

# Which Offenses Are Forgivable in Hollywood?

✘ I miss Mel Gibson. Well, I miss his work in the movies, anyway. Though I thoroughly enjoyed the action heroes he portrayed early in his career, like Mad Max and *Lethal Weapon's* Martin Riggs, I'm particularly fond of his work as a director. *Braveheart* and *Apocalypto* are two of my favorite films, and *The Passion of the Christ* was a groundbreaking, gutsy movie on several fronts.

But as we all know, Gibson was involved in some self-destructive behavior a few years ago. In addition to substance abuse problems, he was caught on tape making sexist, anti-Semitic, and later racist remarks that pretty much derailed his career. His talent agency dropped him, he's been thoroughly shunned by his peers, and he's been unable to find investors for his projects. He's largely become a ghost in Hollywood, turning up only in a couple of obscure, wince-worthy acting roles since then.

The film industry's banishment of Mel Gibson has been so crippling that longtime friend, Robert Downey Jr., felt compelled to speak out about it at the 25th American Cinematheque Awards, back in late 2011. Downey pled with his peers to forgive Gibson of his "trespasses," and let him back into their good graces so he can continue to contribute to their "collective art" without shame.

Little has happened in response. Mel is still on the outs, and it looks like he's going to stay right there.

It makes you wonder exactly which offenses *are* forgivable to the Hollywood elite.

As Robert Downey Jr. himself has demonstrated, substance abuse is indeed forgivable. He's had a longer history of drug and

alcohol issues than just about anyone in the industry, and that's really saying something! Yet, after every stint in jail or rehab, he was always welcomed back to Hollywood with open arms.

We've seen with director Roman Polanski that the act of rape is *definitely* forgivable. How many big names in the industry have regularly called for his legal pardon over the years? In 2010, objections from the cast and crew of *The Hangover: Part II* successfully prevented Mel Gibson from having a small part in the film. Yet, the cast and crew voiced no such objections to letting convicted rapist Mike Tyson appear on camera. So yeah... rape certainly isn't a dis-qualifier in Hollywood.

Hanging out with oppressive dictators and leaders of terror states, like Sean Penn and Danny Glover like to do on occasion, certainly isn't frowned upon. In fact, it's outright admired by many in Hollywood.

Cheating on your spouse, being a sexist, or being a terrible parent to your kids? Definitely forgivable... and need I really provide examples of this in Hollywood?

Angry, vulgarity-laced tantrums that degrade others? Nah. Russell Crowe and Christian Bale are still on top of their games in Hollywood. In the case of Alec Baldwin, even a vicious rant directed at his 11-year-old daughter didn't sink him.

How about spewing out hateful, homophobic comments? Hollywood's big on gay rights, after all. Well, as Alec Baldwin (again) has recently proven, they're pretty forgiving of that as well. It's somewhat surreal to turn on the television and listen to his peers rationalize the things he said, simply because he supports gay marriage.

Racist rants can't possibly be forgiven, can they? Just look at *Seinfeld's* Michael Richards. The racist rhetoric he threw around at a comedy club a few years back effectively ended his

career. Or did it? Am I the only one who remembers that his career was dead long before that incident ever took place? And if Hollywood shuns those who throw around racial epithets, why didn't it turn its back on Charlie Sheen back in 2008 and again in 2010 when he was caught blurting out the 'n' word during angry tirades? Sheen continued to hold a successful Hollywood job throughout that time, and really didn't take any heat from his peers. Only when he physically stopped showing up to work on the set of *Two And a Half Men* in 2011 did his career take a hit.

Obviously then, the anti-Semitic remarks that Gibson made had to be the clincher. The line that one simply can't cross in Hollywood must be religious bigotry. Right? Wrong. You can write an entire book on the religious bigotry that comes out of Hollywood. Usually it's directed at Christians, but it also comes at the expense of the Jews. After all, no one turned their back on Oliver Stone after he talked about the "Jewish domination of the media" in 2010, or Seth MacFarlane after he made some off-color jokes about Jews at last year's Oscars. Sure, MacFarlane took a little heat initially, but that's long been forgiven and forgotten.

So why hasn't Hollywood – a town that clearly seems ready to forgive and forget just about *any* offense – opened their doors back up to a proven talent and a proven commodity like Mel Gibson?

I would contend that it's because of the one unforgivable violation in Hollywood that I failed to mention: Being an unapologetic, Christian conservative in a land full of social liberals.

Now don't get me wrong... I think Gibson did and said some pretty bad things, and I'm certainly not making excuses for any of them. I honestly wouldn't blame an industry for wanting to wash their hands of him. But this is Hollywood – the land of "anything goes." They love a good *comeback* story more than

just about anyone... Just not in the case of a Christian conservative.

If you're a Christian conservative – especially one who had the gall to create an ultra-successful, biblical film  actually based on the Bible, there is no redemption in Hollywood. If you fall from grace, they'll make sure there won't be a resurrection. You just don't receive the same *get-out-of-jail-free* card to screw up, like the ones that liberals in Tinseltown freely grant to each other.

Conservatives have long had a hard time navigating through the thick, liberal bubble that tightly encases the entertainment industry. That bubble of intolerance has damaged a number of careers, and it's forced a lot of talented people to keep their opinions and beliefs under wraps.

In the end, even though he's undoubtedly a man with deep flaws, Gibson's greatest sin might just be that he isn't a liberal. Because if he were a liberal (and an outspoken one at that), does anyone truly believe he wouldn't be receiving lifetime achievement awards right about now?

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## **Guilty Pleasure: Watching Newt Neuter the Mainstream Media**

For media-conscious conservatives, there is perhaps no greater aggravation than that of the prevailing liberal tilt that exists within the mainstream media. Every day, we see or read of fresh examples of bias that we wish we could simply laugh off, but can't because we understand how

important the role of news conveyers are in shaping public opinion. From the absurd Democratic narratives that they instinctively lend credence to, to the selective reporting and astounding double-standards that they spread across the airwaves, the media has long been in need of a bold and brash wake-up call to force them to look at themselves, and at the joke they've made of their profession.

Low ratings and dwindling subscriptions certainly haven't done the trick. Neither have the words of media critics and watchdog organizations who regularly offer a compelling case against them. Even when journalists within the mainstream media's own ranks bring attention to the problem, nothing changes.

*Until* something changes, the best chance conservatives have to marginalize the influence of the liberal media is to stop *playing the game* on the media's terms. An ideologically-slanted media shouldn't be the people who frame our national debates. After all, every recent poll has shown that Americans no longer trust them. Conventional media-wisdom needs to be publicly beaten into shape the moment blatant favoritism is put on display. As some of us were reminded earlier this week, there is one man who is particularly gifted at doing this: Former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich.

For those of you who didn't see the Newt Gingrich/Thomas Friedman exchange from last Sunday's *Meet the Press*, I highly recommend that you check it out. Gingrich took on the uber-liberal *New York Times* columnist on the wide-spread media narrative that conservatives are too "extreme" when it comes to the issue of abortion. Gingrich absolutely obliterated Friedman by pointing out that Barack Obama voted three times to support post-birth abortions (the killing of born-alive babies that survive an abortion attempt). He also pointed out that the president supports tax-payer funded, late-term abortions. Yet the media absolutely refuses to label Obama's position on abortion as "extreme". Gingrich argued that there

is no more extreme position that exists in our politics. By the end of the segment, he had the normally snide and over-confident Friedman (who host David Gregory tried repeatedly to bail out of the mauling) squirming, and trying to disqualify himself from having to answer the charge by claiming that he was just there as a journalist. Rarely do we witness a media figure humiliated so soundly.

Of course, this wasn't the first time we've seen such a display from Newt.

Gingrich first proved himself in the media watchdog role four years ago, at the 2008 Republican National Convention, when he was asked by an MSNBC reporter to comment on Sarah Palin's weak resume in reference to the vice presidential position she was running for. Many might remember that this was a wildly popular media narrative back then. Mainstream pundits were up in arms over the notion that some *hockey-mom* from Alaska could potentially become a heartbeat away from the presidency. Never was there any concern from those same people when it came to Barack Obama, who unlike Sarah Palin, never governed a city or state. In fact, he had no leadership experience at all, yet the media never questioned his credentials. Gingrich went off on the absurdity of the media-driven narrative, running down a list of Palin's numerous accomplishments before challenging the reporter to list a single thing that Obama had done, other than "talk and write." It was such a thumping that you had to wonder if the unsuspecting reporter might have cried himself to sleep that night.

In early 2012, during the Republican presidential primaries, candidate Gingrich made sport out of several of the misleading and irrelevant questions he received from members of the media, but it was CNN's John King who took an outright scolding during one of the debates. Mere days before the important South Carolina primary, ABC News decided that it would be a relevant venture to pursue an interview with Gingrich's ex-wife and let her unload on her former husband.

Gingrich's divorce, which had begun over twelve years earlier, was reportedly a messy one. The media, of course, was well aware of this. Just days after interviewer Brian Ross seemed to take unsettling joy in letting Marianne Gingrich dish on Newt, John King chose to confront Gingrich with the allegations she made as the first question of a nationally televised GOP debate. Newt's passionate response was an absolute indictment of the mainstream media's vindictive nature toward conservatives. After all, this is the same media who actively worked to protect both President Clinton and Presidential candidate John Edwards from accusations of infidelity. And both of those Democratic politicians we're fooling around on their wives in real time – not well over a decade earlier! The public condemnation, that left John King looking like his parents had just caught him with his hand in the cookie jar, struck a chord not only with the enthusiastic crowd in attendance... Many believe the moment actually won Gingrich the state primary, where he had previously been behind in the polls.

Last week at the Republican National Convention, Gingrich decisively smacked down MSNBC's Chris Matthews over the long-held, liberal belief that speaking of our expanding welfare burden is somehow an example of racism. Gingrich quickly rattled off the single argument that shuts the entire false narrative down cold: Pointing out how many Americans are on food-stamps isn't racist. Identifying the food-stamp programs with racial minorities and perpetuating a stereotype (which is what much of the liberal media has done over the past couple of years) is what's racist.

Aside from all of these spectacles being really, really fun to watch, it makes you wonder just how much different the media environment in this country would be if newsrooms actually encouraged some diversity of thought. Imagine if they made an actual attempt to encourage people with traditional, easily-defensible viewpoints like Gingrich into their profession to

balance out the overwhelming liberal group-think that exists there now. I'm not just talking about those in front of the camera, but those behind it as well. Just think of the number of ideological biases that would be recognized before they ever made it to air or print. It seems to me that such a move would allow the media to earn back much of the credibility they've lost.

Will that ever happen? Unfortunately, no.

Sadly, for now, conservatives will have to deal with the media the best they can, hopefully by taking a few pages out of the Newt Gingrich media playbook.

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## **The Interesting Reactions to Don Rickles' Obama Joke**

☒ Like many, I consider legendary comedian Don Rickles to be a comedic genius. Though I'm a bit young to have enjoyed his work while he was in his prime, I've always gotten a kick out of his appearances on late-night television shows, and his acting in re-runs of some of the classic television sitcoms he guest-starred on. From his hard-edge, insulting style and quick-wit to his hilarious mannerisms, it's hard not to marvel at the man's talent.

What I didn't realize until just a couple of years ago was something that pretty much everyone else had apparently long been aware of: Just how ethnically offensive Rickles' standup comedy act is. I rented a documentary on Rickles from 2007 entitled, *"Mr. Warmth: The Don Rickles Project."* Only being a casual fan, I had never actually seen one of his uncensored routines. Quite frankly, I was shocked by its content. Jews,

Asians, African Americans, the Irish... They were all broken down into the bigoted stereotypes of decades past. Forget the era of political correctness. Rickles' jokes seem to pre-date even the civil rights movement.

The common message from celebrity friends of his, who were interviewed for the documentary, was that Rickles himself is certainly no bigot or racist. Even the hardest-left of the bunch (Roseanne Barr, Sarah Silverman, Kathy Griffin, Carl Reiner, and Whoopi Goldberg) explained that Rickles is essentially *in character* when he's on stage, and his style is a throwback to the "Golden Age" of standup comedy when performers could freely deliver insulting, racially insensitive diatribes. All of his friends conceded that Rickles is probably the only comedian today who could get away with such rankness, due to his legendary status.

Though the double-standard makes me uncomfortable, it's an argument I've bought into. I've never been one to hastily throw around blanket accusations of racism (which happens far too often these days) and I'm inclined to recognize Rickles' art form as lighthearted, equal-opportunity denigration.

The consensus seems to be that Rickles can say whatever he wants because he's, well... Don Rickles. Fair enough.

That's why I found it so interesting a couple of days ago when headlines like, "Don Rickles Shocks Hollywood Crowd With Racial Obama Joke", began to appear across the internet. Numerous media sources described a scene that occurred last Thursday night at the American Film Institute's tribute to actress Shirley MacLaine. Don Rickles was a featured speaker at the event, and he made the following joke in front of a microphone:

"I shouldn't make fun of the blacks. President Obama is a personal friend of mine. He was over to the house yesterday,

but the mop broke.”

The *Hollywood Reporter* reported that the black-tie crowd gasped in reaction to the joke which was said to have “bombed”. The *Drudge Report* and numerous other news-sites linked to the story, and the topic was discussed on a number of cable-news shows. *The Politico* actually felt the need to contact Rickles’ people for comment, who made it clear that Don is not a racist. Regardless, Viacom (who owns TV Land) announced days later that the joke will be edited out of the television broadcast of the event, which is planned for June 24th. Their decision was reported by ABC News among others.

Now, I’ll be the first to admit that Rickles’ joke wasn’t funny. Even beyond the realm of political correctness, it was lazy at best.

What kind of fascinates me, though, is the reaction the joke has received. There seems to be a consensus that the quip was newsworthy. Enough media outlets have picked up on the story to conclude that. And judging by the reactions of both the Hollywood elites who were in attendance, and Viacom, the joke apparently crossed a line that they weren’t comfortable with.

My question in both cases is... Why?

If even the ultra politically-correct society we live in today has deemed Don Rickles a pass on his choice of comedy, why is such a joke a controversy?

After all, the celebrity-roasts that Viacom has aired on its Comedy Central channel have proudly featured far more offensive rhetoric than anything that came out of Don Rickles’ mouth last Thursday. If you don’t believe me, just watch their roast of William Shatner and the types of jokes that were made at George Takei’s expense.

To me, it seems that the controversy comes directly from the fact that Rickles’ joke was aimed at the sacred cow of

Hollywood elitism: President Obama.

I wish I could say it stems from Hollywood's reverence to the office of the presidency, but that's clearly not the case. Hollywood liberals and Viacom were never queasy when it came to raking President Bush over the coals. Virtually nothing was off-limits when it came to Bush, even on TV Land whose annual award show featured presenters that regularly skewered the president.

No, it's different because it's Barack Obama. That's what makes it controversial. That's also what makes it yet another example of how defensive the left, in this case Hollywood, has been of the president since he took office.

Liberals were taken back by the joke because, with Obama, they felt it was overboard. I'm pretty confident that if Rickles had made the same joke about Herman Cain, there would have been no collective gasp and Viacom would not have edited it out of the broadcast. After all, Viacom didn't edit out Jon Stewart's controversial Herman Cain impersonation on Comedy Central's *Daily Show*.

Conservatives, on the other hand, are fascinated with the story because they don't often hear stinging jokes made about President Obama, especially by Hollywood darling like Don Rickles. It's something very rare.

In the end, the overall reaction to the joke is more of a symptom of the kid-gloves President Obama has been approached with over the past four years, than it is anything else. Don Rickles should be left to be *Don Rickles*. How is it fair for Hollywood to suspend the exemption they've long given to Don Rickles' humor in order to maintain the exemption *from* humor that they've given to Barack Obama?