

and Comedy

and Comedy: Critical Encounters

Julie A. Webber, Illinois State University

The Joke Is on Us is what you're looking for is a funny-haha book. The contributors are comedians nor are they trying to tell jokes. If, instead, you're looking for serious political satire, irony, and humor—often weapons of the weak deployed against the powerful—have been co-opted and diffused by neoliberal forces and regimes (corporate capitalism, neoliberalism, alt-right conspirators, and racist truthers), then this is the book for you. *Saturday Night Live* or Comedy Central to save us, they warn."

—JOHN SEERY, Pomona College

Laugh on the late-stage of neoliberalism? As this timely collection suggests, the joke is on us on the losing side of a corporate-run humor-mill that keeps us laughing-mad in the aisles. Amid the toxic tides of austerity, white nationalism, xenophobia, and rampant sexism, we are conditioned to look to late-night, white, and (mostly) male corporate-jesters to entertain us and his troll army will be impeached any day now. Comedy won't save us from this crisis. The political and economic elites are the ones laughing . . . all the way to the bank."

—RAÚL PÉREZ, University of Denver

Political Comedy in (Late) Neoliberal Times brings together scholars of comedy and political comedy encounters neoliberal themes in contemporary media. Central to the evolution of genre: under neoliberal conditions, genre becomes "mixed." Once stable, genres such as comedy, horror, drama, news, and entertainment have become blurred and indistinguishable. The classic modern paradigm of comedy/tragedy no longer holds, if it ever, as politics becomes more economic and less moral or normative under neoliberalism. We are able to see new resistance to comedic genres that support neoliberalism and social and gender injustice such as unlaughter, ambiguity, and anti-comedy. There is a growing interest in comedy as a form of entertainment on the political right following Brexit in the United Kingdom and the election of Trump in the United States. Several essays analyze contemporary derivative comedy and place it in context of the larger humor history of these genres and speech and political correctness.

Contributors: Marc-Olivier Castagner, Seçil Dağtaş, Jessyka Finley, Viveca Greene, David Grondin, Thomas Lawson, Sophia A. McClennen, Aaron McKain, Diane Rubenstein, and Julie A. Webber

WEBBER is professor of politics and government at Illinois State University.

BOOKS

titlefield

• www.rowman.com



Cover image © Canva

WEBBER

THE JOKE IS ON US

EDITED BY JULIE A. WEBBER

THE JOKE IS ON US

POLITICAL COMEDY IN (LATE) NEOLIBERAL TIMES

Politics and Comedy: Critical Encounters

Series Editor: Julie A. Webber, Illinois State University

This series brings scholars of political comedy together in order to examine the effect of humor and comedy in a political way. The series has three main components. Political Comedy Encounters Neoliberalism aims to look at how comedy disrupts or reinforces dominant ideologies under neoliberalism, including but not limited to: forms of authority, epistemological certainties bred by market centrality, prospects for democratic thought and action, and the implications for civic participation. Political Comedy as Cultural Text examines the relationship between the more bizarre elements of contemporary politics and comedy, including but not limited to countersubversive narratives that challenge or reinforce anti-democratic political authority and market thought, radical social movements that seek to undermine it, and political comedy's relationship to the cultural unconscious. Lastly, the series welcomes proposals for scholarship that tracks the context in which comedy and politics interact. Political Comedy in Context follows the intersection of politics and comedy in viral, mediated, and affective environments.

Titles Published

Political Satire, Postmodern Reality, and the Trump Presidency: Who are We Laughing at? by Mehnaaz Momen

The Joke Is on Us: Political Comedy in (Late) Neoliberal Times, edited by Julie A. Webber

The Joke Is on Us

Political Comedy in (Late) Neoliberal Times

Edited by
Julie A. Webber

LEXINGTON BOOKS

Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Lexington Books
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

6 Tinworth Street, London SE11 5AL, United Kingdom

Copyright © 2019 by The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN: 978-1-4985-6984-2 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN: 978-1-4985-6985-9 (electronic)

♻️™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Table of Contents

Introduction: The Joke Is on Us: Political Comedy in (Late) Neoliberal Times	1
PART I: THE TERRAIN HAS CHANGED	35
1 All They Need Is Lulz: Racist Trolls, Unlaughter, and Leslie Jones <i>Viveca Greene</i>	37
2 Brexit Irony on <i>The Last Leg</i> and <i>Last Week Tonight with John Oliver</i> : Critiquing Neoliberalism through Caricature <i>Simon Weaver</i>	65
3 What's Wrong with Slactivism? Confronting the Neoliberal Assault on Millennials <i>Sophia A. McClennen</i>	87
4 Political Humor in the Face of Neoliberal Authoritarianism in Turkey <i>Seçil Dağtaş</i>	105
PART II: POST-NETWORK NEOLIBERAL POLITICS	131
5 From Irritated Hostages to Silly Citizens: Infotainment Satire as Ludic Surveillance <i>Marc-Olivier Castagner and David Grondin</i>	133
6 The Political Economy of Late-Night Comedy <i>Don Waisanen</i>	159

7	British Comedy and the Politics of Resistance: The Liminality of Right-Wing Comedy <i>James Brassett</i>	177
8	I Want to Party with You, Cowboy: Stephen Colbert and the Aesthetic Logic of “Truthiness” after Campaign 2016 <i>Aaron McKain and Thomas Lawson</i>	193
PART III: NEOLIBERALISM AND SUBJECTIVITY		219
9	From Awkward to Dope: Black Women Comics in the Alternative Comedy Scene <i>Jessyka Finley</i>	221
10	Savage New Media: Discursive Campaigns for/against Political Correctness <i>Rebecca Krefting</i>	245
11	“An Actual Nightmare, but . . . Pretty Good TV”: Horror-comedy in the Trump Era <i>Diane Rubenstein</i>	267
	Conclusion: “You’re Fired!” Neoliberalism, (Insult) Comedy, and Post-network Politics <i>Julie A. Webber</i>	293
	Index	315
	Biographies of Contributors	333

Chapter 10

Savage New Media

Discursive Campaigns for/ against Political Correctness

Rebecca Krefting

Comedy helps us test or figure out what it means to say “us.” Always crossing lines, it helps us figure out what lines we desire or can bear.

—Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai 2017

Popular discourses capture varied responses to the most pressing social and political issues of the day. They reflect who we are—though not always or ever a collective “we”—our beliefs, fantasies, and fears. The most common popular discourses circulating over the past several years in the world of stand-up comedy are: those lauding the Internet as a democratizing force that levels the playing field by rewarding comics with the best comedic content—this is usually evinced with sayings like “Content is king!”¹, others consider ownership of comic material and images in this online sharing culture, and other chatter involves how women comics have outed fellow male comics for sexual harassment and assault—one side argues that use of social media makes visible the abuse of women in the industry that has always existed and that women have the right to document and defame their perpetrators, while the other side believes that a comic’s reputation should not be determined in the court of public opinion based on tweets and posts.² Another robust popular discourse in the comedy world takes on political correctness when it comes to crafting and telling jokes; indeed, this discourse and those just listed are kissing cousins and at times difficult to separate. In a profession that profits from poking fun at others, playing with the taboo, and pushing the proverbial envelope, demands from fans for political correctness are not exactly welcomed by all comics. It is important to note that the popular discourses surrounding political correctness are not new or fresh or symptomatic

of social media, although at times it certainly feels like social media has exacerbated the debate because so many voices are able to chime in.

From Dennis Miller to Bill Burr to Daniel Lawrence Whitney (aka Larry the Cable Guy), spates of comics are bemoaning the infringement on their freedom of speech wrought by fans overly sensitive and attuned to issues of political correctness. Even Jerry Seinfeld, made famous for his harmless observational patter, voiced objections on *Late Night with Seth Meyers* saying: “There’s a creepy PC thing out there that really bothers me” (Gorenstein 2015). He specifically alludes to a joke wherein he dons a stereotypical gay male affect that hasn’t been going over too well with audiences. He maintains this *is* a funny joke, but audiences are too afraid to laugh for fear of being misidentified as insensitive, or worse: a bigot. While some among those ranks are comics of color like Chris Rock and Russell Peters and a few are even women like Lisa Lampanelli, queen of shock comedy, those most vocal about this are, by and large, white male comics (there may also be an argument here that white male comics constitute a sizeable portion of the comics performing professionally). Ultimately, tensions surrounding political correctness reflect the struggle over who gets to decide what is funny. A male sense of humor has long stood in as humor genera but with the advent of social media like Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Reddit, and Instagram, fans have myriad avenues for challenging the presumption of a shared comic sensibility—one that often takes potshots at the disenfranchised. This chapter uses a dual-method qualitative approach drawing from ethnography (interviews with agents, industry executives, digital media experts, comic entertainers, and writers) and critical feminist discourse analyses of popular media, for example, stand-up comedy, print media articles, blogs, documentaries, public commentary, tweets, YouTube videos, and television programming, to interrogate conversations surrounding political correctness when it comes to stand-up comedy.

SITUATING THE DEBATE

Changing political climate and cultural contexts inform the sensitivities of the audience—meaning what was offensive in the 1930s is not likely to be the same as that which we bluster about in the current Zeitgeist. In “Comedy Has Issues,” Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai (2017, 234) write that “What we find comedic (or just funny) is sensitive to changing contexts. It is sensitive because the funny is always tripping over the not funny, sometimes appearing identical to it. The contexts that incite these issues of how to manage disruptive difference do not just emerge through cultural comparisons, either: a laugh in one world causing sheer shame in another, say.” Competing and contradictory interpretations exist within any given cultural moment,

across cultures, and over time. For instance, when a comic’s joke is called into question, you can track polarized reactions from fans and comics; and, the only evidence needed for how jokes can fail from one culture to another is the sharp inhalation of breath, sucking of teeth, or dead silence that falls after delivery of the joke. The Hays Code (Motion Picture Production Code) instituted in 1930 reflected public sensitivity toward what was seen as morally questionable, that is, lewd or sexual content, profanity, or interracial relationships. Today, that content would make few shudder let alone motivate minions to storm the castle. Gilbert Gottfried—the former voice of the famed Aflac duck who was unceremoniously dumped after he made an inconsiderate joke following the 2011 tsunami in Japan—warns that “People like to pick and choose what to get offended by” and fellow comic Jim Norton points out that “We’re all offended by whatever violates our comfort.” Yesterday’s sexual innuendo has given way to current sensitivities that tend to crystallize around perceived bigoted, sexist, and racially insensitive humor.

The ephemeral nature of what we find offensive means that when it comes to discussions of political correctness we must be careful to neither conflate nor generalize across culture and over time. It is problematic to make comparisons, for instance, between the legal persecution of profanity or obscenity on stage to the public’s feedback on the perpetuation of racist/homophobic/sexist stereotypes. Yet such comparisons are being made, casting comic contemporaries as persecuted in the same ways as Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory, George Carlin, or Richard Pryor. This is evident in *Can We Take a Joke?* (2016), a film focusing on censorship battles throughout the history of stand-up comedy, wherein journalists, scholars, lawyers, and comics offer personal anecdotes and historical and contemporary case studies to reflect on public and legal attacks on stand-up comics. This is also the case in Sascha Cohen’s (2016) “How the Marginalized Invented Politically Incorrect Comedy,” whose central conceit proffers that the politically progressive and radical comics of the 1960s and 1970s like Richard Pryor and Lenny Bruce were the progenitors of what was then politically incorrect. Theirs was a fight meant to take on Goliaths like Christianity, racism, homophobia, and American exceptionalism that pervaded political and social institutions and Americans’ collective consciousness. The substance of their jokes revealed the hypocrisy behind outlawing crass language while introducing all manner of atrocities and human rights violations in Vietnam and Korea. Fans aligned with said comics in opposition to the law/political authorities and to conservative and bigoted lines of thinking because they found the campaign a laudable one. While Cohen acknowledges that there are different kinds of line-crossing going on if one compares Lenny Bruce to someone like Daniel Tosh, linking these two different discourses around political correctness obfuscates that invested parties are now fighting for the right to say hateful things (that none

of the aforementioned comics would have said) rather than fighting for the right to decry the same. The documentary and Cohen's article reflect a discursive trend that links current opponents of political correctness to admirable avengers of free speech throughout history despite incongruities between their motives. Adam Carolla's adamant stance for free speech and what he accomplishes with this hard-won liberty simply cannot be compared to Richard Pryor's. It is as crucial to avoid such pitfalls as it is to contemplate how early debates surrounding multiculturalism and the sedimentation of neoliberalism shape these discourses.

While the focus here is on the comedic cultural form of stand-up comedy, there are many ways in which debates on political correctness are congruent across cultural forms and social/political institutions, for example, debates surrounding multiculturalism in education that began in earnest in the 1990s. These debates circulated around what was seen as the introduction of politics into liberal education that placed primacy on knowledge for knowledge's sake. Conservative arguments asked for a separation and/or excision of teaching that was political in favor of apolitical content. But, as Christopher Newfield (1993, 316), points out, critics were hard pressed to actually develop examples of curriculum or explain why teaching about the role of colonialism in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is political, while teaching about fifteenth-century English history is seen as "disinterested" (his examples). Liberals countered by arguing that all knowledge is political. Multiculturalism was initially derided as "communist militarism" and summarily discounted alongside any outcries in the academy from students and faculty voicing discontent about microaggressions aimed at their otherness (Newfield 1993, 317). For those opposing such conversations, attention to diversity, whether through multicultural education, lawmaking, or in entertainment, signaled a threat to a unified vision of America, a force that could fracture and divide Americans, threatening U.S. sovereignty and the nation's reputation on the international front. According to Newfield, "The opened mind, for the nineties Right, would produce not just a political orgy but a race orgy, a recipe for social collapse" (Newfield 1993, 318). Such conversations aroused deep fears around national identity and security. Indeed, in 1991, Alice Kessler-Harris's presidential address at the American Studies Association meeting tackled the heated debate surrounding multiculturalism in education. She argued that those opposing multiculturalism fear a loss of a venerable shared national identity imposed by curriculum inclusive of minority histories and honest discussions about our legacy of imperialism and white supremacy (Kessler-Harris 1992). This connected to related fears of being scrutinized and criticized not just for the content but the manner in which folks delivered that content.

Just like those opposing political correctness in comedy, opponents of multiculturalism don't take kindly to being monitored for speech and behavior deemed politically incorrect. However, Alice Kessler-Harris points out that protestations surrounding political correctness have less to do with people wanting to say "whatever they want whenever they want" and more so an effort to protect the status quo, safeguarding the very essence of who we think we are as a nation. In her address, Kessler-Harris (1992, 337) said: "At the heart of the attack on multiculturalism lies a concern not for rights but for community. To its opponents the idea of what constitutes America seems to be at stake." But, disunity has and will continue to be more accurate a description of the nation. Christopher Newfield (1993, 336) writes: "Our national 'disuniting' began with our inception, and it's not too soon to get over our regret about this. Our 'pluralistic,' 'consensual' union, however one feels about it, has always rested on a divided, antagonistic multiplicity of cultures whose overlap has been sporadic, conflictual, or incomplete." Similarly, the debate around political correctness calls into question a shared comic sensibility, at the core of which is a matter of communal and national identity. Hegemonic consent to sexism or racism or any -ism functions to obscure the ways these ideologies shape our laws, institutions, and cultural traditions. For comedy, the risks lie in the unmaking of our collective notions of what constitutes something as humorous—if we no longer found sexism funny, imagine how that could change the substance and stylings of stand-up comedy. Because investments around these ideas run deep, it raises vociferous arguments on either side of this complex debate, a debate simultaneously shaped by neoliberalism.

It is impossible to discuss political correctness without considering the impact of neoliberalism on the conversations we are having (or can have) on this topic. Lisa Duggan, in *Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003), writes a reasoned and thorough treatise on neoliberalism, describing the many phases necessary for neoliberalism to become cemented in political thought and public opinion as it did in the 1970s and 1980s. Central to the outcomes of neoliberalism and most important to the current debate on political correctness is the belief that social equality has been achieved and thus any failing on the part of individuals to succeed or obtain the American Dream signals a personal failure rather than impugning institutions that favor certain identity categories like whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, and so on. Adam Kotsko (2017, 498) echoes this when he writes: "The nature of competition, of course, is that someone is going to have to lose. From the neoliberal perspective, however, that is a feature, not a bug. A well-designed market will seek out and reward merit and punish laziness and ineptitude." Privileging ideologies like competition and independence over egalitarianism and community breeds contempt

for anyone unable to rise above poverty (despite overwhelming evidence that this is a Herculean task) and the policies put in place to support those in need of assistance. For example, neoliberal politics informed the overhaul of the welfare system under the Clinton administration from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (instituted in 1935) to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (implementation began in 1997), which offered skimpier benefits to fewer people for less amount of time and sought to quell growing public contempt for perceived abuses of the system and its beneficiaries. Neoliberal policies and practices appear to set people up for success in a free-market capitalist economy but, in practice, obscure and reproduce existing inequalities. In the late 1990s and into the early aughts, neoliberalism did to initiatives directed at multiculturalism what it does so well. Efforts aimed at multiculturalism that were initially resisted by educators and political authorities on the Right were subsumed by state and corporate interests, offering a diluted version that invests in tokenism, assimilatory social practices, and limitations on professional upward mobility and financial success for women and minorities. Duggan (2003, 44) describes this as follows:

the rhetoric of 'official' neoliberal politics shifted during the 1990s from "culture wars" alliances, to the superficial 'multiculturalism' compatible with the global aspirations of U.S. business interests. "Culture wars" attacks and alliances did not disappear, but they receded from the national political stage in favor of an emergent rhetorical commitment to diversity, and to a narrow, formal, nonredistributive form of 'equality' politics for the new millennium.

A diluted form of multiculturalism reflects the general consensus that companies and universities should mirror the ethnic and racial diversity of the country, but it would be preferable if you would leave your yarmulkes, hijabs, or dashikis at home.

The impact of neoliberalism on debates broaching political correctness functions to narrow the conversation and maintain the status quo, particularly when concerns revolve around specific terminology versus the ideologies upholding problematic beliefs about Others. Those opposing the imperative of political correctness claim that free speech provides a catalyst for public debate and that public outcry and backlash stifles this very freedom. In defense of controversial shock comics like Sam Kinison and Andrew Dice Clay performing in the 1980s, Sascha Cohen (2016) writes: "Although the jokes were distasteful, the backlash they caused provoked larger conversations about homophobia during the decade. In this way, even crude, derogatory comedy can be valuable as a barometer of the national mood, and an opportunity to bring up dicey issues that are otherwise repressed or ignored." Other academics are making similar observations. Having written three

books on the topic of political correctness, Howard Schwarz's arguments are prolific and I do not always (or often) agree with his analyses, particularly when he dismisses the entire field of scholarship on microaggressions as unfounded beliefs lacking sufficient evidence. That said, his long-term inquiry into the topic bears mentioning and in his book, *Political Correctness and the Destruction of the Social Order: The Rise of the Pristine Self* (2016, 6), he uses psychoanalytic phenomenology to argue that many social issues we confront like bullying and the subsequent anti-bullying movement is an "avatar of political correctness." By this he means that we structure debates around the anti-bullying movement and political correctness so as to vilify anyone voicing opposition to either—stifling dialogue rather than generating it. According to Schwartz (2016, 3), we have become inculcated with a sense of self-importance, what he calls the "pristine self," that if threatened in any way, ushers forth a volley of public attention on how to not make people feel badly about themselves. For him this is the core issue for those campaigning against political correctness. In other words, we have created a culture in which no person should be subject to any speech or image that violates their sense of self.

Popular media communicates similar arguments, for example when Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt published "The Coddling of the American Mind" in *The Atlantic* (fall 2015), describing current efforts aimed at political correctness on college campuses as "vindictive protectiveness," causing a dust-up on social media between those with clashing ideas on the matter. Celebrated comic performers Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele (2014, 31–2) frame the same argument in this way:

To *not* make fun of something is, we believe, itself a form of bullying. When a humorist makes the conscious decision to exclude a group from derision, isn't he or she implying that the members of that group are not capable of self-reflection? Or don't possess the mental faculties to recognize the nuances of satire? A group that's excluded never gets the opportunity to join in the greater human conversation.

Their arguments, however, inflict further injustice by suggesting that humorous targeting of the nation's most vulnerable populations offers useful opportunities for building character, self-reflexivity, and an acumen for satire. In a neoliberal rhetorical flip, comics and fans advocating for political correctness become the bullies and cast as unenlightened and/or condescending. Key and Peele also neglect to account for their own status as revered, successful comic actors and positionality as biracial men; both standpoints give them greater licensure to speak on the topic at all, lending gravitas to their arguments, that is, coming from a white person may make these arguments more dodgy.

Like Schwartz and Cohen, Key and Peele argue that unfettered joking expands the conversation and, curiously, so do those advocating *for* political correctness. How can such diametrically opposed camps imagine they are accomplishing the same thing and is one side or the other delusional? Under neoliberalism, claims on either side are problematic. Most commonly, a breach in political correctness appears that the problem has to do with a single person—the jokester—which quickly devolves into accusations such as: that guy is racist or that guy is homophobic. The polemics of political correctness (on both sides) seldom discuss these issues as endemic to our institutions and social interactions; rather, we cite abuses as stemming from individual behaviors and beliefs. It is far more comforting to imagine someone's indifference to rape as singular or an anomaly versus that such insouciance has become naturalized. And, so, our conversations focus on how we might penalize the individual for their insensitivity, versus the ubiquity of the beliefs that informed the jokes in the first place. What looks like "change" as a result of consumer feedback does not often accomplish the changes that fuel the outcry in the first place by those desiring to participate in creating a more socially just world.

Another issue specific to this debate in an increasingly technocratic world are the ways social media has made us clumsy in our discussions when more context, not less, is imperative. With comedy, much can be lost in translation. Jokes and those imparting the jokes can be misunderstood when divorced from the larger context of the performance and reception of any joke cannot be definitively controlled by the comic. Historically and especially today in the midst of media engines and social platforms vying for our (un)divided attention, it is easy for consumers to make uninformed judgments about a joke that may resonate differently if they attended the comedy show in question or if they consulted additional media sources. This is a perfect recipe for producing what comedian Karith Foster (2016) calls the "outrage phenomenon" or what comedian Gilbert Gottfried (*Can We Take a Joke?* 2016) calls the "outrage mob"—a swath of the public who, according to their political proclivities, jump on board to whatever issue is trending without doing the necessary reconnaissance to understand the particulars of the issue or accusations being leveled. This is further compounded when the same joke draws appreciation for completely different reasons, variances that are quite difficult for comics to control. Berlant and Ngai (2017, 246) put it this way: "Without actually unifying or bringing the different kinds of laughs together into a consensus about racism or political correctness, without even trying to do this or needing to, the unleashing of the racist joke ends up being enjoyed by the entire audience, including those who enjoy it exclusively because it destroys the white person's alibi." Questions of authorial intention plague comics as they craft and deliver their jokes. Dave Chappelle (2017) recounts being

misunderstood by a vocal female audience member as indifferent to rape, after telling a series of jokes involving Bill Cosby and a superhero whose powers were only activated upon touching a woman's vagina but who is so unattractive that he is forced to rape women in order to save the day. Chappelle reaches the crescendo of the joke, concluding that the superhero "saves way more than he rapes, and he only rapes to save." When the frustrated audience member yells: "Women suffer!" his response earnestly repeated is two words: "I know. I know. [pause] I know." Weaving this account of that altercation into his later performances allows him to continue telling the same jokes while clarifying his position on the matter of violence toward women. These two conditions—context and reception—that give rise to misunderstandings and miscommunication often lead to wholesale dismissal of the concerns raised by the offended parties, another tragic conversation-stopper working in the service of neoliberalism. Historic and contemporary approaches to multiculturalism and neoliberal politics fashion and inform the polemics of political correctness. And this is where we turn next, the arguments waged around political correctness in comedy—for and against.

THE DEBATE IN STAND-UP COMEDY

Advancement of social media platforms has been a game changer in the twenty-first century, a democratizing force for consumers facilitating public engagement with formerly untouchable persons of celebrity status in myriad ways. New technologies allow the public to voice their discontent and challenge the ascendant strain of humor historically produced by heterosexual men. In an article titled: "Twitter is terrifying!" journalist Latoya Peterson (2015) interviews five comics, among them Aamer Rahman creator of the solo show: "The Truth Hurts" and an international feature comic. Rahman describes this evolving social contract between audience and performer as being not "just accountable to the person in the room, but also the people who will eventually encounter the material. And this is changing whether comedians like it or not." New means of accessing comic performers who tend to maintain high visibility on social media platforms has resulted in a cavalcade of criticism aimed at comics expressing homophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, or misogynist world views. The announcement of Trevor Noah as Jon Stewart's replacement for *The Daily Show* sparked controversy when members of the public brought Noah under fire for a handful of anti-Semitic and sexist tweets posted several years ago. Shots were fired from multiple camps and for a while Twitter felt like the beaches of Normandy. Before that it was Daniel Tosh's abhorrent treatment of a fan who vocalized dissatisfaction with one of his rape jokes and before that it was Tracy Morgan and before that

Michael Richards. I could go on. This trend lead writer for *The New Yorker* Ian Crouch (2014) to ask: "Is social media ruining comedy?" In the article, he takes a strong stance for the fans, the consumers of comedy pushing back against bigoted jokes and the comics that tell them.

Standup has always been about thinking while being watched, and it can be a bit grating to hear celebrity comics like [Chris] Rock, Louis [CK], and [Bill] Burr gripe about feeling powerless in a fight against an army of hecklers on the Web. (For every critical voice, there are hundreds of fans hanging onto their every word, and who have no problem laughing at a little casual racism or misogyny.) . . . These complaints about the Web's restrictive atmosphere are being made by well-established straight men in a field that has, until recently, mostly been the province of straight men. Contemporary audiences are more attuned to social power dynamics in comedy: the high-profile controversies involving comedians in recent years have all started with a straight man making a joke about a less-empowered segment of the population.

As Crouch points out, make no mistake about it, people do want to continue to laugh at casual racism, to continue to laugh at how weird queers are and aren't women silly little ol' things. Social media is helping to crack this egg wide open and those defending comics in this discourse surrounding political correctness do so based on the right to free speech, the intent of the joke/jokester, the distinctive characteristics of stand-up comedy as a cultural form, and comedic authenticity, for example, if I saw it happen then I should be able to reproduce it on stage with impunity.

Most commonly, opposing arguments to political correctness rally around the first amendment right guaranteeing freedom of speech. For comics, this is especially important because of the nature of the craft—it is creative and most crucially, it must be funny. In other words, comedy should not be held to the same standards as other entertainment or political punditry *because* it is comedy. Comedy locates itself as a humorous mode of discourse rather than a serious mode of discourse, thus, this discourse should not have to abide by the same rules and fans should allow for greater creative licensure and flexibility. To address these arguments, Aparna Nancherla, as brilliant a comic as she is hilarious, asks: "Does the freedom of all speech mean one never needs to reflect on or even stop to reconsider anything one says? And what exactly do the Internet-termed 'outrage' crowd want in terms of concrete goals? If it's just to start a conversation, who is that hurting? Besides the status quo? Social change doesn't occur through pretending biases and power structures don't exist in society" (Peterson 2015). She, like many other comics and fans, are not opposed to free speech. They are opposed to "free" being a euphemism for uncritical; a safety net for all manner of insensitivities couched in humor and leveled at historically marginalized populations. This is another hallmark

of neoliberalism, the valorizing of loosening of strictures and celebration of freedoms (in the name of capitalism; put differently: bigoted comedy is profitable) that serve to legitimate hate speech. Where Nancherla sees fertile opportunities for conversation about the content of humor, comics angered by public feedback see their creativity being stifled. Some comics welcome those conversations. For example, Hari Kondabolu, whose comedy tackles issues of racism, sexism, classism, and xenophobia, regularly engages with public criticism of his comedy and changes his jokes as a result. He does not consider himself above reproach, demonstrating the value he places on the exchange between creator and consumer (Krefting 2014). Other comics would rather not have that conversation with fans for a variety of reasons. First, a few voices of opposition seems minute compared to the thousands who have found the same joke funny. Second, questioning their comic material may require further introspection of the worldviews that inform it. And third, some comics maintain staunchly held beliefs in the superior ability to gauge what is actually funny (pace: Jerry Seinfeld's insistence on the hilarity of his gay joke). Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai (2017, 234–5) capture such attitudes among comics when they write: "It is as though in the current moment of social claims-making some comedians have become the butts of their own jokes, exiled to the outside of where they used to feel sovereign. It is as though comedy is freshly dangerous." However comics elect to proceed—change their humor to satisfy public complaints or defend their right to joke in this way—put them in danger of losing fans. Ironically, comics poopooing political correctness maintain that changing their jokes violates their integrity as a comic. As a segment of the fans see it, there is nothing integrous about those jokes or their defense of them.

Freedom of speech is a frequent flyer at this airport, but so are arguments centered on comic intent. According to Canadian comic Russell Peters, if the intent is to be funny, not harmful, then comics should have a right to say it (Silman 2015). The subjective nature of humor (why we laugh at what we do, even if that guy next to us isn't) and impossibility of controlling for reception makes this an onerous argument. How can you ensure that each audience member knows the intent of the comic performing? Can't intent be as carefully crafted as the joke itself? Sociologist Raúl Pérez (2013) confirmed this to be the case when he took stand-up comedy classes at a reputable club in Southern California. As a participant-observer, he noted distinctly different coaching practices administered to white people versus people of color. Coaches encouraged comics to invoke racial stereotypes if they were themselves racial minorities because the public enjoys this humor and gives comics of color greater latitude in developing race-based humor. On the other hand, coaches encouraged white comics, particularly men, to approach similar topics far more cautiously. They suggested a variety of rhetorical

strategies to do so, including self-deprecatory humor, claiming to be an “equal opportunity offender,” and donning characters of “Others” for comedic effect—what I call modern-day minstrelsy, comedy teachers describe as being a savvy “dialectician” (Pérez 2013, 493). All of these are “*racial commonsense* strateg[ies], that is, acknowledging the pitfalls of engaging in discourse ‘about a group you don’t represent,’” and bookending such humor with disclaimers situating the comic as anti-racist and knowledgeable about the legacy of racism, even as they make racist jokes (Pérez 2013, 488). Clearly, these strategies are meant to disarm audiences into laughing at what would otherwise be inappropriate. Offering disclaimers may appear to demonstrate that the comic means no harm, yet comedy can always fall back onto timeless bromides, for example, “it’s just a joke” or “I was only kidding,” dismissing any suspicion about comic intent.

Citing comedy as an exceptional artistic craft, a special snowflake when it comes to cultural forms, continually comes up as rationale for why a comedian’s comic material should not be the target of public ire. While having breakfast with Jerry Seinfeld on *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* (2014), Bill Burr rejects the notion that viewers can surmise his intent saying: “Just because you took what I said seriously doesn’t now mean I mean it. What you’re in my head and know my intent? Like if I’m saying something and I’m joking. *I’m joking.*” Burr refers back to the play frame in which comedy is situated that simultaneously serves to exonerate comics and renders impotent any offense taken at the joke. His take, and Seinfeld appeared to agree, is that stand-up comedy is precisely the forum wherein no one should have to apologize for anything they say on stage. Furthermore, other artists like musicians, painters, and writers can workshop their content in a studio or on the page before airing it for public consumption, whereas comics are more vulnerable to public scrutiny because the business of comedy necessitates a visible online presence and no joke is a good one until it has been workshopped and tested multiple times. Chris Rock and Patton Oswalt publicly complain that it is difficult to work out new material on stage in front of a live audience when that material is likely to be uploaded to YouTube by the end of the night (Rich 2014). Ian Crouch (2014) puts it this way: “Every performance has become a de-facto national set, even the ones in which a comedian is riffing or failing through new material.” This wholly changes the creative process that any comic undertakes to develop strong material and according to some, may result in comics self-censoring their work to avoid public outrage or backlash. Chris Rock forecasts that this will “lead to safer, gooier stand-up. You can’t think the thoughts you want to think if you think you’re being watched” (Rich 2014). It is a false presumption that safer comedy is unfunny comedy, but on the latter point, Rock is right; watchful fans may disrupt and destabilize our longstanding shared comic sensibility, one

that has historically protected the most powerful. Leela Ginelle (2015), writer for *BitchMedia*, states: “Personally, I find it easy to believe that a comedy act free of sexism, racism, and anti-queer jokes would be an improvement over the status quo.” Voices, like Ginelle, are not asking for comics to stop making jokes, they are asking for comics to think, to be mindful when it comes to producing humor that punches down. And powerful people are listening. Public responses can impact hiring decisions (you may not get hired if you’re too controversial) and writing choices (some comics may reconsider jokes that may be insensitive or politically incorrect).

A flurry of articles published in the summer of 2015 capture this upset in higher education entertainment—that is, the demand for comics who are conscientious about what comes out of their mouths.³ Jerry Seinfeld says he is avoiding the college circuit, though he does not stand to suffer financially for this decision. Seinfeld has many other lucrative offers but for those for whom college gigs are a main source of income, they will have to find new ways of making audiences laugh or find new audiences altogether. Clearly, status can make you either vulnerable or impregnable to public demands for political correctness. Established comics like Jim Jeffries, Bill Burr, Lisa Lampanelli, Michael McDonald, Gilbert Gottfried, and Daniel Tosh revel in thumbing their noses at political correctness and audiences familiar with their style of humor happily pay to hear more. By and large, for these comics, criticism of their comedy will not dramatically alter their existing fan base that flocks to these comics *because* they like this “equal-opportunity offender” style of humor (Peterson 2008, 149). Comics harrumphing criticism of politically incorrect jokes rarely reflect on status—having it, functions like a suit of armor, protecting and maintaining profitability. However, for most comics, especially less established folks, with the advent of social media the public is able to broadcast breaches in political correctness to an international audience potentially impacting revenue and fan base composition in a global market. This means that comics can and do export more than their comedy to other countries; more dangerously, they export ideas about who we are regardless of the veracity of those ideas, raising the stakes in these conversations about how we represent and depict “Others.”

Sascha Cohen (2016) describes another oft-supplied reason for why you should be allowed to say un-PC things: “The it’s-ok-to-say-it-if-it’s-true defense of politically incorrect comedy may be a simplistic one. But it’s a defense that has prevailed for a reason: It’s made for some of the most celebrated humor in modern American comedy.” Cohen infers that political incorrectness in comedy is the only way to be at the cutting edge of performance and eligible to become a comedy legend. It is problematic to position politically incorrect comedy as automatically radical or cutting-edge; taking potshots at women and minorities is neither edgy nor new. The opposite is

true. These are hackneyed subjects as tired as the stereotypes they reinforce. White stand-up comic Heather McDonald recounts some negative feedback given about a series of jokes that she does about her Vietnamese step-daughter like how great it is to always be able to get her nails done and get massages every day. Because, of course, all Vietnamese women work in nail salons or massage parlors. In one of the jokes, she dons an “Asian” voice, what I call yellow-face minstrelsy, to impersonate the mother of her step-daughter who calls to check in about her daughter’s health and well-being. There is no humor in the joke other than the imitation of the “Other.” While reflecting on this in an interview, she defiantly defends keeping this joke in her sets. For one, it works because audiences are laughing. Secondly, it is a true story and she is merely imitating real life. She bemoans the time producers told her she couldn’t perform as a white girl talking like a Latina gang member, even though she had seen the same on a television talk show and thought it was hilarious (*Can We Take a Joke?* 2016). Using comedy to punch-down, to traffic in commonly held beliefs about minorities, these are hallmarks of much stand-up comedy, not radical performances that should be protected in the same way the public supported protection of free speech in the 1960s and 1970s. There are enough comics out there whose objectives are to get the laugh, no matter the cost, making it essential for viewers to operationalize the avenues available to voice discontent, though I suggest that fans have equal responsibility to be conscientious and thoughtful in their objections, in part because many comics, though not all, are working hard to talk about tough issues thoughtfully.

The comics issuing opposition to the policing of stand-up comedy for political correctness are not necessarily the ones you might suspect based on the content of their humor. They are folks like Chris Rock, Jim Norton, and Patton Oswalt, all of whom publicly support advancement of civil liberties in word and deed. Some of the most vocal opponents identify as progressives, liberals, Democrats, and advocates for social justice, which demonstrates just how complicated this debate has become. In an interview with David Daley of *Salon*, Patton Oswalt, known for being a champion for social justice on and off stage, argues vehemently that a comic’s voice should not be restricted. Oswalt recapitulates all of the central claims vocalized by those opposing arguments for political correctness, which makes for a strained conversation, in part because both men are so clearly in favor of social justice and equality and yet both adamantly adhere to their respective camps. At one point, Daley (2015) interjects: “But just as the comedian has the right to make a joke, any of us have the right to speak up about it. And I believe in empowering voices that aren’t 40-something white guys like the two of us to say, ‘Wait a second, maybe there’s something being said here that we should all talk about, or another way of thinking about this.’” Daley illumines Oswalt’s privileged position as a white, male which informs his perspective on this matter.

Americanist scholar Jessyka Finley (2016), who examines black women’s satire—from Shirley Chisolm’s subversive congressional politicking to the comic performances of Danitra Vance and Leslie Jones—argues that progressive white male comic mouthpieces like Stephen Colbert, and Jon Stewart take as a given that society is “fractured and unequal” (239) and yet their privilege means they do not have to experience that fracturing.

Such detachment from the general racial situation, in that their whiteness and maleness privileges and protects them, when paired with their frank confrontations of the problems plaguing American society, is a striking juxtaposition of the rational comic persona and that which refuses to conform to rational understanding This posture could not be in greater contrast with black women’s marginal location in American society. When life is constrained and limited by the social and political forces with which postmodern theory tries to reckon, the escape hatch of rationality is not as easy to access. (239)

Finley and Daley are in accord here, both arguing that minorities have narrower ways of intervening in these conversations in the first place and so to circumscribe their voices in the interests of free speech, regardless of good intentions, reinforces and operationalizes existing privilege. Daley firmly believes, as I do, that comics have the right to say what they want to, but fans also have the same rights to flex these newfound muscles in virtual spaces. Finley reminds us that even with an invitation and avenue with which to speak freely, critiques arising from the marginalized may be stifled, misinterpreted, and misused.

Veteran comic Jim Norton (2015) argues that we are addicted to outrage, to being offended at all the wrong things. In a country where less than 50 percent of the population show up to vote in elections, we are spending our time raging about matters that are inconsequential like jokes told by comics. As he puts it: “Upsetting ourselves on purpose is exactly what we are doing. I choose to believe that we are addicted to the rush of being offended, the *idea* of it, rather than believing we have become a nation of emasculated children whose only defense against an abyss of emotional agony is a trigger warning.” Norton has gone on record about these matters many times and he makes some astute comments in *Can We Take a Joke?*. His beliefs in a nutshell—he wants comics to be able to say what they want without professional penalties for doing so; in other words, the feedback from fans is not nearly as problematic as the financial repercussions that can take place as a result of unsavory jesting. In practice, Norton (like Oswalt) appreciates smart, thoughtful comedy and does his own work to be informed and politically correct on stage. His comedy special *Mouthful of Shame* (2017) reveals that he dates transwomen but that it has been difficult joking about this life choice,

in part because producers ask him not to, assuming that any joke on the topic will be offensive. His response echoes Key and Peele's points made earlier: "Just because you've been marginalized doesn't mean you're removed from the humor spectrum." Stated differently: because you occupy a minority status or certain issues are rubbing up against public comfort does not mean that the topic or persons deserve to be shelved. Nevertheless, whether he means to or not, his statement about a swath of the public being addicted to outrage puts defenders of political correctness into a double bind—they are either not tough enough, not man enough to handle the joke, or self-righteous, humorless, whiners fiending for their next emotional high. As so many of these discourses demonstrate, there is more nuance than this to the debates.

Patton Oswalt expresses a different kind of problem with "outrage culture" because it promises a false sense of empowerment. He suggests that the real power lies in laughter and mockery aimed at bigotry.

I don't want any voices silenced, no matter how repellent, no matter how racist or homophobic. I want to hear them. I don't like this policing of language so racists, homophobes and misogynists just think of more clever and obscure ways to get their hatred out there. Let people say nigger and faggot. I want to know where those people are . . . The messiness is what will save us. The politeness will not save us. Politeness, the policing of words, let it all fucking out there and then if someone says something racist, just fucking laugh at them. *Dude, really?* Make fun of that shit. We used to be the guys that fucking say it all, and now we are policing shit and I don't like it. That's going to hurt us. That's going to hurt progressivism in this country. (in Daley 2015)

He, like Norton, expresses frustration that fans have taken their participatory role as consumers to newfound extremes that have consequences—financial, professional, personal, and so on. Moreover, he is concerned that comics will start doing one of two things: steer clear of certain subject matters for fear of being misunderstood even though they are, like him, progressive and well-meaning or learn how to be politically correct, adapting to this new rhetorical footwork while advancing conservative agendas or bigotry. In his comedy special, *Talking for Clapping* (2016) he makes this plea to his viewers on the matter:

My brain's fucking going. It is. And it's really hard now because. Look, I could not be a more committed, progressive, feminist, pro-gay, pro-transgender person but I cannot keep up with the fucking glossary of correct terms, goddammit [*clapping*]. I'm trying [*clapping*]! I want to help, but holy fuck [*clapping*]! It's like a secret club password. They change it every week and then you're in trouble. "That's not the word we use!" Fuck! It was last week [*laughter*]! I have

hemorrhoids; my ass is falling out [*laughter*]. I wanna help! I know I'm a cis, old, white, motherfucker [*laughter*] but don't give me shit because I didn't know the right term. Fucking RuPaul. RuPaul got into shit for saying the word tranny. Ru-fucking-Paul [*slamming the mic stand for emphasis on each syllable amidst laughter and clapping*]. RuPaul, who, she laid down on the barbed wire of discrimination throughout the 1970s and 80s so this new generation could run across her back and yell at her for saying tranny [*laughter and clapping*]! What the fuck [*clapping, cheers, and whistles*]!? I will always change. I will always try to learn the new term. But you gotta give me some fucking wiggle room. Alright? My ass is falling out. I'm trying. I'm trying.

Oswalt and Norton welcome the conversation surrounding these touchy matters but remind viewers of the pitfalls of those advocating for political correctness like not being aware of how a joke in questions fits within the larger context of the performance or how we latch on to the use of certain terms and anyone using such terms becomes the villain despite the substance of their work—onstage and off. Unless conversations surrounding political correctness grapple with the chief promoters of inequality (and some do), larger institutional forces and ideologies that shape and sustain white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, and so on, we are all missing the point and the opportunity to truly shift our shared comedic sensibility toward something that looks and sounds more egalitarian.

CONCLUSION

Viewers and comics alike exhibit a range of reactions to the polemics of political correctness. Some comics opposed to policing for political correctness value the conversation but disapprove of consequences being meted out based on the sentiments expressed during a performance. Other comics reject the conversation altogether and rue the advent of social media that threatens a humor genera that has been circulating since blackface minstrelsy. To that effect, Australian comic Aamer Rahman says: "The fear of the 'PC police' is basically this—it's 'I used to be able to say horrible things about minorities, but now if I do that, they all have Twitter accounts and they can spam my mentions'" (in Peterson 2015). Another segment of comics desires the conversation and welcomes audience feedback on their work and especially on the work of comics using the stage as a platform for dispensing bigotry. *Huffington Post* writer Maureen Ryan (2015) offers an optimistic view of how these conversations may impact our culture in the future.

What if ever-larger numbers of people have become more aware of the pernicious nature of biases, demeaning speech and prejudice, and are trying to do something about it? I'd like to think these incidents are not examples of "political correctness" (a phrase that translates as: "I'm stomping my feet because I can't say whatever I want to whomever I want"), but evidence of the world becoming a more egalitarian and compassionate place.

Ryan presents the possibility that we reassign such conversations, not to the category of political correctness, but to social change. Smart lady. Such a rhetorical shift may prevent us from comparing apples to oranges like early battles for free speech predicated on speaking truth to power being compared to contemporary debates on the same that justify comics' right to incorporate stereotypes and abusive epithets into their comedy. It can also foment deeper conversations examining larger engines sustaining inequality rather than targeting individuals as the sole sources of systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, and the like. In turn, more nuanced conversations may transform the substance of what we find funny leading to smarter comedy that lets more people in on the jokes and leaves us sharing yuks versus bracing ourselves for an attack.

NOTES

1. We explore this particular discourse further in the following article: Rebecca Krefling and Rebecca Baruc, "A New Economy of Jokes?: #Socialmedia #Comedy." *Comedy Studies* (Fall 2015): <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2040610X.2015.1083165>. Even greater explication of this discourse can be found in Rebecca Krefling, "Dueling Discourses: The Female Comic's Double-Bind in the New Media Age," in *Transgressive Humor of American Women Writers*, edited by Sabrina Fuchs (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

2. The following popular news pieces document the ways in which women are using social media to document sexual harassment; these are just a sampling of the articles that have been published on the topic: Kate J. M. Baker, "Standing Up To Sexual Harassment And Assault In L.A.'s Comedy Scene," *Buzzfeed*, January 14, 2016, accessed January 15, 2016, https://www.buzzfeed.com/katiejmbaker/standing-up-to-sexual-harassment-and-assault-in-las-comedy-s?utm_term=.hcyeedLbn#gq1VV0kO5; Ed Cara, "A comedian has been accused of sexual assault – and women are speaking out," *Mic*, August 17, 2016, accessed August 20, 2016, <https://mic.com/articles/151826/comedian-aaron-glaser-has-been-accused-of-sexual-assault-and-women-are-speaking-out#.DYX9I4Kvh>; Jason Molinet, "Margaret Cho tackles sexual violence with social media hashtag #tellyourstory," *New York Daily News*, November 4, 2014, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/margaret-cho-tackles-sexual-violence-social-media-hashtag-article-1.1998256>; Sarah Stewart, "Exposing Sex Abuser is the Best Use of Social Media Ever," *The New York*

Post. January 22, 2016, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://nypost.com/2016/01/22/exposing-sex-abusers-is-the-best-use-of-social-media-ever/>.

3. For op-ed pieces documenting political correctness on the college circuit, see: Leela Ginelle, "College Students Don't Want to Hire Racist or Homophobic Comedians. Why Is That a Problem, Exactly?" *BitchMedia* August 17, 2015, accessed August 20, 2015, <https://bitchmedia.org/article/college-students-dont-want-hire-racist-or-homophobic-comedians-why-problem-exactly>; Emanuella Grinberg, "Why Some Comedians Don't Like College Campuses," *Fox2Now* June 10, 2015, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://fox2now.com/2015/06/10/why-some-comedians-dont-like-college-campuses/>; Anna Silman, "10 Famous Comedians on How Political Correctness is Killing Comedy: 'We Are Addicted to the Rush of Being Offended,'" *Salon* June 10, 2015, accessed July 1, 2015, http://www.salon.com/2015/06/10/10_famous_comedians_on_how_political_correctness_is_killing_comedy_we_are_addicted_to_the_rush_of_being_offended/; Lindy West, "What Do the Politically Correct Brain Police Have Against Venerable Man Comedians Like Jerry Seinfeld?" *The Guardian* June 9, 2015, accessed June 14, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/09/politically-correct-jerry-seinfeld-comedy-marginalised-voices>.

WORKS CITED

- Berlant, Lauren and Sianne Ngai. "Comedy Has Issues." *Critical Inquiry* 43 (Winter 2017): 233–249.
- Can We Take a Joke?* Directed by Ted Balaker. U.S.: Korchula Productions, 2016.
- Cohen, Sascha. "How the Marginalized Invented Politically Incorrect Comedy." *Zocalo Public Square*, September 19, 2016. Accessed September 20. <http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2016/09/19/marginalized-invented-offensive-comedy/ideas/nexus/>.
- Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*. Season 5, Episode 3, first broadcast November 20, 2014 by Crackle. Produced by Tammy Johnston.
- Crouch, Ian. "Is Social Media Ruining Comedy?" *The New Yorker*, December 30, 2014. Accessed April 17, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/social-media-ruining-comedy>.
- Daley, David. "Salon's Patton Oswalt Peace Summit." *Salon*, March 11, 2015. Accessed June 10, 2015. http://www.salon.com/2015/03/11/salons_patton_oswalt_peace_summit/.
- Dave Chappelle: The Age of Spin*. Collection 1, Episode 1. Streaming. Directed by Stan Lathan. U.S.: Netflix, 2017.
- Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003.
- Finley, Jessyka. "Black Women's Satire as (Black) Postmodern Performance." *Studies in American Humor* 2, no. 2 (2016): 236–265.
- Foster, Karith. "Keep the Offensive Comedy Coming." *Zocalo Public Square*, September 19, 2016. Accessed September 20, 2016. <http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2016/09/19/keep-offensive-comedy-coming/ideas/nexus/>.

- Ginelle, Leela. "College Students Don't Want to Hire Racist or Homophobic Comedians. Why is that a Problem, Exactly?" *BitchMedia*, August 17, 2015. Accessed August 20, 2015. <https://bitchmedia.org/article/college-students-dont-want-hire-racist-or-homophobic-comedians-why-problem-exactly>.
- Gorenstein, Colin. "Jerry Seinfeld Doubles Down: 'There's a Creepy PC Thing out there that Really Bothers me.'" *Salon*, June 10, 2015. Accessed June 11, 2015. http://www.salon.com/2015/06/10/jerry_seinfeld_doubles_down_%E2%80%9Cthere%E2%80%99s_a_creepy_pc_thing_out_there_that_really_bothers_me%E2%80%9D/.
- Jim Norton: *Mouthful of Shame*. Streaming. Written and directed by Jim Norton. U.S.: Netflix, 2017.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate." (1992) In *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, edited by Lucy Maddox, 335–352. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999.
- Key, Keegan-Michael and Jordan Peele. "The Ideas Issue: Comedy: Make Fun of Everything." *Time Magazine* 183, no. 11 (March 24, 2014): 30–32.
- Kotsko, Adam. "Neoliberalism's Demons." *Theory and Event* 20, no. 2 (April 2017): 493–509.
- Krefting, Rebecca. *All Joking Aside: American Humor and Its Discontents*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014.
- Krefting, Rebecca and Rebecca Baruc. "A New Economy of Jokes?: #Socialmedia #Comedy." *Comedy Studies* (Fall 2015): <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2040610X.2015.1083165>.
- Lukianoff, Greg and Jonathan Haidt. "The Coddling of the American Mind." *The Atlantic*, September 2015.
- Newfield, Christopher. "What Was Political Correctness? Race, the Right, and Managerial Democracy in the Humanities." *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 2 (Winter, 1993): 308–336.
- Norton, Jim. "Trevor Noah Isn't the Problem: You Are." *Time*, April 1, 2015. Accessed April 8, 2015. <http://time.com/3766915/trevor-noah-tweets-outrage/>.
- Patton Oswalt: *Talking for Clapping*. Streaming. Written by Patton Oswalt. U.S.: Black Flint Productions, 2016.
- Pérez, Raúl. "Learning to Make Racism Funny in the 'Color-Blind' Era: Stand-up Comedy Students, Performance Strategies, and the (Re)Production of Racist Jokes in Public." *Discourse & Society* 24, no. 4 (2013): 478–503.
- Peterson, Latoya. "'Twitter is Terrifying.' 5 Comedians on the New Realities of Comedy." *Fusion*, April 2, 2015. Accessed April 24, 2015. <http://fusion.net/story/113606/twitter-is-terrifying-5-comedians-on-the-new-realities-of-comedy/>.
- Rich, Frank. "In Conversation Chris Rock: What's Killing comedy. What's Saving America." *Vulture*, November 30, 2014. Accessed December 4, 2014. <http://www.vulture.com/2014/11/chris-rock-frank-rich-in-conversation.html>.
- Peterson, Russell. *Strange Bedfellows: How Late Night Comedy Turns Democracy into a Joke*. New Brunswick, NJ & London: Rutgers UP, 2008.

- Ryan, Maureen. "Trevor Noah, Twitter and the Uses of Social Media Outrage." *The Huffington Post*, July 30, 2015. Accessed August 3, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/07/30/trevor-noah-twitter_n_7900912.html.
- Schwartz, Howard. *Political Correctness and the Destruction of Social Order: Chronicling the Rise of the Pristine Self*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Silman, Anna. "10 Famous Comedians on How Political Correctness is Killing Comedy: 'We Are Addicted to the Rush of Being Offended.'" *Salon*, June 10, 2015. Accessed July 1, 2015. http://www.salon.com/2015/06/10/10_famous_comedians_on_how_political_correctness_is_killing_comedy_we_are_addicted_to_the_rush_of_being_offended/.