

Comedian Under Fire for misogynistic, racist, and homophobic Comments

[Alex Blum](#) | November 21, 2012

*The following article contains
extreme profanity. Reader
discretion is advised.*



Sal Rodriguez's routine has drawn intense criticism for being "blatantly misogynistic, racist, and homophobic." Rodriguez says, "My performance, like much of comedy, is predicated on transgression, on playing upon the pretensions and anxieties of the crowd."

Controversy roiled Saturday at a stand-up comedy show in the Student Union. During comedian Sal Rodriguez's set, a student took the stage and grabbed the microphone from Rodriguez to criticize him for what she called his "blatantly misogynistic, racist, and homophobic" performance.

Debate has continued since the event, with a discussion and support group hosted by the Feminist Student Union on Monday, and discussion of a possible honor case against Rodriguez. Rodriguez, for his part, said via email, "I apologize for nothing."

According to the accounts of students present at the performance, Rodriguez made jokes about diversity, gender pay equality, and Reed's campus discussions about rape and sexual assault. He said that the audience "sit and watch [sic] as I trash talked them," as he put it via email after the event. He called the audience out for this, calling them "faggoty pussies."

Rodriguez quotes himself from a transcript of a video he says he has of the performance: "I don't know what it is about this fucking school, but we have fucking signs everywhere just talking about 'diversity' and then we have signs saying 'don't rape people.' It's just fucking everywhere—'diversity is fantastic and don't rape people here.' 'You have to not rape someone to have a good time.'" On the

topic of pay disparity, he quotes himself as saying, “I support equal pay for equal work. And women as a group do not perform equal work.”

Though Rodriguez has declined to share the video of the night in question, another person with access to the video has allowed *The Quest* to view it. It corroborates the quotations reported by Rodriguez, shows racially charged comments he made, and demonstrates the extent to which he antagonized the crowd.

He referred to one person, whose racial background was not clear from the video, as a “sand nigger.” When another spectator was talking in the front row, he criticized them, calling talking at shows “the negro way.”

He also gave the audience a good deal of provocation. “You should be fucking outraged, and you’re fucking sitting here like a bunch of little bitches, and then after the show you fucking bitch to Sean about it,” he said, as he criticized the crowd for a passive reaction to his antagonization. Later, he was quiet for a long stretch, then suddenly shouted, “You fucking just sit there like a bunch of bitches, what the fuck is wrong with you?”

“What would you do?” asked a spectator.

“I wouldn’t come here,” he replied.

Many audience members responded negatively; some attendees say that some people may have been crying. One female attendee shouted back at Rodriguez. He responded directly, as attendees recall, calling her a “loud-mouthed cunt.”

The audience member then took the stage and grabbed the microphone, telling Rodriguez off for the offensive nature of his comedy. Due to the sensitive nature of what she said onstage, she has asked not to be named to protect her privacy.

According to the video, she said, “Sit the fuck down! Is this what you were waiting for? Is this what you were waiting for? Do you want to hear ‘fuck you your jokes aren’t funny because I was raped here?’ Do you want to hear that fuck you women aren’t in math and science fields because of fucked up male mentorship? Sit the fuck down.” Witnesses, including the girl who took the stage, also upheld the overall accuracy, if not the word-for-word correctness, of this version.

Later, when Sean Howard put an end to the dispute, Rodriguez and the girl continued shouting at one another. “Save this for after the show,” said Howard. “We’re trying to be funny.”

Throughout the set, Rodriguez received laughter, sometimes enthusiastically, though there were stretches with no laughs

at all. When the girl who took the stage criticized him, she received cheers and applause as well.

Free speech or hate speech?

But the disagreements persist. The audience member who took the stage says, in a statement that she requested only be reproduced in full: “This was not offensive comedy. This was hate speech. His words were blatantly misogynistic, racist, and homophobic. These were not jokes—there was never a punchline or a hint of irony. He did not use slurs to engage in a conceptual discussion. He targeted and caused harm to specific groups of people. Please recognize his actions for what they were.”

Rodriguez remains unapologetic for his act. Comedy, he says, “is a means of expression and communicating a message. One may not like the message, the means by which the message is expressed, or neither, but that goes for all forms of artistic expression. My performance, like much of comedy, is predicated on transgression, on playing upon the pretensions and anxieties of the crowd.” Rodriguez, who has performed at Reed stand-up events before, claims this is the first time someone has told him they had a problem with his act.

He also says he doesn’t regret the interaction with the audience member. “Audience members in a comedy show

don't have a right to not to be offended. They only have a right to decide whether or not to attend or stay," he says. "As I see it, hecklers deserve whatever response they get. Unless audience members are invited to speak (as I did allow at one point), they have no right to interfere with a performance."

Even Reed's performing comics don't all agree on these points. "The implicit philosophy of the club (as I've understood it) is that anyone can go on stage who wants to, and while you are on stage, you can say whatever you want. This is typical of comedy clubs across the country," says Brett "Boots" Beutell, who performs stand-up with Reed College Comedy Club, or RKKK, the group that hosts the SU stand-up events. There have been two other shows in this semester, RKKK's first.

However, Beutell says, while some argue that audience members should never interfere, "in the context of Sal's bit, which involved accusing the audience of being 'pussy-ass bitches' for sitting there and passively taking his barrage of insults, it seemed pretty apt that at least one person started to yell back at him."

Beutell says Rodriguez "has done racist and sexist bits at Reed in the past. I've seen him perform to both uproarious laughter and stunned silence with the same bit on two

separate occasions. Very odd.”

Another comedian who performed Saturday and wished to remain unnamed calls Rodriguez’s act “angry and hateful.” The comedian says, “I don’t really care,” but felt that “when he blew up at one Reedie in particular, that’s when he crossed the line.” That comedian went on, “I don’t want to see this kind of speech policed at Reed, but I wish we had more of a way to deal with idiots who want to abuse their power. I wish this could just be a common sense thingâ€¦ I think it’d be good if Reed could be better in general with trigger warnings.”

Advertisements for the show bore the warning “This show will contain seriously offensive material.” Howard, the show’s organizer and another stand-up comic, says he decided to include the warnings after he received word of complaints about the content of this semester’s other shows. As for the effects of this event on the club, he says, “There won’t be any changes to the stand up events in the future as a result of this, except for maybe a rule along the lines of ‘Don’t bumrush the stage.’”

Audience members, too, have their own views about when it is acceptable to interrupt a performer. “You can’t say things like ‘I believe in equal pay for equal work, but women don’t do as much work as men’

and not expect people to get upset and want to say something in response,” says one audience member who asked not to be named because of “general shyness.” She goes on, “And I think that’s all the performer was doing — seeing how far he could go before someone stopped him. He almost seemed pleased when the mic got taken away.”

Joel Hawkins, a student who was at the show, differs with Rodriguez over the comedic value of the performance. “In an environment like Reed, it’s unbelievable that a seemingly intelligent person would be so violently misogynistic and at the same time seem completely solemn, adamant, and sincere,” he says. “That concept is so farcical that it seems like it could only be the facetious commentary of tasteless irony, but as far as I can tell, it wasn’t.”

Along with the Feminist Student Union’s support event Monday, affected parties have discussed the possibility of an honor case against Rodriguez. One student plans to stage a walkout the next time he performs. Rodriguez responds, “I find it silly that someone would be so activist about a comedy routine. If anyone wants to make a difference in the world, they should go volunteer somewhere in the greater community, where there are lots of actual problems that should yield ‘outrage’—not ‘outrage’ over an artistic performance at

some uppity liberal arts college on a Saturday night.”

Beutell says the issue falls in a “murky area.” Comedy, he says, “is not inherently safe, nor is it inherently inclusive.”

As he puts it: “The Honor Principle and comedy have a tenuous relationship.”

Student Services has released the following comment:

“Student Services is aware of the concerns over the content of the comedy show on Saturday night. The administration takes these reports very seriously. Jyl Shaffer, Assistant Dean of Students for Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, is our point person for collecting student concerns about this event. Anyone who would like to share their experience from the show can contact Jyl Shaffer, either in person (in 28 West), by e-mail (shafferj@reed.edu) or by phone (503-517-7966). Reports can be made anonymously. If students need additional support we encourage them to seek the assistance of the Health & Counseling Center.”

This story has been revised to reflect the following correction: Sean Howard is a senior, not a junior.

This story has been updated to

reflect the following change: This story originally stated that Rodriguez had not responded to a request for the video; he has now declined to share it, though another person, who prefers to remain anonymous, has shared the video with *The Quest*.

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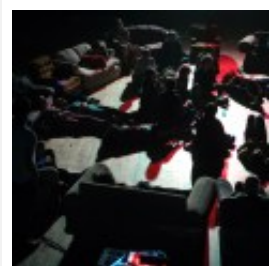
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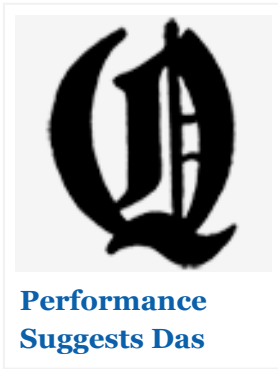
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