



DAVE CHAPPELLE: AN OPEN LETTER TO RACISM IN AMERICA



ANDREW HAVENS

CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA HONORS PROGRAM

Introduction

Dave Chappelle is a comedic legend with a storied career spanning decades. Much of his comedy focused on race and race relations between people, which made him famous. He often spoke of his own experiences as an African American man, and that carried over into his comedy. Chappelle is famous for his skits and stand-up bits about racial stereotypes, and that is what will be covered here.

Thesis

In a country that loves to boast about its post-racial state, Dave Chappelle uses racially charged comedy with heavy use of stereotypes as well as punching up to reinforce, or even introduce, the truths regarding racial inequity and the systematic and historical oppression of African Americans to an audience.

Research and Procedures

I used CALU's Academic Search Ultimate tool to find peer-reviewed outside sources, which helped to solidify my argument. I used YouTube for my primary source material, and my objective was to find bite-sized clips of Chappelle using racial humor so that the report would be focused and tailored to my research question.

Argument

Dave Chappelle (1973-Present)

- *Chappelle's Show*
- Many Stand-up specials and gigs
- Cultural and comedic icon- known for his racial humor

Stereotypes and Punching Up

- Stereotype- an over-generalized belief about a particular category of people.
 - "Stereotypes involve the reduction of complex social realities and individual experiences into recognizable figures that derive their effectiveness precisely from their exaggerated simplicity" (Green, Linders 257).
- Punching Up- The comedic act of making fun of the oppressor.

• Chappelle uses punching up to show the tumultuous relationship between black people and police.

- *Why I Don't Call the Police* and *Talking to the Police*
 - "He's still here!" and "That's a waste of weed." (Why, Talking)

Punching Up is also used to remind the audience what black people had to go through in American history.

- "Took us 400 years to figure out as a people that white people's weakness the whole time was kneeling during the national anthem. That's a brittle spirit." (Dave Chappelle Reveals)

Chappelle uses stereotypes to fight against racism and prejudice by "playing off viewer's expectations of stereotypes, by exaggerating them, to show how ridiculous those ethnic and sexual stereotypes truly are" (Kan 1).

- Black Santa Claus
- Terrorists Don't Take Black Hostages
 - "We have 5 black... hello?"
- "Indeed, much of the humor presented on his popular series *The Chappelle Show* played on and amplified racial stereotypes while simultaneously revealing their prevalence in American society" (Constance 254).

Conclusion

Dave Chappelle uses comedy to his full advantage to expose the raw relationship that the United States has with race. Racial stereotypes and punching up, to Chappelle, are a means to an end- the audience laughs and enjoys the comedy, but then they question why they are laughing. Oppression, discrimination, and racism are no laughing matter- Chappelle finds a way, using comedy, to show that.



Dave Chappelle Performs in his new Netflix special, From www.variety.com

Bailey, Constance. "Fight the Power: African American Humor as a Discourse of Resistance." *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2012, pp. 253-263. JSTOR.

Chappelle, Dave. "Dave Chappelle Reveals White People's Weakness." Youtube, uploaded by Netflix is a Joke, 13 January 2020

Chappelle, Dave. "Dave Chappelle: Talking to the Police." Youtube, uploaded by HBO, 20 December 2017

Chappelle, Dave. "Dave Chappelle: The Reason Why I Don't Call Police (911)." Youtube, uploaded by StandupTV13, 27 June 2018.

Green, Aaryn L., and Annulla Linders. "The Impact of Comedy on Racial and Ethnic Discourse." *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 86, no. 2, 2016, pp. 241-269. JSTOR,

Kan, Michael. "Stereotypes in Comedy: Harm or Humor?" *The Michigan Daily*, 12 April 2004

Works Cited