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Opinion by Ernesto Portillo Jr. : Free speech also for those who disagree

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It's tough to stand up and accept people who make stupid, hateful, sexist and racist statements.

But for those of us who believe in free speech, we swallow the hurt and hurtful words. We can also answer back — exercising our free speech.

Radio schlock jock Don Imus, who firmly placed his wrinkly foot in his big mouth, was fired Thursday from his national radio show by CBS, his main employer, under increasing national pressure and diminishing advertising dollars.

Imus' demise comes after he derogatorily slapped down Rutgers University's women's basketball team.

I'm not shedding tears for Imus, who previously uttered racist and sexist comments on his show. His antics have earned him an estimated \$10 million a year.

But I will shed tears as we move chillingly closer to a place where people demand people be fired and banished for their words, written or spoken. His firing leads us to ask, who's next and who decides?

This will not be the last time a public person, in the media or workplace, makes a racist, homophobic or sexist public comment. We are a racist, homophobic and sexist country.

Columnist and television commentator Ann Coulter last year referred to Muslims as "ragheads." Heck, she's made a living using derogatory and bigoted words.

Bill Bennett, a former education secretary, suggested in 2005 that if every black baby were aborted, the nation's crime rate would drop. He still pops up on television and radio.

It pays to be obnoxious and insulting. Some people are fired, while others are not.

Imus maligned a group of hardworking, dedicated young women. But he, like the rest of us, has every right to make a public idiot and bigot of himself.

And we have the right to get angry, boycott a show or publication and answer them.

It's called free speech.

What's your Take?

Have something to say about it?

Join metro news columnist Ernesto Portillo Jr. at go.azstarnet.com/portillochat for a live one-hour online chat at noon today.

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