

The Case of Alec Baldwin



Alec Baldwin is a terrific actor. At least I've enjoyed him. You may disagree. On the Tina Fey series "30 Rock," I found him very amusing as the obnoxious network exec—although, come to think of it, I guess that was mostly a case of excellent typecasting. Twenty-five years ago, he was effective as the sinister heavy in "The Juror," opposite Demi Moore. But *hmm* . . . I guess that was pretty much typecasting, too. And his legendary performance in "Glengarry Glen Ross" as the loathsomely abusive sales trainer—well, OK. Either he's a terrific actor or he's been selected for TV and film roles by some damn fine casting directors.

A few months ago, Baldwin was at the center of a [scandal](#) that would have made you or me crawl into a cave to die. For years, on talk shows, he'd described his wife, Hilaria, as Spanish; whenever she was on TV herself, she'd claim, in a distinctly Spanish accent, that she'd first come to the United States at age 19. Then it turned out that her real name is Hilary, that she's as WASPy as they come, and that she grew up in tony Weston, Massachusetts, with a mother who taught at Harvard Medical School.

In short, they're both sociopaths. *At best.*

Baldwin has been through—or, rather, caused—other [travails](#), owing to the fact that he's a world-class hothead. In 1995, he broke a paparazzo's nose. In 2011, he was kicked off a plane for refusing to turn off his phone before takeoff. In 2012 and 2013, he made headlines for several scuffles with various photographers. He was arrested in 2014 for getting belligerent with cops—always a good idea—and in 2018 for punching a guy over a Manhattan parking spot. Then there was the time that one of his voicemails, in which he called his 11-year-old daughter a “rude, thoughtless little pig” and said she didn't have “brains or . . . decency as a human being,” went public.

As repulsive as all this behavior is, none of it has humbled Baldwin in the slightest, or put a dent in his golden reputation with the mainstream media. Along with other insufferable nitwits like Rob Reiner and Barbra Streisand, he's one of the showbiz Left's leading holier-than-thou lights, always ready to preach and pontificate—and since his politics put him on the side of the angels, he's been forgiven repeatedly for his odious behavior. Capping his role as left-wing hero, needless to say, was his regular gig as Donald Trump on “Saturday Night Live.” For his high-profile mockery of the president, the leaders of the Democratic Party would've gladly given him a lifetime get-out-of-jail-free card, if they'd been able to.

The Left especially loved him because of his hatred for guns. Boy, did he *hate* guns. Boy, did he *hate* the Second Amendment. And boy, did he *hate* gun-owners. He hated them so much that instead of carrying on respectful debates with defenders of gun rights, he always went after them with, well, guns ablazing.

In 2018, along with Amy Schumer, Patton Oswalt, Jimmy Kimmel, David Hogg, and other celebs, Baldwin helped [form](#) the No Rifle Association Initiative (NoRA, get it?) to fight the NRA. In

the same year, he tweeted that NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch “doesn’t care how many dead bodies she has to step over.” In 2017, after a Huntington Beach police officer accidentally shot a young man to death during a struggle, Baldwin [sneered](#) on Twitter: “I wonder how it must feel to wrongfully kill someone.” He also cracked jokes when Dick Cheney shot and wounded a friend in a hunting accident.

How beautiful his righteous passion was! How noble and selfless was his uncompromising devotion to the anti-gun cause!

And then, on October 21, it happened. At the Bonanza Creek Ranch in New Mexico, Alec Baldwin was filming a movie called “Rust.” He was the star and also the producer. It was a small-budget Western about a character named Harland Rust (Baldwin), “who rescues his thirteen-year-old grandson Lucas after he is sentenced to hang for an accidental murder.” While rehearsing a scene set in a church, Baldwin, 63, drew a Colt .45 revolver and fired it, killing the cinematographer, Halyna Hutchins, 42, and injuring the director, Joel Souza, 48.

Baldwin doesn’t have to wonder anymore “how it must feel” to kill someone wrongfully.

What made the situation hit home for me in a kind of weird way was the news that Hutchins had grown up in Murmansk. As it happens, the woman who runs the beauty parlor under my apartment in small-town Norway is from Murmansk. It’s a dreary, ice-cold place. No city on earth (with a population of over a quarter million) is further north. What an incredible triumph for Hutchins to have made her way to sunny Tinseltown, where, by all accounts, she was a brilliant camerawoman with a great career ahead of her. And now, through the most incomprehensible turn of events, she was suddenly dead at the hands of a movie star a world away from her Arctic home—leaving behind her husband, Matthew, a lawyer, and their nine-year-old son, Andros, who after being [informed](#) of his

mother's death "couldn't say a word for two days."

How did this killing happen? In the days since the incident, the story has been endlessly recounted, although many of the details have changed or been confusing. Apparently, the film's assistant director, David Halls, handed Baldwin the weapon, saying "cold gun," meaning that it wasn't loaded—although Halls has since [told](#) officials "that he hadn't thoroughly checked each of the rounds of ammunition." Since Hutchins's killing, it has emerged that Halls was [fired](#) from a previous movie two years ago "over a mishap with a gun."

Another person of interest is Hannah Gutierrez Reed, 24, a nepotism hire who despite her youth and inexperience (and an alarming immaturity, to judge by videos she's posted online) was given the job of being the film's armorer—i.e., the person in charge of guns on the set—a task generally delegated to someone with firearms expertise, often a former member of the military. Earlier this year, working on a movie in Montana, Reed reportedly failed "to follow basic gun safety protocols" and "discharged weapons without warning," leading the film's star, Nicolas Cage, to walk off the production.

Commenting on the killing of Hutchins, a number of film and TV professionals have emphasized that on a properly run set involving weapons, gun safety is the number-one priority, and every gun is passed carefully from hand to hand in accordance with a fixed procedure. At each step, both parties look into the chambers and confirm out loud that there are no bullets in the gun; at each step, it's dry-fired into the ground once for every chamber, just to ensure that it's empty. If someone puts the gun down—to go to the bathroom, say—and then comes back and picks it up, he has to go through the whole ritual all over again.

Although some movie guns are essentially toys that can't even take real bullets, in period Westerns it's common to use real antique guns—but not live rounds, which, as a rule, are

utterly *verboden* on film sets. Yet Hutchins was apparently killed by a live round. (To be sure, you don't need real bullets to have a fatal incident. In 1984, actor Jon-Erik Hexum, unaware that even blanks can be deadly at close range, shot one into his temple as a gag and died.) Indeed, police [apparently](#) found 500 rounds of ammunition on the film set, "a mix of blanks, dummy rounds and live rounds." If true, this qualifies as shockingly inappropriate.

That the "Rust" set was not properly run has been testified to by many persons close to the production. Only hours before Baldwin killed Hutchins, seven members of the "Rust" crew [walked off the set](#) citing safety and housing concerns. Reportedly, there had been "two accidental weapon discharges" from a gun that was described as containing no live ammunition.

Peggy Lane, an actress and producer who worked with Baldwin on "Will and Grace" and calls him "the nicest guy," found the news from the "Rust" set "insane," telling me: "One *never* rehearses with a real gun. One *never* points a gun at another person or at the camera. And the first AD *never* hands the weapon to an actor. That is the armorer's job."

On Twitter, actress Kirstie Alley [made](#) the same point. "No AD yells 'COLD GUN.' The armourer [sic] or prop person is supposed to PERSONALLY show you the gun so you can see it is empty for yourself. Then I dry fire it into the ground. I have NEVER been handed a gun by an AD & I've been handed 100 guns & I've never heard 'COLD gun' in 40 years."

I'd forgotten that my sister, Carol, whose CV includes production jobs on films like "Death Becomes Her" and "Mrs. Doubtfire," spent several months in the 1990s working on a couple of TV series at the Bonanza Creek Ranch. "I have worked with lots of gunfire and explosions in movies and TV and nothing happened," she told me the other day on Facebook

Messenger, "because we had union behavior on set. Preparation, safety, rules followed. All of that makes a difference. Casual attitude on set is what causes accidents."

Alas, everyone on the "Rust" set was apparently, as my sister delicately put it, an "asshole." Though not in the business anymore, she's still in touch with many people who are, and what she's heard about this shoot isn't good.

"There was a lot of stupidity, disregard for safety, confusion, and lax attitude on that set," she told me. When those six "experienced and trained" crew members walked off the set, it "left the show with raw crew." Since Baldwin and his fellow producers "likely felt they were losing money," they "started to move fast, without checking all the steps for safety."

And the gun? According to what she's heard from people close to the production, allegedly "the gun was never checked. The gun was left unattended on a cart, the gun was taken on a HUNTING TRIP or used for target practice, the person in charge of taking care of the gun was lax, the AD (my job) called the gun 'cold' (meaning it has no ammo in the chambers) without even CHECKING THE CHAMBERS. He handed it to a smug actor who pulled the trigger ON A REHEARSAL. While POINTING AT THE DIRECTOR AND DP."

Her conclusion: "Too many assholes on one set. Remove any of the assholes from the process and it would not have happened. Film sets like that one are accidents waiting to happen."

My sister—who, note well, is a progressive Democrat—complained about the widespread effort to pin all or most of the blame for the killing on Halls and/or Reed. "They are really pointing at the AD and the arms person as being culpable," she wrote. "It seems they are giving a pass to Baldwin, which I don't understand. They said he will need to be questioned, but he's already in Vermont with his family. As far as I am

concerned, he was holding a weapon and needed to make sure his weapon, or prop, or toy, was SAFE to be playing with. And he should NOT have fired the weapon. PERIOD. Blanks or not. He was apparently just practicing, doing quick draw movements for the shot. He didn't need to fire it."

No, he didn't. But it's striking that a lot of the same people who hold Donald Trump responsible for the so-called insurrection on January 6—even though he explicitly told his supporters to behave peaceably—are quick to insist on Baldwin's innocence in the death of Halyna Hutchins.

In doing so, they're deliberately ignoring a key point: if a crew, whether on a movie set or a construction site or a Navy destroyer, is made up of assholes, always look to the captain or foreman—or, in this case, producer. Dollars to donuts, he'll turn out to be the biggest asshole of all. He's the one who sets the tone, who either encourages or permits hasty, slipshod, and unprofessional behavior by his crew or disciplines or fires them for it. It's the boss man who's ultimately responsible for chronic recklessness on the job. On "Rust," the head asshole was Baldwin, the producer. He hired Halls and Reed, or at least approved of their hiring. He had to approve any decision involving guns.

Also—and, ultimately, this is all that really matters—Baldwin was the one who fired the fatal shot. It's an action that makes absolutely no sense. Purportedly he was preparing to do a scene in which he was supposed to fire his gun in the direction of the camera. But when such scenes are actually filmed, the director and cinematographer, who are otherwise usually behind the camera, always move to another spot for safety's sake. If Baldwin was just preparing for the scene, *there was no reason whatsoever to aim the gun at Hutchins, and no reason to pull the trigger.* It doesn't matter in the slightest whether he thought the gun had been checked. It doesn't matter what anybody, either the first AD or the armorer, said to him about the gun. According to

established on-set gun procedures, *he should have treated it as a real gun containing deadly bullets until he, himself, ascertained otherwise.*

In short, he should have checked the gun himself, visually. He should then have dry-fired it into the ground, once for each chamber. And even after he'd proven the gun's emptiness beyond any doubt, he still shouldn't have aimed it at anybody. And he shouldn't have pulled the trigger. Never, never, never.

There are several steps there. Alec Baldwin failed all of them. Totally. Ignominiously.

And this is assuming that the notoriously hotheaded star didn't act in anger.

I'm not a gun expert. Far from it. But I know enough to understand that mature gun owners educate themselves thoroughly about their guns, store them securely, and handle them with the utmost caution—and, when they train their children to be gun owners, they teach them to do all these things, too. Being this kind of responsible gun owner is the very opposite of being an inner-city thug who murders innocent kids in drive-bys. Which is why serious gun owners resent the likes of Alec Baldwin—because his whole take on guns is based on the spurious notion that the alarming statistics on gun deaths in the United States are their fault and not the fault of gang violence by people to whose criminal activities the Left has chosen to blind itself.

It's hardly a coincidence that Halyna Hutchins was shot to death by the man who is arguably America's most famous enemy of the Second Amendment. While responsible gun owners treat their guns with respect, Baldwin has no respect either for guns or for their owners. No surprise, then, that unlike any responsible NRA member—but very much like one of those above-mentioned inner-city thugs, who's grown into adulthood without ever developing the slightest concern for his fellow

man—Baldwin, by handling his gun with such contemptuousness, exhibited an arrogant indifference toward its potential deadliness. Which is to say, an arrogant indifference toward the lives of everyone on his film set.

I looked up [New Mexico law](#). It distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary manslaughter. Voluntary manslaughter consists of an intentional killing for which there was a mitigating circumstance, which reduces the crime from murder. Involuntary manslaughter, on the other hand, consists of a killing that was unintentional, resulting from either recklessness or criminal negligence.

For example, if a person decided to drive a car blindfolded and ended up in a car accident where passengers were killed, the act would be perceived as reckless since it may be anticipated that death or serious injury would occur from such actions and the person would be charged with voluntary manslaughter. Another example is if the same person, knowing that his car had serious brake problems, allowed another person to drive his car. This may be perceived as a criminally negligent act and the person may be charged with involuntary manslaughter.

Some commentators, including experienced prosecutors, have [suggested](#) that Baldwin could be charged, at most, with involuntary manslaughter. I'm no legal expert, but it seems to me that not checking a gun for bullets, then aiming it at a person and firing it, is very much analogous to a person driving a car blindfolded. This would make Alec Baldwin guilty, at the very least, of voluntary manslaughter, a third-degree felony punishable by up to six years in prison.

I fear that in these dreadful times when American justice is poisoned by politics, justice will not be done, and Alec Baldwin will walk. I can picture him returning to the talk-show circuit—at first contrite, but soon enough returning to

his usual wiseguy mode. And worst of all, I can also picture him audaciously using his own crime—because that's what it is, a crime—as Exhibit A in his war on guns. He's enough of a shameless sociopath to twist this whole thing around and wear the mantle not of a killer but of a victim of circumstances whose passion for the anti-gun cause has only been intensified by his terrible experience.

But let's not give up hope yet. Let's hope for justice to be done. And if, by some fluke, it *is* done, let's hope that the next few summers in New Mexico are very, very hot.

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