

# Robert and Richard: Two Aging Actors Make News, Differently

By Roger L. Simon

I don't often write about my Hollywood years in this newsletter. I prefer to move on with my life.



Actor Robert De Niro speaks in support of President Joe Biden outside of Manhattan Criminal Court as former President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump attends his criminal trial in New York on May 28, 2024. (Charly Triballeau/AFP via Getty Images)

The motion picture industry as we know it is in its dotage, and the continued fascination with Hollywood is unhealthy.

Nevertheless, something cropped up recently that impels me to break my self-imposed rule.

Two aging (I should talk) Hollywood stars have been in the news—Robert DeNiro and Richard Dreyfuss.

During my years in the Industry, I had no contact with Mr. DeNiro other than as a fan, but plenty with Mr. Dreyfuss, who

has been a friend and colleague for over fifty years.

Richard played the leading role of Moses Wine in my adaptation of my detective novel, "The Big Fix." He also was offered the lead in my screenplay of Isaac Bashevis Singer's "Enemies, A Love Story" when he declined because of a disagreement with the director, Paul Mazursky. He was replaced by the late Ron Silver.

Both DeNiro and Dreyfuss have had what one might call political outbursts, although Richard's was as much social as political.

What I found interesting, though not surprising, was the media's and Hollywood's reactions to the two. Dreyfuss was condemned, while DeNiro was either applauded or patronized.

To be honest about my biases, I agreed completely with what Dreyfuss had to say (or was trying to illustrate) and thought DeNiro was so prejudiced that he began to resemble a parody of the worst of Trump Derangement Syndrome, something for the Babylon Bee.

The "Raging Bull" and "Taxi Driver" star, standing in front of the New York courthouse for Donald Trump's so-called "hush money" trial, went so far as to say the following with a straight face:

"The Twin Towers fell just over here, just over there. This part of the city was like a ghost town, but we vowed we would not allow terrorists to change our way of life. ... I love this city. I don't want to destroy it. Donald Trump wants to destroy not only the city but the country, and eventually he can destroy the world."

"I don't mean to scare you. No, no, wait – maybe I do mean to scare you. If Trump returns to the White House, you can kiss these freedoms goodbye that we all take for granted. And elections – forget about it. That's over; that's done. If he

gets in, I can tell you right now, he will never leave.”

My response to that bizarre statement is, in the actor’s own words in “Taxi Driver,” [“You talkin’ to me?!”](#)

Actually, giving credit where due, those were the screenwriter’s, Paul Schrader’s, words. He created the psychotic Travis Bickle in “Taxi Driver.” I have no idea whether DeNiro made up the above courthouse rant on his own.

Not only will, in the actor’s view, Trump end the elections, but he will “never leave.”

Delivered in high dudgeon, that sounds like a one-liner from an old Preston Sturges comedy. Mr. Trump will be 78 in a couple of weeks. Does Mr. DeNiro think he will live forever?

We all know how difficult—nigh onto impossible these days—“never leaving” would be under our Constitution, so I will skip past that and even skip past the evident elements of projection and the lack of the slightest bit of evidence itself in Mr. DeNiro’s screed and ask why is this man so angry?

On the most obvious level, he and those who importuned him to do this have obviously been reading the polls favoring Mr. Trump over Mr. Biden and are reacting, or more precisely, abreacting. Mr. DeNiro called pro-Trump demonstrators at his press conference “gangsters.” Is that how he would like to characterize half his compatriots? “Deplorables” were bad enough, but 150 million Al Capones?

Other than the mainstream media, it’s hard to think of any sector of our society that thinks more alike than the film and television industry (with the positive exception of the burgeoning [Christian industry](#) outside Hollywood). They remind me of the amusing [Triplets](#) number with Fred Astaire, Nanette Fabray, and Jack Buchanan from “Bandwagon” made in Hollywood’s more halcyon days (1953) in their mirroring one to another.

Some of this comes from understandable fears of being cast aside in an industry where employment is always precarious,

even for the very famous. Ideological conformity becomes the natural outgrowth of this fear. Often it is internalized.

This makes for mediocre art. The decline in Hollywood has been well documented. Fewer seem to want to watch the Academy Awards every year. I frequently see comments online from those who haven't seen a new movie in years. This can be ascribed partly to their age, but also to that sameness and predictability, a lack of joy, in the filmmaking that we used to find no matter where it stood.

Despite having a left-wing childhood, to a surprising degree, Richard Dreyfuss has swum against this tide of ideological uniformity.

For many years Richard has spoken out and organized in favor of teaching civics in our schools. This was largely ignored by an entertainment industry that these days has little interest in our Constitution or regards it skeptically.

[In May 2023](#), he made a welcome (to me) consternation-inducing (to many of his colleagues) criticism of the Motion Picture Academy's new rules adding minority/diversity (DEI) requirements to any film nominated for the Best Picture Oscar. "Legendary actor Richard Dreyfuss condemned the inclusivity changes that will be [implemented for next year's Oscars](#), saying the new standards 'make me vomit.'

"'This is an art form. It's also a form of commerce, and it makes money. But it's an art,'" Dreyfuss said on PBS' ['Firing Line with Margaret Hoover](#).' "And no one should be telling me as an artist that I have to give in to the latest, most current idea of what morality is."

Next up was Richard's "scandalous" appearance at the screening of one of his most famous films. In the words of USA Today, May 2024: "Richard Dreyfuss accused of going on 'offensive' rant during 'Jaws' screening: 'Disgusting'."

What happened? USA Today continues:

"Dreyfuss began his Q&A session at The Cabot with lighthearted

whimsy, appearing onstage in a floral-printed blue dress, which he wore over a long-sleeved, button-down shirt and pants, according to [footage of the event](#) shared online. The actor playfully swayed his hips and swung his cane like a baseball bat as [Taylor Swift's](#) 'Love Story' played in the background.

"But things [reportedly went south](#) when Dreyfuss went on a fiery rant that spanned topics including actress-singer [Barbra Streisand](#), the #MeToo movement and transgender youth. Footage of Dreyfuss' full presentation has yet to emerge.

"Several attendees later took to social media to criticize Dreyfuss' comments."

I bet. Naturally, he was accused of homophobia, which is ludicrous since Richard has worked and played around gays without prejudice all his life, some of whom I know personally.

What he was obviously doing, in flamboyant actor-y style, was shining a light on the crazy destructiveness of the transgender epidemic, particularly among the young, and daring to point the finger at the hypocrisy of many in his industry.

Whether you prefer Dreyfuss to DeNiro (my preference is clear) an overall question remains. Are the opinions of celebrities worth more than those of the common man and woman?

In almost all cases, I would say no. (In deference to Mr. Dreyfuss, he does a lot of reading of history.) The views of celebrities are often tainted and not particularly informed. And yet we have to hear them over and over.

My suspicion is the public largely tunes them out, increasingly so. And although I concurred with and was amused by my friend Richard in this instance, that's probably for the best.

*First published in the [Epoch Times](#)*