

The Liberal Media Views Race Through the Eyes of Michael Scott

☒ One of my all time favorite television characters is Michael Scott from *The Office* (back when the show was still funny). The self-centered and incompetent, though well-meaning office manager was portrayed masterfully by actor Steve Carell. One of the many trademarks of the character was his internal need to demonstrate to his subordinates that he was sensitive to racial diversity in the workplace. The problem was that in doing so, he would often use insensitive racial stereotypes or hail minorities within the office as triumphant, miraculous success stories for merely achieving the common job positions they held. His actions would reek of unwitting condescension and were often met with irritation by the people he was lavishing praise upon.

Though the character was fictional and such scenes were intended for the purpose of comedy, shades of this same form of racial condescension can be seen regularly in the supposedly serious professions within the media. The mentality essentially stems from the idealistic belief that even in this day and age, criticism of a non-white is less likely prompted by what that individual says or does, and is more likely prompted by the color of their skin. I've written about this in the past. It's a fairly prevalent mindset.

But from time to time, we see such an outlandish example of this behaviorism that it deserves special attention. The recent reaction to Newt Gingrich's *talking down* of Juan Williams in FOX News' last Republican presidential debate is one of those examples.

To refresh everyone's memory, Williams was one of FNC's

questioners during the South Carolina debate on January 16th. When Gingrich was asked by Williams about perceived racial implications in discussing poverty programs, Gingrich answered in a tone that could fairly be described as arrogant and parental. In other words, it was answered in the same Newt-like manner debate viewers have come to expect when watching Gingrich field an absurd question. Such moments usually result in an enthusiastic pop from the venue's conservative audience, which is exactly the type of response Gingrich is aiming for.

Chris Wallace, John King, Maria Bartiromo, and numerous others have all drawn Newt's ire under similar conditions. However, in the case of Juan Williams, who just happens to be an African American, some in the media saw something far more sinister. They saw despicable racist overtones.

Though it isn't easy, let me try and explain their rationale...

First of all, they didn't like how Gingrich began his answer by addressing Williams by his first name, Juan, which they apparently found disrespectful. Despite the fact that every panel member from every debate has been referred to by their first name by every candidate, the media saw racism in the case of Juan Williams.

Secondly, they didn't like the way Gingrich said the name 'Juan'. It wasn't the pronunciation that they objected to, but rather the snide tone that came with it. Despite the fact that the tone was consistent throughout the entirety of Gingrich's answer, and mirrored the same tone he's used in previous debate performances, the media saw racism in the case of Juan Williams.

Lastly, they objected to Gingrich's mere *revealing* of Williams' first name. Because the name 'Juan' is a typically associated with a specific ethnicity, it was speculated that Newt purposefully won favor with the South Carolina crowd (perceived by the liberal media to be inherently racist) by

dressing down a person with *that* name. So... The media saw racism in the case of Juan Williams.

Sound ridiculous and silly? It is. It's every bit as ridiculous and silly as Michael Scott asking a Mexican employee if he'd rather not be referred to as a Mexican because it's an "offensive" term. It's every bit as ridiculous and silly as Michael Scott assuming that his only African American co-worker is good at basketball. It's every bit as ridiculous and silly as Michael Scott asking a friend to read out loud a list of employees who might have a police record, then calling that friend "a racist" once he gets to the name of an African American co-worker.

But in the case of the Newt Gingrich/Juan Williams exchange, we're sadly not talking about a sitcom. We're talking about today's media.

Here were MSNBC's Chris Matthews' thoughts on the day after the debate:

"There were interesting aspects to that, wasn't there some applause when he called him Juan? I mean it's an interesting thing here. I mean, I once, it's very clever – I mean Newt is a very smart guy. He knows how to play an audience... Now it is his name, and Juan is his name, but there's an interesting way it's used and to personalize it, and Juan Williams has a lot of guts getting in front of that audience that's conservative white in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and asking a question which is a reasonable question... This is going to get very, you know, very ethnic, very racial, it's going to get very hot... And I think we're looking for signs of coaxing people back to their sort of tribal attitudes. You know, and how it's done and that use of the name Juan, the way he does it... It's just the way he did that."

Chauncey DeVega, who blogs for The Daily Kos and Salon.com called Juan Williams a "paid pinata for white conservatives"

and described the moment this way: "The cheering, snide glee of Newt Gingrich dressing down uppity 'Juan', and the audience's cheering of a 'boy' being put in his place, would be missed by only the most in denial observer."

And then there's FOX News Channel's own Geraldo Rivera, who's never met a racial minority in the public eye who he didn't feel compelled to defend against imagined persecution. On his WABC radio show last Thursday, he made these comments about the Gingrich/Williams exchange:

"I believe, you know, and I've thought about it and I've thought about it, I really believe that what Newt Gingrich did to Juan Williams at that debate, at that presidential debate in South Carolina on Monday really was, if it wasn't racist it was racialist. Now, listen to this, folks, and you tell me when you listen to the way Newt Gingrich says Juan Williams's first name. He says it like it's a racial epithet, I swear to God, that's my impression... All right, there is Gingrich being filled with disdain, utter disdain, for the only man of color maybe in that whole room."

Oh my. What a comical bunch.

Maybe the NBC entertainment division should hire Matthews, DeVega, and Rivera to do some sitcom writing. That way, *The Office* might actually start being funny again.