**10 famous comedians on how political correctness is killing comedy: “We are addicted to the rush of being offended”**

By Anna Silman

Yesterday, Jerry Seinfeld — a famously “clean” comic known for staying away from controversial issues — issued some strong words on the topic of political correctness. After stating that political correctness is hurting comedy and railing on college kids for being too sensitive on an [ESPN](http://www.salon.com/2015/06/08/seinfeld_slams_politically_correct_students_for_hurting_comedy_they_just_want_to_use_these_words_that%E2%80%99s_racist_that%E2%80%99s_sexist_that%E2%80%99s_prejudice/) podcast, he later went on Seth Meyers to [say that](http://www.salon.com/2015/06/10/jerry_seinfeld_doubles_down_%E2%80%9Cthere%E2%80%99s_a_creepy_pc_thing_out_there_that_really_bothers_me%E2%80%9D/) “there’s a creepy PC thing out there that really bothers me,” because some of his old routines riffing on gay men no longer play well with audiences.

Conservatives and comedians don’t tend to agree on a lot, but a shared rallying cry for both has been the area of political correctness. Lately, more and more comedians have been speaking out against political correctness, arguing that audiences’ increased sensitivities and tendencies to take offense stifles comedic freedom. These issues came to a head with the recent [Trevor Noah flap](http://www.salon.com/2015/03/31/did_trevor_noahs_twitter_history_just_kill_the_daily_show/), in which people dug up a number of old sexist and racist tweets belonging to the soon-to-be “Daily Show” host. While Noah was roundly criticized in the media, a number of comics came to his defense, arguing that the problem wasn’t Noah’s bad jokes, but an overly sensitive public. As Jim Norton wrote in [Time](http://time.com/3766915/trevor-noah-tweets-outrage/), “Trevor, while tweeting things with the intention of being funny, had gone … yes, you guessed it – *over the line*!… In his rush to be funny, he had broken what has become the new golden rule in American public life, which is to never say anything (or, God forbid, joke about anything) that may be deemed even remotely offensive or upsetting by any segment of the population for any reason thoroughly addicted to.”

There’s also the argument that comedians in particular are held to an unfair standard of scrutiny given the fact that their art form requires that they publicly workshop material. As Chris Rock put it in a [New York Magazine](http://www.vulture.com/2014/11/chris-rock-frank-rich-in-conversation.html) piece a few months prior to the Noah controversy, “Prince doesn’t run a demo on the radio. But in stand-up, the demo gets out. There are a few guys good enough to write a perfect act and get onstage, but everybody else workshops it and workshops it, and it can get real messy. It can get downright offensive.”

While some female comedians are critical of PC culture, too, the most outspoken opponents of political correctness have tended to be men pushing back against today’s climate of increased public scrutiny. That scrutiny isn’t universally denounced, though. As [Lindy West](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/09/politically-correct-jerry-seinfeld-comedy-marginalised-voices) smartly wrote in a Guardian piece (which is worth reading in full): “It’s so-called political correctness that gave me the courage and the vocabulary to demand better than that from the community I love. Yes, this cultural evolution is bumpy, but what Seinfeld and some other comedians see as a threat, I see as doors being thrown open to more and more voices.” Or as [John Hodgman](http://www.salon.com/2015/01/27/pc_guy_john_hodgman_rebuts_jonathan_chaits_anti_political_correctness_argument_with_an_epic_twitter_essay/) wrote in a brilliant twitter rant in response to Jonathan Chait’s recent essay in New York Magazine, “I will say that the ‘PC’ critiques, even at their most infuriating to me, almost always make me think and yes check my privilege…I am glad to give these issues thought. It enlarges me.”

Still, not all comedians embrace those critiques. Here are ten comics explaining why they think political correctness is killing comedy.

1. Chris Rock

In an interview with Frank Rich in [New York Magazine](http://www.vulture.com/2014/11/chris-rock-frank-rich-in-conversation.html), Chris Rock said he stopped playing colleges because they are too conservative: “Not in their political views — not like they’re voting Republican — but in their social views and their willingness not to offend anybody.” He also discussed how the prevalence of social media forces comedians into self-censorship. As he put it: “It is scary, because the thing about comedians is that you’re the only ones who practice in front of a crowd. Prince doesn’t run a demo on the radio. But in stand-up, the demo gets out. There are a few guys good enough to write a perfect act and get onstage, but everybody else workshops it and workshops it, and it can get real messy. It can get downright offensive. Before everyone had a recording device and was wired like fucking Sammy the Bull, you’d say something that went too far, and you’d go, “Oh, I went too far,” and you would just brush it off. But if you think you don’t have room to make mistakes, it’s going to lead to safer, gooier stand-up. You can’t think the thoughts you want to think if you think you’re being watched.”

2. John Cleese

The former Python has been particularly [outspoken](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2851888/John-Cleese-blasts-political-correctness-protecting-select-groups-ridicule.html) in his views against PC culture. As he put it in an interview with Bill Maher, Cleese dismissed political correctness as “condescending,” saying “It starts as a half way decent idea and then it goes completely wrong and is taken ad absurdum,” and explaining how he stopped making race-related jokes after audiences were angered by jokes about Mexicans in his routine. As he put it “Make jokes about Swedes and Germans and French and English and Canadians and Americans, why can’t we make jokes about Mexicans? Is it because they are so feeble that they can’t look after themselves? It’s very very condescending there.”

3. Russell Peters

Canadian comic Russell Peters [told](http://www.cbc.ca/strombo/videos/russell-peters-theyve-drilled-it-into-your-head-youre-not-supposed-to-laugh) George Stroumboulopoulos that he too thinks that society has become overly sensitive. As he put it, “If you look at TV in the ‘70s versus TV now, and you see the things people said back in the day – they said the most off-colour stuff and nobody’s feelings were hurt. Do you know why? Because it’s about intent. The intent then was to make you laugh. And the intent is still to make you laugh, but they’ve drilled it in into your head that you’re not supposed to laugh at this.”

4. Scott Capurro

The fiercely polemical comic wrote a long screed about political correctness in [Time Out,](http://www.timeout.com/london/comedy/scott-capurro-on-political-correctness-in-comedy) arguing for the importance of pushing boundaries, especially from his vantage point as a gay comedian seeking to “test audiences and see if words could change their perceptions.” As he put it, “I don’t ever want the audience to know what side I’m on. I’ve got no sides. I’m trying to deliver more than one argument. I’m like the US Army: I don’t take a position, I’m just there to help clear up this mess of confusion about political correctness, because there is none. Everyone’s boundaries are different, thank Goddess. If we all agreed, nothing would be funny. If at least parts of the crowd aren’t shaking or angry by the end of my set, they haven’t got their money’s worth and I feel a bit dirty, like I’ve let down the contingency of cantankerous, crabby, clarifying comics by smothering myself in sticky, gooey kindness.” He concluded that “comics shed light. We’re as necessary as a lightbulb, yet harder to replace.”

5. Daniel Lawrence Whitney (Larry the Cable Guy)

In an interview with [60 Minutes](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/political-correctness-out-of-control/), the famed Nebraskan stand-up agreed that political correctness had gone way too far. As he put it, “It’s gotten way outta control. You know. I really think that we’re at a point in this country where people really need to take the thumb outta their mouth and grow up a little bit and realize there’s a lot bigger problems out there than what a comedian did a joke about.” His “politically correct” version of “The Night Before Christmas” similarly gets the point across:

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6. Patton Oswalt

As Salon readers know, Oswalt has long taken issue with political correctness. After the Trevor Noah controversy, he sent out a long string of humorous [tweets](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/patton-oswalt-defends-trevor-noah-785776) riffing on peoples’ tendency to take offense at the slightest provocation. And, as he put it in [Salon’s](http://www.salon.com/2015/03/11/salons_patton_oswalt_peace_summit/) own interview with him, “Comedians have always been the best conduit to the forgotten, to the outsiders, to the inarticulate. We speak for the underdogs, for the most part. That’s what most comedians do. If Salon is doing articles about, ‘Did the Onion go too far?’ or ‘Why does ‘Last Week Tonight with John Oliver’ have to be hosted by another straight, white male?’ then you are now just picking, out of context, these buzzwords. You’re asking questions that don’t need to be asked. The content of what John Oliver does is so revolutionary and so amazing that if you’re going to just pick it apart, you’re making progressives look like people that can count beans but can’t make soup.”

7. Jim Norton

Norton is another comic who has expressed annoyance with online outrage culture, particularly in his special “Contextually Inadequate.” Weighing in on the Trevor Noah flap in [Time](http://time.com/3766915/trevor-noah-tweets-outrage/), Norton says that Western culture has become a “tireless brigade of social-justice warriors” and that “Being outraged and upset and feeling bullied or offended are not only things we enjoy, they’re also things we have become thoroughly addicted to. When we can’t purposefully get our feelings hurt by a comedian, we usually find another, albeit less satisfying, source of indignation… I choose to believe that we are addicted to the rush of being offended, the idea of it, rather than believing we have become a nation of emasculated children whose only defense against an abyss of emotional agony is a trigger warning.”

8. Gilbert Gottfried

The controversial comic — who got in trouble online back in 2011 for some jokes he made about the tsunami in Japan — penned a piece for Playboy called [“The Apology Epidemic,](http://www.playboy.com/articles/stop-saying-sorry-on-twitter)” arguing that our current apology culture has gone too far. As he put it, “It’s the modern equivalent of ringing someone’s doorbell and running away. We’re more vindictive than we’ve ever been, but we’re also cowards.

In Gottfried’s opinion, its not just the internet, but inside comedy clubs as well, where PC culture is taking its toll. “Imagine if the most brilliant comedians in history were working today. They’d never stop apologizing. Charlie Chaplin would have to apologize to all the homeless people he belittled with his Little Tramp character. W.C. Fields and Dean Martin would both have to apologize to alcoholics. The Marx brothers would have to apologize to Italians, mutes and uptight British ladies. Comedy has been around for a long, long time, and there have been a lot of impolite, unpleasant and jaw-droppingly politically incorrect jokes…. You went up there as a comic and joked about it all and nothing was off-limits. And to this day, nobody has died from a single joke.”

9. Lisa Lampanelli

The edgy comic wrote a piece in the [Hollywood Reporter](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/lisa-lampanelli-how-political-correctness-450210) titled “How Political Correctness is Killing Comedy,” writing “Here’s the problem: Comedy, probably more than any other art form, is subjective. What jokes crack up your mom, your little brother, and your gay best friend will be completely different — unless it’s a video of a guy getting hit in the gonads with a piñata stick. That’s funny to everyone….If you like safe, generic comedy, that’s fine. Go on a cruise ship and crack up listening to the comedian point out the hilarious differences between loafers and shoes with laces. But don’t go to one of my shows and be outraged by what you hear. Going to my show and expecting me not to cross the line of good taste and social propriety is like going to a Rolling Stones concert and expecting not to hear ‘Satisfaction.’”

10. Dennis Miller

One of the few big-name comics who is also a conservative, Miller is certainly no fan of PC culture. In his book of [rants](http://www.amazon.com/The-Rants-Dennis-Miller/dp/038547802X), Miller devotes a whole chapter to the issue, writing “trying to negotiate straits of what’s acceptably funny nowadays is like trying to navigate through the Sargasso Sea of plastic toadstools in the middle of a bumper pool table.” Miller acknowledges that he understands where political correctness comes from, “but now, suddenly, we find ourselves in a classic overcorrection, where we’re all supposed to zip through life like some huge societal squadron of Blue Angels, flying six inches off each other’s taste wing, never ever deviating even one angstrom. Well, folks, there are a lot of different aircraft careening through the social stratosphere, and we better start working out some respectfully independent glide paths right now, or it’s gonna start getting really messy….Why don’t we start by letting humor serve as our guide? Laughter is one of the great beacons in life because we don’t defract it by gunning it through our intellectual prism. What makes us laugh is a mystery — an involuntary response.”

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<http://www.salon.com/2015/06/10/10_famous_comedians_on_how_political_correctness_is_killing_comedy_we_are_addicted_to_the_rush_of_being_offended/>