gross until I was in the liberal cross hairs.

I may have no right to be on her show, but she has no right to pretend she's not part of NPR's "overwhelmingly" liberal crowd, and one who has a very deep-seated liberal bias.

As for the current debate, about whether federal government money should go to NPR: I'm against it. And not because of liberal bias. If public broadcasting is as good as we're constantly being told by its adoring and loyal supporters in places like Manhattan and Malibu, then it ought to be good enough to survive on its own, without taxpayer money, no matter how small.

In a 21st century media universe with thousands of radio and television outlets, NPR (and PBS) should find its niche in the marketplace. If it does, that's fine with me. If it doesn't,

well, somehow I suspect we'll all survive.

