

Assignment 3: Prejudice

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Prejudice

The question if Michael Richard is racist, based on his outburst against hecklers in a comedy club, really should not be a question at all. Comedians are subject to many criticisms for the content of their comedic shows like, whether a person or a group of people were offended by a joke mentioned in the show or perhaps how funny or not funny the show was. Sometimes, too, these criticisms can come from an individual to the comedian directly, for instance, at their shows. And this can be embarrassing because the comedian is being insulted for their work in front of the entire audience, but how you respond to this direct criticism can say a lot about you as a person and as a comedian. You can either take their criticism in stride or you can try to retaliate which could lead to further embarrassment and a disgruntle crowd if you say the wrong things.

To set the stage, Michael Richard, a comedian who was a member of the show Seinfeld, spewed out highly offensive racial slurs to two Black audience members at a comedy club in West Hollywood, California because they made comments to him that he was not funny. Now Michael, having just been embarrassed at his own show, probably began to question if he really was bombing, a term used when a comedians' jokes get no laughter, and allowed the comments from these hecklers to threaten his self- esteem. In attempts to protect his now fragile ego, he proceeds to call these Black men the N-word and to rephrase, says that fifty years ago, White people would have hung the Black audience members for their remarks. This response was fueled out of anger and was intended to be hurtful to the individuals to which these comments were directed. Michael Richard acted in an inexcusable manner and was incredibly racist to not only those Black audience members but to all Black people, collectively. His whole rant was based on the fact that the man was Black, there was no mention of anything to do with the man's

comments regarding the show, but rather his race. So, to simply answer the ignorant question of whether or not Michael Richards' tirade was racist or not, yes, it was indeed racist.

While the conclusion that Michael Richards' tirade was racist seems apparently obvious, there are individuals that try to justify his actions. It is ironic to me that the individuals that claim this overt display of racism was brought forth only because Michael Richard was angry and for that reason alone, he should be allowed a pass, are not individuals on the receiving end of his racial threats. From a White person's point of view like, Eric Zorn, excusing this behavior and attributing it to the result of an adult man being upset may seem legitimate, but to a person in the minority group that Richard was ridiculing, this behavior from a man who should know right from wrong, cannot be painted as anything other than racist and disgusting. Using the excuse that "people say things they don't mean when they are upset", to justify this way of behaving only enables racism and allows for people to excuse their racist ways by simply saying that they were upset. As far as Michael Richard, himself, I believe he felt comfortable saying these racial slurs in front of this audience because it is common for comedians to include stereotypical jokes into their sets. The only difference between those comedians and Richard is that they write these jokes ahead of time to include in the show, whereas Richard had an unplanned reaction to an audience member where he went off on a racist tirade.

Taking it upon myself to research this incident more, I came across a video of Michael Richard appearing virtually on the Late Show with David Letterman, and he was apologizing for his racist rant. To add, Michael Richard said, "That's what happens when you interrupt a White man", to the Black audience member, signifying that he believed his racist outburst was appropriate at that time. But in his seemingly ingenuine apology, he claims to not be a racist and that this attitude "comes through and fires out" of him. I believe the goal of his distasteful rant

was to execute pain which led to his deep-rooted hatred for Black people seeping out and being exposed to the world. To reiterate, nothing Michael Richard said in response to the Black man had anything to do with the actual comments he made, but everything to do with his race.

I say his apology was ingenuine because throughout his whole drawn out recount of what happened, he fails to issue a direct apology to the individuals he directed his insults to. He apologizes to “the Blacks, Hispanics, and the Whites”, instead of directly to Black people when he and everybody else knew that that anger was specifically towards a Black man for being Black and interrupting his show. He uses the term “Afro-American”, which I understand is a term that was used back then but has now been deemed politically incorrect, but he consistently refers to Black people as “Blacks”. The problem I have with this is that being referred to as simply just “Black or Blacks” reduces a whole community of people to a color; it does not acknowledge that we are a people or that we are even American that terms such as, “Black people” or “African American” do. He goes on to mention a “Black-White conflict”, and then says that “there is a great deal of disturbance in this country and how Blacks feel about what happened in Katrina”. This has absolutely nothing to do with what actually happened at the comedy club and he further insinuates that there is a “rage” in all of us and he just so happen to be the one who acted upon it publicly.

There is an alarming number of celebrities, mainly White celebrities, who have used racial slurs and/or had a racist outburst and have been under fire for it. So, I am all too familiar with ingenuine apologies and senseless justifications for racist behaviors. I am personally tired of seeing grown adults make comments that are racist, then say that they are still growing when they are called out because they should fully understand right and wrong at their age. Those who issue apology videos and statements after expressing their racist attitudes have only done so to

please those angered by their actions and not because they acknowledged where they were wrong on their own. At some point, sorry is not enough anymore and maybe it will take legal action for these foolish celebrities to comprehend their faults.

Mel Gibson is one of the many celebrities who has participated in this deviant behavior. In fact, he is infamously known for his racist remarks. Mel Gibson, on multiple occasions has been seen and heard behaving in an awfully offensive way, ranging from anti-Semitic statements to using misogynistic language toward an ex-partner of his. Why is there no question whether Mel Gibson is racist when like, Michael Richard, he was angry when the outburst took place? Is it because Michael Richard has been documented as only having one incident displaying this behavior that we know of and Mel Gibson has multiple? There should be no discrepancies between determining if these two men are racist. Once you reveal that part of yourself, one time, there should be no question whether or not this was simply a crack in the facade with no connection to profound racism.

If, because you are upset, you resort to using racial slurs to inflict harm upon another person for whatever reason, you are racist. I understand that that is unfortunately an opinion, but I feel it should be something that, we as people, unanimously agree on. Michael Richard is a grown man whose vocabulary is not limited. I could off on a rant of my own about all the alternative insults he could have fired back that are not racist or even remotely related to race, therefore, there is no excuse fathomable for Michael Richard's behavior. Richard choosing to attack these men because of their race is classless and says a lot about his character.

Determining whether or not racial slurs can exist without a racist intent/prejudice seems idiotic to me to even dignify with an answer but for the purpose of this assignment, I will. There is no such thing as a racial slur existing without racist intent or emphasizing prejudice. The only

instance I could think of that the use of a racial slur would be appropriate would be educating others on how slurs are highly offensive and explaining why nobody should use them. To conclude, Michael Richard exposed his racist attitude and was rightfully crucified for it. I harbor no sympathy for Michael Richard, and I refuse to justify anybody's racist behavior under any and all circumstances.

Reference Page

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