
FUNNY HURTS

By JASON STUART

All I ever wanted to do was act and do stand up comedy. Since I discovered that being gay was an issue to most folks one way or another, I feel compelled to take a stand when I see a group of my fellow human beings attacked. I was never the kind of man who could sit at a family dinner when a racist comment was made about any group. So if a racist joke were made, I would simply say, that's not ok with me. They would reply but you're not Black. Well, it's still not cool or funny.

So, I was saddened and offended at the crudeness, the lewdness, the brazen racism expressed by Michael Richards unloading his rage. Surely most comics have the skills to handle hecklers or distractions, from a large group of friends gathered for a surprise party at a comedy club where alcohol is routinely served. This should come as no surprise to any comic, and our tactics should be playful, to engage, and win over the noisy fuckers. It's part of our job.

To demean, an audience member with a vile, hateful diatribe, simply has no place in comedy. It's not even the word, it's who says it on our cultural landscape, in what context it is said, and most importantly the intent behind it. Nonetheless, I side with Oprah and think the word has too much meaning to be used in a public setting.

It is time for us all to stand up for an internal audit. What are we capable of? How many Mel Gibson and Michael Richards' moments have we witnessed in ourselves, both in and out of a comedy clubs?

As the NY Times stated on Dec. 3, "For some, the most important lesson, one which may show some progress toward racial tolerance, is that it is the man who first hurled the racial insult who appears more damaged this time, not the target of his epithet. Mr. (Dick) Gregory

said his son told him a joke the other day: "What is worse than a white man calling a black man a nigger?" Mr. Gregory said, quoting his son. "Calling a white man Michael Richards." My hope is that Mr. Richards is able to turn this negative situation around and make it a positive by supporting the community with his celebrity. My hope is that then, he'll no longer be the target of jokes, and all of us may be changed by the discussion his behavior ignited

I found myself in the lobby of the Laugh Factory after the news conference on November 27th and was asked to be of support to the owner Jamie Masada, who has had me work at his clubs for over 20 years as a headliner and always as an equal. After the press conference the New York Times asked me some questions. But the NY Times misquoted my words. So I wanted to set the record straight. [LA Times Review](#) "What I said was that, "about 25% of black comics have anti-gay material in their act and just as many or more white comedians do the same. What are we doing about that?" Nothing.... I spoke with Najee Ali, a civil rights activist and he responded by stating that he has been on the front lines to support all folks from prejudice.

So I turn to you, my community to start an enlarging dialogues on the social acceptability of gay-bashing. I ask the question where do we draw the line? The current all-important discourse on racist speak is vital. How can we as gay folks add to the crucial discourse centered now on racism? At a time when LGBTQ folks are scorned, do we not have to address the hate radiating from the Religious Right, and to all comics making us the "butt" of their homophobic fixations? We must ignite amongst Americans a desire to also dig deeper and address the hate. Most Americans have soul-searching to do in their comedy choices, on street corners, and middle school hallways, that are often not very funny either but painful to others.

I learned when I was 12 the word "fag" scraped on my locker with a nail. I saw it every day for 3 years in Jr. High School. I never said a word to a soul. It shredded my sense of who I was for almost 20 years, until I started speaking on college campuses on the power of being out in the workplace.

It is time for change and I for one intend to continue to be a part of it in my work and my life.

Jason Stuart is an actor & comic is currently featured in the film "Coffee Date" and has appeared in over 100 films and TV shows, including his groundbreaking role as Damon's Wayan's gay family therapist on ABC's, "My Wife & Kids". Recently he was seen on "George Lopez" and "House". He is one of the few openly gay men to headline mainstream comedy clubs & college campuses and was proud to host the Millennium March on Washington.