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Comediana

by BRIAN LOCKHART

A priest, a rabbi, and a minister walk into a bar....

You just know the punch line is going to be at the expense of one of these guys. Most likely if a real priest, minister, or rabbi, heard the joke they would get a chuckle out of it. That's humour for ya.

There was a news item this week about the backlash against comedian Trevor Noah, of the Daily Show, for making a joke about the India-Pakistan conflict, saying a war between the two countries would be ?the most entertaining one of all time,? while doing his impression of a soldier singing and dancing like a Bollywood star.

He received a lot of criticism from high profile people calling the joke, among other things ?despicably crass and racist.?

Noah responded, saying ?It's amazing to me that my joke about the conflict in India and Pakistan trended more than the story of the actual conflict itself.?

And he was right. An actual shooting war with very serious impending action is making little news because it is between two countries the west cares little about, but make a joke about it and he's in the news.

What's also amazing is that these ?high profile' people were offended.

Since when is comedy NOT offensive?

The entire premise of comedy in the modern world is based on offending someone, some thing, some idea, or some group.

There may be some limits to jokes that can be made that could be in bad taste. For example making light of the holocaust probably wouldn't make you any friends.

However, even the worst part of history will become comic foil once enough time has passed.

I once heard a comedian discussing politics say, ?JFK needed that trip to Dallas like he needed a hole in the head.?

That joke would have met with dead silence in the 60's or 70's, but in the 2000s, it got a good laugh.

Some people were offended by Trevor Noah's joke but since when are comedians actually held accountable for tasteless humour?

At one time, comedian Joan Rivers' shtick was all about insulting people on a personal level. I recall seeing her time after time on talk shows ridiculing Elizabeth Taylor for being fat. As a personal attack, apparently Ms. Taylor was deeply offended by the jokes, but no one ever spoke publicly and said Rivers routine was crass or insulting.

I have never really been a fan of stand-up comics. I don't mind a five minute routine on a talk show, but going to a comedy club and listening to the headliner crack jokes for a solid hour isn't my thing.

My three favourite stand-comedians are the late Don Rickles and Rodney Dangerfield, and the still living Stephen Wright.

Rickles was a master of insult comedy. It didn't matter who you were, your race, religion, background, it was all fair game. He could fire off an insult the moment he found out anything about you. He was that good.

No one complained, they took his jokes for what they were ? jokes. If people were offended by his type of humour his career would never have taken off.

George Carlin, the ponytail wearing comedian routinely attacked people, religion, and politics while on stage and is best known for his ?seven dirty words you can't say on television' bit.

Carlin is still considered a great comedian and no one ever complained or seemed to realize that a guy rapidly saying seven vulgar words in public isn't comedy ? it's something an elementary school kid does to entertain his friends at recess.

I have an old book tucked away somewhere that someone brought back from a trip to Newfoundland. Yup, it's an entire book of Newfie jokes. People in Newfoundland aren't offended by it ? they wrote it ? they just have a good sense of humour about their island.

Of course there is a fine line between humour and stupidity, although while listening to many contemporary comedians the lines between the two are kind of blurry.

I've seen comedians tells jokes that I thought weren't funny at all but everyone else is laughing ? see Andrew Dice Clay. Yikes.!

If high profile people are going start being offended by comedians and going public about it, then the entire entertainment industry is going to be ripe for attacks, including those same high profile people.

As Rodney Dangerfield quipped, ?My wife and I were happy for twenty years, then we met.?