

Q&A: Woody Harrelson

Rob Tannenbaum

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At 51, Woody Harrelson would rather watch *Game of Thrones* than work hard. But the longtime hedonist hasn't lost his hippie spark—just get him going on those corporate warmongers.

DETAILS: You filmed a lot of your new movie, Now You See Me, in New Orleans, and you're here again, making a detective series for HBO with Matthew McConaughey. Seems like the odds are 80/20 that you two free spirits will get arrested in this city at some point.

Woody Harrelson: That does seem likely, doesn't it? I imagine it will be for multiple charges: Drunk and disorderly would be at the top of the list, probably, and resisting arrest, no doubt. The good news is, we're playing cops, so maybe the New Orleans police will be more forgiving.

DETAILS: You've said that playing a cop has made you more sympathetic toward the police. Did playing Steve Schmidt in Game Change make you sympathetic to Republicans?

Woody Harrelson: I like Steve Schmidt. But I tend to not like politicians, because it's a subtle form of prostitution. Or maybe not so subtle.

DETAILS: So you dislike Democrats as much as you dislike the GOP?

Woody Harrelson: It's all synchronized swimming to me. They all kneel and kiss the ring. Who's going to take on the oil industry or the medical industry? People compare Obama to Lyndon Johnson, but I think a better comparison is between Obama and Nixon. Because Nixon came into office saying he was going to pull out of Vietnam, and then he escalated the war. A lot of us were led to believe that Obama was the peace president, but there are still, I think, 70,000 troops in Afghanistan. Corporations like Grumman are so powerful that—I don't know, is this the kind of shit we want to talk about? It's making me depressed.

DETAILS: Do you see similarities between Natural Born Killers and the Hunger Games films? Both look at how TV uses spectacle to keep people passive.

Woody Harrelson: With *Hunger Games*, it's about people rising up to fight against a corrupt government that controls them.

DETAILS: Now that you've wrapped Catching Fire, the Hunger Games sequel, can you tell us one plot point, something so small the studio won't care?

Woody Harrelson: They're probably going to be pissed about what I already said. They don't like you talking about this shit.

DETAILS: Your character, Haymitch, has long blond hair. As a bald guy, did you feel like keeping the wig?

Woody Harrelson: You know, it feels like the whole conversation is devolving.

DETAILS: Okay. You were raised in a very religious family. What were your twenties like, after Cheers made you a star?

Woody Harrelson: It was the time I shook off the yoke of organized religion and became a hedonist. I won't paint a sensationalistic picture for you, but you can imagine. I was famous, I was wealthy. I was an idiot. An absolute moron. I've done it with the best of them, and I've got no—well, I probably have one or two regrets. Honestly, I was lost.

DETAILS: You had a bad temper, too. How is it now?

Woody Harrelson: Pretty good. We don't get the greatest tools to deal with anger. It's like, "Hey, count to 10." When someone really upsets me, how do I respond? I don't usually start counting to 10 and breathing deeply. But, for example, I don't think you'll ever see me get into it with the paparazzi again.

DETAILS: If you could spend a weekend with any of the characters you've played, who would it be?

Woody Harrelson: Larry Flynt. I love that guy. He's one of the few people who's always 100 percent honest and doesn't give a shit if he offends people. I don't agree with all the porn stuff he publishes, but I shouldn't judge. It's like hanging with Steve Schmidt—I don't focus on the politics. With Larry, I don't focus on the porn.

DETAILS: You're an advocate for legalizing marijuana. Do you think recent events make it more likely?

Woody Harrelson: I can't imagine that it's going to happen, no. The deeper issue is, what does it mean to live in a free country? In the U.S., something like 80 percent of people in prison are there for "consensual crimes." The government may change faces from time to time, but it's not like we fight wars for democracy—we fight wars for capitalism and for oil. I keep coming back to the same goddamn subject. I guess because it's what really bugs me the most.

DETAILS: Do you want to get more involved in politics?

Woody Harrelson: No. I don't believe in politics. I'm an anarchist, I guess you could say. I think people could be just fine looking after themselves.

DETAILS: You might have a lot of free time on your hands soon, because you've talked about taking a break from acting.

Woody Harrelson: I like the idea of writing and directing my own projects. But I'm a lazy bastard. [Laughs] I know I could do more, let's put it that way. Instead, I just put on *Game of Thrones*.

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