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DECONSTRUCTING “CHAPPELLE’S SHOW”:  
RACE, MASCULINITY, AND COMEDY AS RESISTANCE

by

LYNDSEY L. WETTERBERG

A THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
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IN  
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MANKATO, MINNESOTA

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Deconstructing Chappelle's Show: Race, Masculinity, and Comedy as Resistance

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This thesis (or dissertation) has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis (or dissertation) committee.

Dr. Helen Crump, Advisor

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### **Abstract**

“Chappelle’s Show” is a sketch comedy series that ran from 2003-2004 and that was created by and starred comedian Dave Chappelle. Chappelle focused on the issues of racism and race as gendered and as a social construction throughout the show’s two full seasons. Using content analysis, my research highlights race and masculinity as a social construction within the context of “Chappelle’s Show” by focusing on specific sketches within the series that play on issues of race and gender. The overarching theme of my analysis examines the idea of comedy as resistance to dominant society, specifically to race and gender norms and thus to limited expectations and representations of black masculinity. The selected sketches exemplify how humor de-centers popular narrative and positions the world within a marginalized perspective.

## Acknowledgements

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## CHAPTER 1

“Chappelle’s Show”, a sketch comedy show co-created by Dave Chappelle and Neal Brennan and featuring comedian Dave Chappelle, exemplifies humor as a tool of social advocacy in response to the climate and the historical legacy of racism in the United States. Employing scholarship on race theory, African-American humor, and performances of black masculinity, I examine the history of racism and comedy in the U.S., contending that “Chappelle’s Show” substantially follows in the tradition of African-American comedy. Therefore, the evidence obtained from the scholarship I use will support my theoretical claim that “Chappelle’s Show” is an act of non-violent protest and resistance to social and racial inequality. In deconstructing race, history, and black masculinity in the context of “comedy as resistance”, I engage W.E.B. Du Bois’s theory of double-consciousness in order to ascertain and discuss the positionality of African-Americans in popular culture, particularly when compared with media representations and/or stereotypes of race and black masculinity, and to critique the ways that “Chappelle’s Show” challenges and speaks to racial discourse.

### **Brief History of “Chappelle’s Show”**

“Chappelle’s Show” first broadcasted on Comedy Central in January 2003, and it ran successfully for two full seasons. By the second season, the show’s audience had increased by 25%, and it became one of Comedy Central’s most viewed television shows (Champagne). “Chappelle’s Show” earned industry recognition and was nominated for three Emmy Awards in 2004 (Champagne). With a loyal fan base and increasing popularity, Comedy Central had struck gold; Dave Chappelle signed a two-year contract,

which was estimated to be worth \$50 million. Then, without warning, in May 2004, Chappelle abruptly walked out on “Chappelle’s Show” (Farley). Without the hit T.V. series star and host, Comedy Central was forced to postpone the third season of “Chappelle’s Show” indefinitely.

Though the show lasted for a short time by television standards, “Chappelle’s Show” was a cultural phenomenon and grasped an audience of epic proportions. Dave Chappelle (who started doing stand-up at the age of fourteen and has been in numerous Hollywood films and commercials) was finally being recognized for his talent and comedic genius. Subsequently, he became the face of new-school comedy, and some even consider him to be one of the greatest stand-up comics of all time, certainly of his generation. So, the media’s all-consuming question was, why did Dave Chappelle walk away from a hit comedy series and \$50 million?

Chappelle was nowhere to be found. Rumors circulated that he had checked into a mental hospital, had gone crazy, or was smoking more than just marijuana (Farley). Though Chappelle had admitted that he met with a therapist for a 40-minute session, the media obviously exaggerated this isolated incident. As it turns out, Dave Chappelle had traveled to Durban, Africa, to escape the Hollywood drama and reflect on his recent rise to fame and success; he described his trip as a “spiritual retreat” (Farley). He was questioning himself as an artist and as an individual. Chappelle feared the consequences of fame and fortune, contending, “It’s like someone saying, ‘You’re the CEO of a \$50 million company—good luck!’ And then kinda leaving you to your own devices. I’ve been a comedian since I was fourteen. But I’ve never really been a CEO” (Powell). After



a brief absence from the public eye, Dave Chappelle gave several exclusive interviews to tell his side of the story in order to set the record straight. He told *Time* magazine that he was not crazy and he was not on drugs (Farley). There were a myriad of reasons for Chappelle's seemingly sudden escape from Hollywood. In fact, during a two-hour special with James Lipton on "Inside the Actor's Studio," Chappelle poignantly expressed to Lipton and the audience that "the worse thing to call someone is crazy—I don't understand this person, so they're crazy—that's bulls\*\*t. These people are not crazy; they're strong people. Maybe their environment is a little sick" (taequeen0611). According to the comedian himself, Dave Chappelle was fed up with Hollywood and compromising his art and personal politics for the sake of being a brand for Comedy Central. Dave Chappelle was not selling out.

During the second season of "Chappelle's Show," episode 12 fictionalizes what would happen if Dave Chappelle quit "Chappelle's Show" and was replaced by daytime T.V. personality Wayne Brady ("Chappelle's Show"). Thus, the show would be hosted by Wayne Brady and dubbed "the Brady Show." This appeared to be an obvious message that Dave Chappelle had become dissatisfied with things that were going on behind the camera and that the sketch, in something of an art-imitating-life or life-imitating-art moment, foreshadowed the future of "Chappelle's Show."

During a candid interview in May 2006, *Esquire* magazine documented Dave Chappelle's unofficial return to show business at the Grammy Awards in Hollywood, California (Powell). The interview also uncovered some interesting facts as to why Dave Chappelle really left "Chappelle's Show" and the public sphere. Chappelle told *Esquire*

that, during the first and second seasons of “Chappelle’s Show,” Viacom bought Comedy Central. He spoke candidly, commenting that “certain things happened that were strange at the time” (Powell). He had been asked to attend a conference on his use of the n-word. Chappelle willingly attended the meeting but, afterward, felt discomfort with the entire situation. Chappelle stated,

Why the fuck would I explain to a room full of white people why I say the word nigga? Why on earth would I put myself in a position like that? So you got me on a panel, and all of these, like Harvard-educated, you know, upper-echelon authors, me, and a rapper. So here I am explaining, and I was defensive ‘cause of what was going on at the time—we had just shot the Nigger Family sketch, and I was at a symposium on the word nigger. So I’m feeling like I’m fighting censorship. They say, ‘We just want to know how far we should go with something like that.’ And the subtext of it is, ‘Do you want to know, or do you want to tell me something?’

Of course, this is not the story that the public or even some of his fans really want to acknowledge or interrogate. Why? Perhaps, it’s not as interesting, or maybe people don’t want to go beyond the surface of a situation or an individual. If a person’s career is about creating laughter and now you have profited tremendously, it is a challenge to be taken seriously. Who really wants to talk about race in a serious context, *besides* Dave Chappelle? Dave Chappelle did not tip-toe around the subject of race or racism in his art. Thus, he was not comfortable with presenting work on the subject of racism that was not up to *his* standards.

Most do not realize how Dave Chappelle personally challenged the racism in the entertainment industry. Besides being a fan of “Chappelle’s Show” and Dave Chappelle’s stand-up, I think the actions Dave Chappelle took in 2004 are what make his work and career compelling and unique compared to other entertainers. Initially, some thought Chappelle’s absence from “Chappelle’s Show” was a publicity stunt, but it has been almost ten years since the first episode of “Chappelle’s Show” originally aired. Dave Chappelle has not returned to “Chappelle’s Show,” television, or film. However, he continues where his comedy career began—doing stand-up for live audiences. In 2011, he participated in Comedy Jam with other stand-up heavyweights like Katt Williams and Chris Tucker (twitter@jv). The show sold out on the first day.

Another interesting nuance of “Chappelle’s Show” is that the show surfaced in tandem with the Bush administration. As fellow comic Chris Rock pointed out in his HBO special “Never Scared”, the post 9/11 era shifted the landscape of racism. However, the racism and xenophobia that occurred and is still happening today is not new in the United States. During World War II, hundreds of thousands of Japanese-Americans were forced into internment camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor (Begley). Rock pointed out that after the events of 9/11, racism was fundamentally sanctioned in the United States. In an article published in *Newsweek* October 1, 2011, Sharon Begley examines the government’s use of racial profiling after 9/11: “Targeting noncitizens seems likely to include profiling [...]. While the desire for vengeance seems tragically prevalent, as witnessed by the assaults on and even murders of Sikh-Americans and Arab-Americans after the terror attacks, crude profiling is largely ineffective” (58). Part of the

controversial aspects of “Chappelle’s Show” was that the show did more than address the subject of race and racism. Dave Chappelle’s use of satire and his critique of race were dead on and at a time when race and racism had become more than relevant in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2

The literature featured in my research illustrates the three bodies of knowledge I draw from in order to effectively analyze the use of comedy in “Chappelle’s Show.” The bodies of knowledge “Black masculinity,” “race in the media,” and “comedy as resistance” inform my critical, visual content analysis of Dave Chappelle’s sketch comedy show. Black masculinity, positioned as my first body of knowledge, discusses historical and current constructions and performances of black masculinity. My second body of knowledge focuses on representations of race in the media. In this section, I examine the ways that African Americans have been historically represented in the media, specifically in regards to depictions of black men. I use current scholarship to analyze how African Americans utilized agency to recast profound and multifaceted representations in art and pop cultural media. My final body of knowledge, comedy as resistance, is fundamental to understanding and interpreting “Chappelle’s Show” as social commentary and response to the issue of racism in the United States.

### **Black Masculinity**

In *Deconstructing Tyrone*, Natalie Hopkinson and Natalie Y. Moore use modern interpretations and hip-hop culture to consider how black masculinity is perceived and commercialized in American culture. The authors conducted interviews with individuals who identified as coming from the Hip-Hop Generation, born between 1965 and 1984 (Hopkinson and Moore xii). “Tyrone,” as used in the title, is employed with a sense of irony when paired with cultural stereotypes of African American men. (Coincidentally, the author also states that the title was inspired by one of the characters from

“Chappelle’s Show,” Tyrone Biggams). Tyrone, according to the Hopkinson and Moore, is a name associated with representations of black male identity, having more of a negative connotation than not (xi). Hopkinson and Moore posit that the media reinforces stereotypes of, and to some degree informs, black male identity. They define the phenomenon of black masculinity within the media, explaining, “In our Tyrone, deconstructions may never have found a better subject. Black males make up about 6 percent of the U.S. population, yet they loom colossal in their constructions as broadcast by media all over the world via sports, crime, and entertainment” (Hopkinson and Moore xii). In chapter two, the authors reference curator Thelma Golden’s pop-cultural exhibit as an introduction to visual and historical images of black masculinity in American culture. Hopkinson and Moore describe the controversial exhibition, which opened in 1994, stating that “the catalog for *Black Male* presented a visual history of five major evolutions of the black male aesthetic that took place from the 1960s to the 1990s. In the introduction to the exhibit, Golden described black males as ‘one of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century,’ an amalgam of fears and projections that don’t even begin to describe the way black men actually live” (31). Golden rendered images from photographs, television and film depicting African American men such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Black Panthers, O.J. Simpson, Snoop Dogg, Tupak Shakur, television fictional character Cliff Huxtable, and Rodney King (Hopkinson and Moore 31). The exhibition’s meaning was to be interpreted as edgy with its message of paradox. However, this message was not translated and ended up appearing more as a

commodification of male blackness than a commentary on constructions of black masculinity.

In order to understand performances of blackness as a social construction, I use *Appropriating Blackness* by E. Patrick Johnson. This text articulates race, particularly blackness, as non-essentialist. Johnson discusses the idea of authenticity in relation to identities of blackness. He posits that, rather than a monolithic identity of black masculinity, there are numerous constructions of blackness. Moreover, Johnson describes performances of black identity and blackness as a response to oppression. The necessity for various identities of blackness emerges when blacks have been marginalized, not only by white American society, but also within black communities (3). For instance, Johnson locates gay black men on the margins of black communities since the intersections of sexual orientation and race broaden the complexities of their experiences of oppression (37). For that reason, the identity of blackness, being neither monolithic nor stagnant, shifts according to time and place. Furthermore, the level of complexity of that identity is influenced by social locations of gender, class, and sexuality as well.

Johnson argues that blackness is appropriated through performance. He explains, “My purpose here is to utilize performance to interpret various sites of performed ‘blackness’” (Johnson 7). According to Johnson, blackness and performance, when combined, form the historical discourse of otherness. Racism has vastly influenced negative associations with blackness and the physical body. Briefly elaborating on the significance of the physical body in representations of identity, Johnson comments, “Similarly, as Dwight Conquergood notes, performance is also ‘associated with feelings,

emotions and the body’ and is constructed in opposition to scientific reason and thought” (7). Therefore, performance and the physical body cannot be reduced to a logical framework—performance is representational of self, and more often than not, the politics of race, gender, sexuality, etc. inform the identities we perform.

Supporting Johnson’s argument on the complexities and shift of blackness, Riche Richardson’s *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South* fleshes out certain nuances of black identity and masculinity that are not addressed in *Appropriating Blackness*. In his text, Richardson uses geographical location as a link to formulations of black masculinity. He suggests that the U.S. South has been instrumental in forming both historical images and modern conceptions of black masculinity. Richardson articulates this significance, stating that “the enduring and eponymous images of black masculinity that emerged in the South during the nineteenth century—the Uncle Tom and black rapist—were paradigmatic, I suggest, in helping to establish foundations for perennially complex politics of black masculine representation in the United States” (3). In other words, Richardson contends that conceptual constructions of the Uncle Tom and the black rapist are integral to the basis of broad perspectives about U.S. black masculinity. Negative images of black masculinity rooted in geographic location also speak to the hierarchy of the North and South in the United States.

I position *American Paradox* by Renford Reese as the devil’s advocate within my analysis. Reese’s text counters some of the arguments found in other scholarship on black masculinity. Reese claims that it is all too simplistic to conclude that the plight of black men in the U.S. is attributed to systemic racism and oppression. He posits that black men



should turn the critical lens, which has been directed at society, onto themselves (Reese 4). By positioning the lens from a personal standpoint enriches how images of black masculinity are conceptualized and subsequently perceived. Thus, the individual takes an introspective approach to dispel stereotypes. Reese states that white imagination has conceptualized and demonized black male sexuality and, for that reason, negative representations of blackness have subsequently survived in the constructions and stereotypes of today's image of black masculinity (25). Moreover, Reese discusses the terrible backlash black men experienced during post-slavery in response to white fears of black male hyper-sexuality. Lynching, indeed, was the horrific response that reinforced and solidified fears of black male hyper-sexuality. Reese also links the fear of potential castration to black male sexuality. He states, "If a black man was found guilty of a crime that was punishable by capital punishment, the lynching should have been the gross punctuation of that punishment. However, castration became an 'exciting' element of the lynching ritual in the South. This cultural exercise revealed a uniquely intense perversion and obsession with the sexual nature of the black male body" (25). When discussing black masculinity today, sexuality is automatically assumed as part of the construction. Then this also links to the historical assumptions about black masculinity and sexuality, that black masculinity must be feared.

It is imperative to acknowledge the influence of hip-hop within popular culture (not only in the U.S. but worldwide), particularly African American culture, and in the context of "Chappelle's Show." Therefore, I use *Performing Identity/Performing Culture* by Greg Dimitriadis to discuss hip-hop as a nuance of black masculinity. Dimitriadis uses

hip-hop and hip-hop icons as text (an umbrella term that includes music, music videos, films) to inform how American youth construct and conceptualize identities that speak to the lived experiences of Black youth in the U.S. (2). Dimitriadis states that the evolution and commodification of hip-hop transcends the material and is in fact a way of life for young people in America (3). Therefore, situating hip-hop as text, Dimitriadis argues that young black Americans utilize hip-hop as a cultural vehicle through which to understand themselves and their positionalities in connection to society overall. Hip-hop is not only a medium of artistic expression; it is a direct result and response to a system that has failed the black and brown youth of America. Dimitriadis states, “As will remain implicit, these texts are circulating in a space vacated by traditional schooling institutions and curricula, both of which have become increasingly routinized, increasingly at the service of corporate imperatives and out of touch with particular concerns of young people” (6-7). This text is vital in forming and understanding constructive concepts of black masculinity, since “Chappelle’s Show,” though it attracted a vast and diverse audience, embodied the quintessence of American hip-hop culture. Significantly, in this case, comedy as resistance mirrors characteristics of hip-hop culture through language, dress, and even music choices. Chappelle’s humor is blatantly unapologetic when exacting a critique on issues of race within the U.S., and his sometimes brutal honesty is essential to his comedic style. He is not placating to the establishment, he making a critique of the establishment in an innovative fashion while depicting nuances of the legacy of African American humor. The point of Chappelle’s comedy is to address the elephant in the room be it race, gender, or socio-economically marginalized groups.

As part of a feminist critique of “Chappelle’s Show” and performances of black masculinity, it is essential to apply feminist scholarship as a lens through which to view and critique select sketches of the comedy show. I use bell hooks’s *We Real Cool* to analyze sketches that I have positioned as exemplifying performances of black masculinity. In *We Real Cool*, bell hooks discloses little known historical evidence in order to demonstrate how black masculinity has been formed and has come to be accepted as the norm in black communities. For instance, hooks notes that black men have been imprisoned both literally and metaphorically, an experience that had a definitive impact on constructions of black male identity. As she states, “Whether in an actual prison or not, practically every black male in the United States has been forced at some point in his life to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain [it] for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed” (hooks xii). Speaking to the literal incarceration of black men and the emblematic imprisonment linked to white patriarchal masculinity, hooks argues that, historically, black masculinity was not created or synonymous with white masculinity (2-3). Unconventional forms of black masculinity and black families have largely gone undocumented; consequently, hegemonic power maintains control of representations of blackness and black masculinity through the production and distribution of knowledge (13). hooks also contends that knowledge addressing the literal and figurative emasculation of black men by white men, as a response to their feelings of disempowerment, is missing from the annals of history. Additionally, with the propaganda of Moynihan’s study, a pseudo-credible documentation supported by the government reinforced racist stereotypes and

assumptions, which placed black women as the cause for the plight of black families and black communities at large. History demonstrates the impact of representation on present ideas and understandings of blackness, notably the formation of black masculinity. To underline concepts of gender and identity politics, particularly black masculinity, as conceptualized in broader society, I incorporate the work of Denise A. Isom.

In the article “Performance, Resistance, Caring”, Isom conducts a study using qualitative research to understand how fifth, sixth, and seventh grade African American boys come to conceptualize their own identities through constructs of race, masculinity, gender, and “blackness” (405). The study was conducted at an after school program in a large city located in the Mid-Western United States. Isom describes her method as “the two-pronged approach” in which participant observation and semi-structured interviews are central for conducting a naturalistic research study” (407). The study was conducted over a nine-month period with the participation of seventy-five boys and girls. From the study, Isom concluded that young African American boys have a multifaceted view of themselves. However, in this complicated world, their authentic selves are often silenced by projections of race and gender ideals.

In the collection of essays titled *Progressive Black Masculinity*, the various authors theorize a new approach to conceptualizing black masculinity, one which embodies and supports the multiplicity within identities of black masculinity. Chapter one defines the concept of Progressive Black Masculinities:

Simply stated, progressive black masculinities, on the one hand, personally eschew and actively stand against social structures of

domination and, on the other, value, validate, and empower black humanity in all its variety as part of the diverse and multicultural humanity of others in the global family. More specifically, progressive black masculinities are, at minimum, pro-black antiracist as well as profeminist and antisexist (7).

Therefore, this collection considers the concepts and theories of progressive black masculinities as a reconstruction in opposition to predominant images of black masculinity (Mutua 7). Moreover, the essays in this text assert the necessity of interlacing the institutions of gender and race.

During my research, I kept coming across W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of "double-consciousness". From *The Souls of Black Folk* written by Du Bois in 1903, Du Bois articulates the reality of being black in America, stating,

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (38)

Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness, though formed over a hundred years ago, still contains a sense of relevant truth to understanding and analyzing the experiences of black men today. It is an important concept to keep in mind when thinking about combining ideas of comedy, race, and masculinity, especially significant in framing

“Chappelle’s Show” as a commentary on race in the U.S. and as a strategic resistance to racist or problematic representations of black masculinity.

### **Race in the Media**

In order to justify “Chappelle’s Show” as a medium for knowledge and social justice, I draw from existing scholarship that discusses the history and construction of race and racism in the United States. I cannot speak to the fundamental groundwork of my thesis without establishing the framework of race intersected with gender. For both African American men and women, the intersections of gender, class, and race vastly alter their lived experiences and others’ perceptions of them.

I use Amy Helene Kirschke’s *Art in Crisis* with the purpose of creating a historical lens to view how art has been utilized as an instrument to promote social consciousness. *The Crisis* was one of the first African American magazines published in the United States. Kirschke applies a critical analysis to this pivotal and groundbreaking journal. The first issue of *The Crisis*, featuring artwork, news, and editorials produced by African American artists and writers, was published in 1910 (Kirschke 12). It was strongly influenced by the direction of the acclaimed writer and scholar W.E.B. Du Bois. Kirschke positions her analysis as “an extended exploration of how W.E.B. Du Bois used the visual arts to define a new collective identity and historical identity for African Americans” (3). Therefore, Kirschke posits that Du Bois’s role as director and editor of *The Crisis* was critical to retelling the history and cultivating broad concepts of identity for African Americans. *Art in Crisis* underpins the significance of reclaiming history and culture subjugated through the exploitation of slavery. It is significant that this journal

was published at a critical point in history, thus providing a space for African American social and political critique.

Since “Chappelle’s Show” is a television show, the history of television and how this modern technology significantly informs the ways the public conceptualizes gender and race must be considered as well. The texts *Television in Black-and-White America* by Alan Nadal and *Revolution Televised* by Christine Acham address similar issues, discussing how visual imagery and art have been used as a catalyst to shape ideas about whiteness and blackness. Specifically, a new concept of whiteness, through the medium of broadcast television, increasingly normalized whiteness, juxtaposing blackness as racial “other” during the Cold War era. Nadal states that this new technology added another layer to the constructions and dynamics of race in the United States. He contends, “[C]ertainly television did not invent the “whiteness” of America as a set of white colonies, as a white postrevolutionary nation, as a white post-Civil War nation, or as a white post-World War I nation. What it did do was impressively help codify and deploy whiteness as a norm for the United States in the nuclear age” (Nadal 3). Nadal posits that the fictional world of television “appeared to make visually concrete the necessarily imaginary space of the United States” (6). Although around the period of the Civil Rights Movement, the imaginary landscape of America was changing alongside the innovation of television. For that reason, I use *Revolution Televised* by Christine Acham to contextualize television as a platform of political space and resistance.

Then too, Acham’s *Revolution Televised* applies a critical critique of race and broadcast television as well. As an extension of Nadal’s work, Acham gives us an

analysis of blackness stemming from television during the 1960s and 1970s. In the first chapter, Acham lays a historical foundation articulating the emergence of African American performance and comedy. She locates some of the earliest forms of African American performances in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. African American theater troupes, known as the Chitlin' Circuit, performed in the U.S. for African American audiences. Acham posits that African American performers and performance groups emerged as a response to Jim Crow laws, which legalized the separation of whites and blacks within public spaces (xiii). For that reason, Acham argues that inevitably black comedy and performance evolved from shared experiences of oppression met with solidarity: "The history and development of African American humor serve as a sound example of the workings of these sites" (9). However, Acham recognizes that there were differences in performances and content when African Americans performed for black audiences as opposed to when they performed for white audiences. When performing for whites, African American performers played on racist stereotypes; yet, as Acham states, "an ironic, realistic, sarcastic, and satirical black humor was reserved for the black community" (9). Thus, it seems that artistic expressions, historically, have been used among black performers to critique constructions and expressions of race in America.

### **Comedy as Resistance**

In the article "Ethnic Humor" by Joseph Boskin, the author discusses the origins and uses of ethnic humor in the United States. Boskin also explains whiteness as a historical and evolving concept that has changed over time. Changes in immigration trends re-situated certain groups (such as Italian, Russian, and Jewish persons) that were



previously viewed as ethnic other in early American history, transitioning them into the privileged position of whiteness. Ethnic humor was used by those defined as white Protestants (within the context of the time) to stifle those identifying as ethnic “other”. However, as the concept of whiteness shifted, so to the focus or subjects of ethnic humor shifted as well, focusing more on persons of color or those now identified as ethnic minorities. According to Boskin, stereotypes and racist slurs initially used as part of ethnic humor were later re-claimed by subjugated groups to be used against the aggressor (81-82). Boskin points to the fine line of ethnic humor, noting that “such humor is one of the most effective and viscous weapons in the repertory of the human mind” (Boskin 81).

In this article, Boskin sites the origins of African American humor as being rooted in “folk sources” (91). When being presented to a white audience, African American humor serves as method of survival. Boskin states that, “slaves used veiled humorous language to vent anger, just as they employed coded sayings to mask true feelings” (91). In the face of aggression, minorities found ways of working around the pain ethnic humor exacted. Those affected by ethnic humor manipulated hateful jokes to their advantage (93). Therefore, laughter has often been used as a vehicle for resistance or non-violent protest.

The anthology *African American Humor* addresses the idea that the history of African American humor originates from African griots and oral traditions “that esteemed dramatic, colorful speech, and imaginative storytelling, irony and libelous verbal satire” (xvii). According to this text, slave humor “denounced bondage and ridiculed slave masters.” However, the disdain for slavery and slave masters was masked

because of self-preservation (xvii). *African American Humor* anthologizes various forms and times of African American humor—oral tradition, folk tales, short stories, poetry, and the seminal work by standup-comedians such as Richard Pryor, Chris Rock, Dave Chappelle, Martin Lawrence, etc. Within this text, the contributors, too, trace the history of African American humor as a position of resistance. When positioning the content from “Chappelle’s Show” in a historical context of comedy as resistance, it is beneficial to reference one or two of the stories from this collection as examples that speak to the historical roots of comedy. For instance, stories and jokes were used as a tactic to critique racism and to encourage social uplift within black communities. As also discussed in Boskin’s article, these narratives and humor often reclaimed racist stereotypes and used coded language to mask the hidden meanings from whites. However, some African American humor trickled into mainstream white society. For example, in the comedic folk narrative “Jack Johnson and the Hotel Clerk”, Jack Johnson (first black heavyweight champion) is featured as part of a social commentary on race:

Jack Johnson went to a Jim Crow hotel and asked the desk clerk for a room. When the clerk raised up and saw that Johnson was black, he angrily responded, “We don’t serve your kind here.” Johnson asked again, and the clerk repeated himself. The champion laughed, pulled out a roll of money and politely said, “Oh, you misunderstand me. I don’t want it for myself, I want it for my wife—she’s your kind!” (101)

Along similar lines, Michael H. Epp’s article *Raising Minstrelsy* provides a cultural analysis of two films: *Bamboozled* directed by Spike Lee and *The Birth of a*

*Nation* by G.W. Griffith. Juxtaposing these two films, Epp painstakingly compares each film's contrasting representations of minstrelsy. Epp stipulates that *Birth of a Nation* is "the first movie produced for a mass audience in America[;] it uses minstrelsy in complex ways that suggest blackface may employ inevitably racist qualities, and it was, as Lee mentions in an interview with Cineaste, an important motivating factor behind his own film" (20). The creation and use of blackface by whites emphasized the dislocation of African Americans' access to their own bodies and identities (19). Epp poignantly states that "form thus meets content when blackface minstrel stereotypes are invoked and 'explained' to reinforce the ideological assumption of 'white' control over 'black performance'" (19). The very construction of "black performance" by whites emphasized a perverse level of control over conceptions of blackness. Epp states,

The difference between *Mantan's* (fictional television show in *Bamboozled*) cynical satire and *Bamboozled's* genuine satire is thus also difference of address: *Mantan* interpellates its audience as customers who are always already right and therefore do not really need to rethink what they enjoy, while *Bamboozled* addresses its audience as capable of resistance and indeed required to consider resistance. (28)

Fundamentally, *Bamboozled* as satire places the audience in a position to be critical; however, this representation made audiences more uncomfortable, which is one reason *Bamboozled* is problematic. Lee in a sense was holding a mirror up to the entertainment industry, and the truth is often painful to the point of obliviousness. The intent of

*Bamboozled* was to provoke a critique of how minstrelsy still presents itself in less obvious ways (Epp 32).

Jonathan Wipplinger continues the discussion of minstrelsy in his article “The Racial Ruse.” Rather than discussing minstrelsy in the context of the United States, he analyzes how minstrelsy was perceived in Germany during the 1880’s and 1890’s (458). Wipplinger contends, “While nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Anglo-American audiences laughed heartily at the antics of whites performing blackness, Germans are said to have completely missed the point”(457). Therefore, the humor and performances of minstrelsy did not speak to a universal concept of blackness for the international community. This humor could only be understood by an Anglo-American audience (457). Wipplinger proposes that the significance of his research illustrates the lack in academic discourse addressing “scholarly treatments of blackface in Germany before the First World War, let alone discussions of the ways in which blackface impacted cultural engagement with America, African Americans, and Africans” (457). Moreover, minstrelsy and the performances became synonymous with urban spaces, and “such depiction took place outside the traditional parameters of bourgeois cultural consumption” (457). However, Germany’s misunderstanding of American blackface was never really the issue. Blackface, as an American import, forced Germany to question its identity and position on a global scale (458).

Exploring the use of names/naming in the social construction of blackness, Randall L. Kelly contextualizes the most egregious word in the English language in his poignant article “Who Can Say ‘Nigger’?” Kelly gives a historical overview to uncover

the origins of the word and to find out when the word began being used contemptuously. Unfortunately, the origins of the n-word are unclear, and Kelly only gathers some semblance of its history. Most etymologists believe the word originated from the Spanish word “Negro”—meaning black. Kelly explains how the n-word evolved into its historical usage: “The linguist Robin Lakoff speculates that nigger became a slur when users of the term became aware that it was a mispronunciation of Negro and decided to continue using the mispronunciation as a signal of contempt—much as individuals sometimes choose to insult others by deliberately mispronouncing their names” (86). Therefore, no one has successfully substantiated exactly how and when the n-word came to be what it is today. However, evidence does suggest that it began being used derisively in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (88). Despite its obscure origins, Kelly posits that the word and idea as a whole have substantially existed in and influenced American society.

In examining the word, Kelly speculates about current criticism of stand-up comedians’ usage of the n-word. For some conclude that *any* use of the n-word is dangerous when discussing racism and the oppression of African Americans. For instance, Kelly points out that comedian Bill Cosby has advocated against use of the word, particularly censoring its use by black comedians (90). However, Kelly argues that to simply relegate the word to the past would also be a disservice to its historical relevance. When examining *Chappelle’s Show*, Kelly’s analysis of the n-word would be helpful in understanding Dave Chappelle’s profuse use of the n-word in his stand-up performance and comedy sketches.

Within the “Chappelle’s Show,” Dave Chappelle embodies white male characters in costume, make-up, mannerism, and language. When he imitates whiteness through voice or a complete character, he changes vernacular. For that reason, I use Jacquelyn Rahman’s study of language and phonetics as another source of comedy as resistance. In “An AY for an AH”, Rahman analyzes the manner wherein stand-up comedians utilize overt portrayals citing differences in language use between African Americans and the middle-class establishment. Rahman draws from the performances of Richard Pryor, Adele Givens, and Steve Harvey in order to contextualize language and to highlight the significance of phonetics (65). From her study, she contends that the phonetic sounds comedians depend on during performances are the diphthong /ai/ to illustrate differences in perceived African American language. Ultimately, Rahman strategically locates how comedians manipulate language and character portrayals in order to juxtapose African American performance and performances of the middle-class establishment. Audiences are drawn to direct forms of comedy because it is a play on “those who are perceived as having power in the larger society”—a deconstruction of power. Rahman goes on to define her use of particular terms—the middle-class establishment, marking, incongruity and exaggeration, and directness—in relation to language in African American Narrative Comedy. These terms are important in understanding how Rahman positions language and African American stand-up comedy and in my examination of language in “Chappelle’s Show”.

Katrina E. Bell-Jordan analyzes the use of comedy when applied to the subject of race within “Chappelle’s Show” in her article “Speaking Fluent ‘Joke’.” She maintains

that the comedy used in “Chappelle’s Show” focuses on the political perspectives surrounding the issues of race. Bell-Jordan posits that the show “openly ridiculed people convinced that race no longer matters in America” (74). In her article, Bell-Jordan utilizes “scenarios of discovery” in order to contextualize specific sketches from “Chappelle’s Show” while critiquing theories of utopian performative. Utopian performative is defined as “a counter-hegemonic approach to performance, minor discourse, and ruptures in the discourse on politics and race in America” (75). When the comical nuances are stripped away, the content found in “Chappelle’s Show” addresses the serious discourse of race and the use of performative functions as creating and documenting subjugated knowledge (77).

To contextualize African American humor, racism, and “Chappelle’s Show,” William Jelani Cobb discusses Dave Chappelle’s well-publicized desertion of his show in his essay “The Devil and Dave Chappelle.” Cobb states that most people and the mainstream media dismissed Dave Chappelle’s desertion of his hit television show, in 2005, as testament that he had cracked under the pressure of fame and fortune (247). Considering that this is Hollywood sensationalizing a cover story for Chappelle’s concerned audience, it can be assumed that the truth was somehow *coincidentally* missed. Perhaps, the truth was something people were not ready to face.

Cobb recounts Chappelle’s interview with Oprah Winfrey in which Chappelle describes one particular incident and his feelings of accountability as an artist. Cobb states, “He spoke of a white man laughing in a way that made him uncomfortable with the direction that his career had taken[...]. Chappelle mentioned later that he left because

he felt he'd been irresponsible with his art. But his work had not changed; the news of his massive contract and his status as the reigning it kid of American pop culture had vastly changed the audience he was performing it for" (248-249). Dave Chappelle's sketches and humor addressing race and racism in America were unadulterated. Cobb points out that Chappelle's work and performances are a link to traditions of African American humor. He argues that historical accounts give evidence that slave masters feared they were the subject of the jokes slaves told (249). Slave humor, therefore, remained ambiguous to slave masters and outsiders, causing an uncertainty bordering along feelings of paranoia (249). Thus, taking up the subtleties and dynamics of African American humor, Dave Chappelle's "Chappelle's Show" is an extension of the critique and resistance of comedy that emphasizes the continued complications of race and racism, as well as gender and other identities, in the U.S.



### CHAPTER 3

bell hooks describes the efficacy of recognizing one's social location, commenting that "the politics of location necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counterhegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision" (153). Therefore, to challenge hegemony, we must begin with ourselves as a site for change. Reflecting on hooks's concept of "politics of location," I acknowledge my own positionality in view of my research and do so in order to adhere to a feminist framework. I locate myself as a woman of color and as a non-traditional student. Specifically, I identify as a Filipina-American/Asian-American, politicized transnational adoptee. Though these are not the only ways in which I identify or describe myself, these theoretical concepts have influenced how I approach my research. In view of how I articulate my identity in relation to my research, my thesis topic might not come across as an obvious choice. How does identifying as a Filipina-American/Feminist/Transnational adoptee share any link to "Chappelle's Show" and black masculinity?

Having lived in the American South since I was two years old has significantly informed my location and concepts of identity. Growing up identifying as a minority, though not as African-American, in the Southern United States was a confounding and complex experience—especially since I was adopted and raised by white American parents who were born and raised in the American Midwest (my Mother is from South Dakota, and my Father is from Minnesota) and both my older brother and sister (who are also adoptees) identify as minorities. The subject of race was not necessarily a prohibited

topic; however, the discussions at hand were usually centered on racial and cultural concepts of black and white. Identifying as neither black nor white either culturally or symbolically, I had an unsettling feeling of not really belonging to any cultural or ethnic group. At times, it felt like the outside world expected me to choose or claim one or the other as my identity. Wanting to focus my research on “Chappelle’s Show,” I think, speaks to my experiences of feeling ashamed of not being white. Of course, my parents have never instilled in me feelings of shame. They are my parents and I know they love me. My earliest memories of feeling embarrassed or being made aware of my difference began when I started going to school. I never wanted to be white, but I did not want to be laughed at or ridiculed because of my difference. Finding humor from painful experiences can dismantle instances of oppression, not just within the context of actual confrontation, but also through struggles of internalized oppression. Or just even realizing that experiences of racism are shared or having a similar narrative as others somehow makes me feel not quite so alone. I loved comedians such as Eddie Murphy as a kid because his humor was critical of dominant society, which made me look at my experiences as not necessarily personal but part of a broader system that may actually be wrong.

### **Analysis of “Chappelle’s Show”**

For my research, I selected the sketch-comedy series “Chappelle’s Show,” which ran for two full seasons on Comedy Central from 2003 until 2004. “Chappelle’s Show” was an overnight success, having a cult-like following and an audience which transcended gender, racial, and generational lines. With popular catch phrases and

sketches still being talked about, referenced, and quoted and reruns still being broadcast on Comedy Central almost ten years after it aired, it is safe to say that “Chappelle’s Show” is now a permanent fixture in American pop culture.

I intentionally chose to analyze “Chappelle’s Show” based on its phenomenal popularity and its attention to the politics of race. (I am also a self-described “Chappelle’s Show” enthusiast.) When the first season of “Chappelle’s Show” was released on DVD (2004), the sales were record breaking, having the highest ranking DVD sales of all time. The show’s popularity and content raises some interesting research questions, which I address in my thesis: 1. Is “Chappelle’s Show” restructuring discourses of knowledge and race? 2. How does the individual viewer understand a joke and humor used—in other words, do people understand the history and social implications imbedded in the comedy? 3. Do the representations of black masculinity reinforce stereotypes of gender and race? 4. In what ways is “Chappelle’s Show” a means of social resistance that addresses and attempts to rearticulate media representations of black masculinity? Rather than examining other comedians or sketch-comedy shows, I intentionally chose “Chappelle’s Show” in order to demonstrate comedy as a vehicle for social resistance. To demonstrate “Chappelle’s Show” attention to political commentary, I will code sketches that best exemplify race theory and its use as a recurrent critical tool.

### **Methodology**

To develop a multifaceted result for my research, I employ mixed methods to conduct a critical analysis of “Chappelle’s Show.” To contextualize themes of race and masculinity within “Chappelle’s Show,” I engage W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black*

*Folk*. Specifically, I employ Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness" to articulate and analyze representations of the experiences of African American men. Du Bois's theory of "double-consciousness" was strategically applied to my consideration of each foundational body of knowledge—race in the media, comedy as resistance, and black masculinity. I rely on preexisting data (current scholarship and mainstream and popular media) to formulate a deductive content analysis of "Chappelle's Show."

Du Bois articulates "double-consciousness" as encompassing dual identities. He elaborates, explaining that such identity means that "one ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 38). Knowing that Du Bois's text was originally published in 1903, I anticipate limitations in using the theory of "double-consciousness", and for that reason, I look to other theories that speak to issues of masculinity from a feminist perspective.

To emphasize the idea of comedy as resistance and its use, I utilize the text *Art in Crisis* by Amy Helene Kirschke. Kirschke formulates an in-depth analysis of the African American magazine *The Crisis*, which was edited and directed by W.E.B. Du Bois (1). Kirschke contends that the artwork depicted in *The Crisis* was intentionally deployed to dispel racist stereotypes and images used in other publications and commonly accepted in the U.S. during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (2-3). She identifies Du Bois's influence as editor, noting that "the images Du Bois used were generated from a black perspective; they were almost entirely created by black artists who were connected to the importance of the causes addressed in the journal. The art was dignified and respectful and exuded pride"

(Kirschke 2). Therefore, Kirschke's use of visual content analysis in contextualizing a historical African American journal grounds and enhances the concept of comedy as resistance, which I examine in my thesis.

To conduct research using content analysis applied to black masculinity, I engaged hooks's feminist analysis of representations of race and gender. In *We Real Cool*, bell hooks highlights historical evidence illustrating how black masculinity has been formed and has come to be accepted as a social norm. hooks states that black men have been imprisoned both literally and metaphorically: "whether in an actual prison or not, practically every black male in the United States has been forced at some point in his life to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain [it] for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed" (xxi). hooks is speaking to the literal incarceration of black men and the symbolic imprisonment linked to white patriarchal masculinity. Therefore, I use a similar feminist lens in examining constructions and performances of black masculinity in "Chappelle's Show".

### **Procedures**

As part of my procedures, I viewed the entire "Chappelle's Show" series, which aired between 2003-2004. There are twenty-five full-length episodes, each episode running under thirty minutes without commercials. The host and star of the show, again, is Dave Chappelle. He presented the sketches to a live audience, so none of the laughter was edited or manipulated. There was only one sketch during the show's two-season run in which laughter had to be edited in after the show's recording. (The audience did not respond to this sketch.) Therefore, the audience's laughter can be described as authentic

and spontaneous. Based on specific criteria, I narrowed the episodes for analysis to twelve sketches that focus on an intersection of gender and race, specifically representations of black masculinity from a critical perspective. Using a feminist lens informed by Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness", I analyzed the 11 sketches, coding them for indications of performances of masculinity, performance of race, and social constructions of gender and race. There was, however, a third season of "Chappelle's Show" without Dave Chappelle starring as the host, also known as "The Lost Episodes." I have chosen not to include the 'unofficial' third season of "Chappelle's Show." For me, as a fan of "Chappelle's Show," without Dave Chappelle (the star and creator) as the host, the show was wanting, lacking its expected verve and critical, comedic approach.

To determine the specific episodes and sketches for analysis, initially, I viewed all 25 episodes. Of those 25 episodes, I gleaned 11 sketches for analysis in order to make the project feasible. To allow for a close reading of the visual content, I analyzed the dialogue and visual representations of the sketches. I looked for sketches that depicted not only performances of black masculinity through the characters, the language, and the focus of the sketch, but also those that appeared to explicate a particular political and/or social commentary regarding race in the United States. As a result, I identified 11 sketches for analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### Evolution of African American Humor

In order to analyze specific sketches, I have organized the “Chappelle’s Show” sketches under various categories that include race, masculinity, and social construction. The overarching theme drawn from all of these sketches is comedy as resistance. The sketches I use to address the subject of race are “Clayton Bigsby Sketch,” “Tyrone Bigsby Sketch,” “Racial Draft Sketch,” “Nigger Sketch,” “Reparations Sketch,” and “Law & Order.” Specifically analyzing performances of masculinity, I transcribed and coded “Keeping It Real Goes Wrong,” “Black Bush Sketch,” “Trading Spouses Sketch,” “Gay America Sketch,” and “The Brady Show Sketch.” (Full transcriptions of the individual sketches used in this research are available in the Appendix.) I identify each sketch according to the title it is given on “Chappelle’s Show” or through my own naming, which is based on the central character or idea running through each sketch. When discussing representations of masculinity as perceived in an American context, race links itself to the concept of masculinity. Therefore, often times, social constructs overlap and one cannot necessarily be separated from the other; masculinity and race intersect. Since we live in a patriarchal, racist, and racialized society, representations of femininity and masculinity have assumed racial characteristics and scripts. To some degree, the characters in “Chappelle’s Show” are modeled and performed based on these already existing constructs, influenced by both a gendered and racialized perspective. As Dave Chappelle contends, “When you are making stereotypical kind of jokes there is no room for subtlety” (Chappelle’s). For that reason, the humor depicted in the show’s

sketches may replicate, exaggerate, generalize, and generally make-fun of race and gender. Some may even describe this humor as racist or sexist, maybe both. However, it is the viewer's choice to decide if this humor is meant to reinforce stereotypes or actually be a critique of them. At the same time, "Chappelle's Show" sketches individually and collectively demonstrate the slippage of gender and race within existing social constructs. Since Dave Chappelle is a heterosexual black man and the star of "Chappelle's Show," it seems logical that the narratives in these sketches reflect his experiences on some level. For that reason, the sketches usually center on characters who are black men, but this is not to suggest that every episode is scripted in this manner. During his interview with James Lipton on "Inside the Actor's Studio," Chappelle confirmed that his comedy is not quintessentially autobiographical, but when viewing "Chappelle's Show" and his stand-up routines, his humor evidently centers on the discourse of race.

Another significant aspect of "Chappelle's Show," much of the humor that is motivated by race is presented in stereotypes or race performance and performance of masculinity, which is articulated by characters such as Chuck Taylor, Leonard Washington, and Black Bush (characters included in my content analysis). I use the word "performance" configured around the notion that race and masculinity can be related to individual agency. I discuss performance not only in a literal fashion, but also the performances we as humans engage in a social sphere. Therefore, the performances rendered in "Chappelle's Show" draw from life as a point of reference. These performances are rooted in social construction, but again, we do see slippages in everyday life. It remains critical to keep in mind that African American culture does not



exist in a vacuum, nor does it develop in a bubble. Therefore, it is integrally linked to its historical ties to white American culture and colonization. E. Patrick Johnson describes his use and the definition of performance in his text *Appropriating Blackness*, stating, “The term “performance” enjoys currency among various fields and disciplines in the academy ... performance continues to offer nuanced methodologies and interpretive frames in which to theorize [...]. Performance becomes a vehicle through which the Other is seen and not seen, according to Patricia Williams, ‘depend[ing] upon a dynamic of display that ricochets between hypervisibility and the oblivion’” (6-8 Johnson).

Performance of race and masculinity, in today’s context, links to a form of resistance to white society, particularly through the artistic expression of hip-hop. However, resistance through artistic expression is not a new concept. Music such as the blues, literature, and visual art have all contributed to the multifaceted history of African American artistic and cultural expression. Moreover, the term “hip-hop” is not only used to describe a genre of music, but also it is made synonymous with a broader concept of lifestyle and cultural esthetic. Dyson states, “[H]ip hop is connected to the ghetto whether or not many of its artists grew up there [...]. It’s more important to know if your [sic] able to scrutinize the possibilities, the positions, the moods, the dispositions, the interests, the sentiments, and the morality environment breeds” (11).

According to Boskin and Dorinson, authors of “Ethnic Humor,” comedy functions as a tool to address conflict and control. The authors describe this as a “smile through one’s teeth.” Moreover, stereotypes of race may have evolved through actual cultural ideas or customs. For instance, the authors argue that Jewish humor draws from

its folk sources similar to the manner in which African American humor evolved (Boskin and Dorinson 86). Boskin and Dorinson contend that ethnic stereotypes deeply rooted in both historical and cultural imagination, over time, have been reclaimed by out-groups and used against those belonging to the in-group (out-group and in-group being the language used by the authors). For instance, Irish immigrants responded to verbal derision aimed at their cultural heritage by mocking the cultural behaviors of older-stock Americans ( Boskin and Dorinson 84). Boskin and Dorinson state, “If, indeed, the Irish represented unwanted alien characteristics, they readily employed their own wits to criticize American values and peculiarities, and maintained thereby a measure of self-respect” (84). It becomes evident historically that this sort of defense towards social opposition was not only engaged by Irish immigrants but by Polish, Jewish, and African Americans. This sort of mocking humor is often depicted in “Chappelle’s Show.” It is meant to deconstruct mainstream societal thinking and existing systems of power.

Boskin and Dorinson comment, “Ethnic humor in the United States originated as a function of social class feelings of superiority and white racial antagonisms, and express the continuing resistance of advantaged groups to unrestrained immigration and to emancipation’s black subcitizens barred from opportunities for participation and productivity” (81). As a response, those who have been historically marginalized by the dominant society reclaim stereotypes, once used for derision, to deflect feelings of shame. For instance, derisive language is sometimes reclaimed by individuals and communities in order to demonstrate protest or used as a term of endearment and pride, such as the use of the n-word (which will be discussed later) within the black community.

Some feminists have reclaimed piercing language such as bitch or slut, similar to how members of the gay community use the word dyke in reclamation, exuding pride through co-opting language. African American comedians like Dave Chappelle use the n-word intentionally, but Chappelle addresses his use of it in a political and social context in his show, particularly in the “Nigger Sketch.”

Boskin and Dorinson describe African American humor, stating, “Inwardly masochistic, indeed tragic, extremely aggressive, even acrimonious, their humor generated several distinct forms of expression such as gallows humor, the ironic curse, double meanings, trickster tales, and retaliatory jokes” (91). Not only did African American humor emerge as a method for survival, but it was also used to entertain white audiences. Of course, as performance, characters were rendered in an exaggerated manner, simultaneously constructing and upholding specific ideas of blackness. Black comedians even in performing to white audiences used their humor and the moment to unconsciously support stereotypes white audiences interpreted as truth. Not surprisingly, part of the process of presenting humor that indirectly mocked whites involved carefully masking this humor (Boskin and Dorinson 91). Certainly during slavery and post-slavery, to openly ridicule whites would have resulted in violence or even death. For that reason, African American humor would be presented differently to white and black audiences, generally segregated spaces prior to integration out of necessity. Before I discuss several of the “Chappelle’s Show” sketches in detail, in addition to the concept of comedy as resistance and Katrina E. Bell-Jordan’s discussion of performance as knowledge within

“Chappelle’s Show,” I want to address how television functions as political space (Acham).

Bell-Jordan acknowledges the significance of “Chappelle’s Show”, stating, “Chappelle is politically astute and keenly aware of the potential contradictions in performing race through racialized poses in his comedic routines [...]. The contesting of power is accomplished through comedic performance by juxtaposing dominant and marginalized agents and by using satire, parody, and other forms to draw on this tension” (75). Therefore, Dave Chappelle walks a fine line when he exerts racial humor for the masses to consume. Someone who has no knowledge of African American humor or its history may misconstrue the material that is being presented. However, that is a risk Chappelle took every week his show aired. The humor in the sketches is created in the mindset that the audience understands the dynamics of race in the U.S. This understanding or knowing is what Christine Acham describes as the hidden transcript (7). The hidden transcript is the ability to engage African American comedy based on the knowledge and experience of oppression. Acham contends,

The comedy of the TOBA (Theater Owners Booking Association), in addressing everyday issues of black folks, such as inability to find employment or the lack of resources, formed the basis of a political comedy. Although it did not directly address the emotions resulting from these circumstances, this comedy can be an everyday political act—a “hidden transcript” formed, in a communal setting, from a group’s acknowledgement of its public reality. (Acham)

Chappelle's comedy in "Chappelle's Show" takes up this hidden transcript and becomes "an everyday political act" that prompts the audience toward a consciousness of race in various aspects of society.

Similar to how Du Bois strategically manipulated the use of imagery in *The Crisis*, Dave Chappelle incorporates comedy as resistance to discuss racism through the medium of television, which is indicated in the majority of his sketches. The similarity between *The Crisis* and "Chappelle's Show" is the astute attention to provocative subject-matter (Kirschke). Du Bois used *The Crisis* to draw attention to the lynching epidemic in the United States during the post-Reconstruction era. Kirschke contends, "Before Du Bois brought lynching to the forefront on the pages of *The Crisis*, it was largely a taboo subject within the black community" (52). Another fascinating tactic used as part of the anti-lynching campaign was pointing out the hypocrisy in the United States. Kirschke states, "Lynching was essentially anti-American—it put the rule of mob over the rule of law. Furthermore, blacks who opposed lynching were true patriots. By using symbols of America, including the flag, the Statue of Liberty, and Uncle Sam, to underline lynching's anti-patriotic character, blacks placed themselves in a position of being better Americans than southern whites" (56). In a similar vein, "Chappelle's Show" also constructs sketches to mock U.S. policy and government leaders, such as President George H.W. Bush, and government policy, such as limited access to healthcare. For instance, the "Black Bush" sketch re-conceptualizes President George H.W. Bush as a black President and explores how being black would influence his policies and his public persona. The sketch uses constructs of black masculinity to depict a distinct contrast

between a white Bush and a black Bush. Of course, this sketch utilizes stereotypes of race and raced masculinity to reverberate the humor. Black Bush is depicted as being loud, often yelling at news journalists and nonchalantly swearing. There is one man simply referred to as “some black dude” who stands next to Black Bush interjecting at random when Black Bush holds a press conference. “Some black dude” is dressed in a tan suit and a coat trimmed with fur and a matching hat. Juxtaposed to Black Bush is the British Prime Minister, Black Tony Blair (with a cameo appearance by Jamie Fox). To introduce this sketch to his audience, Dave Chappelle explains why he has chosen to critique President H.W. Bush. He states,

Dave you talk about everybody except the President. Why don't you do that? Well, cause he's the President. Now I know my limits ladies and gentlemen and I wouldn't wanna cross em, but I will say this. If our President were black we would not be at war right now, not because a black President wouldn't have done something like that. Just because America wouldn't *let* a black President do something like that without asking a billion questions. You know they always do poles (now using a white voice) “minorities just don't seem to trust the government.” Because you don't understand what it looks like for us. (Chappelle's)

To reiterate Bush as being black, the character's language and vernacular switch to a so-called “urban” vernacular, and he simply drops curse words and the n-word. Being a black president keeping it real is also part of his political decisions, such as the war in Iraq.

Black Bush: After carefully examining the region, me and my cabinet definitely agree that that area is definitely ready for regime change.

Cabinet member 1: A'ight.

Black Bush: But if I were real about it.

Cabinet member 1: Be real, son.

Black Bush: Real.

Cabinet member 1: Be real, real, son.

Black Bush: He tried to kill my father, man.

Cabinet: (in unison) What. Word.

Black Bush: I don't play that shit.

Cabinet member 1: Say word, he tried to kill your father, son.

Black Bush: That nigga tried to kill my father!

Chappelle has woven actual political events into his humor in a way that speaks to a comedy that is used to induce laughter as well as provide a social commentary on race and policy. At this moment in American history, the oncoming war with Iraq was not sitting well with the American public, and many were protesting and questioning the motives for pursuing conflict in that region. In its entirety, the "Black Bush" sketch addresses the controversial topic of oil and weapons of mass destruction, and to discuss the element of race in a humorous manner, Chappelle uniquely renders the U.S. President as a black man. Chappelle never actually articulates that he is against President Bush or the war in Iraq within "Chappelle's Show," but his political stance reveals itself through the artistry of comedy sketches. Chappelle does not pander to his audience, and it would

be an insult to simply spell out the obvious. The sketches speak for themselves. This is the first time within the “Chappelle’s Show” that Chappelle discusses the policy of the Bush Administration. Again, somehow being a black president automatically changes the sort of language he uses. Black Bush is a cool character, not the inarticulate Bush in reality. Black Bush does address a female journalist as a bitch. While others have potentially referred to women in ways that are not so flattering, supposedly only Black Bush has the nerve to actually use it unapologetically in a public forum. As a feminist, I do not condone men calling or referring to women as bitches. The use of “bitches”, while derogatory, is intended to be synonymous with women, not necessarily to diminish women’s value or oppress them. The sketch continues:

News Journalist: What about people saying you’re only interested in the Middle East for oil?

Black Bush: What? Huh, oil? Who said something about oil? Bitch, you cookin’? Oil? Man, I don’t know wha...(tips over a pitcher of water and darts from his chair). C’mon ya’ll, get outta here (his cabinet members also flee the scene).

In the “Black Bush” sketch, the concept of “keeping it real” is mentioned as part of the President’s justifying war with Iraq. Saddam Hussein attempted to kill Black Bush’s father, which in itself is a challenge to masculinity and one’s authority, and were he to ignore that challenge, he might be written off as a “punk” or weak. Therefore, the only logical reaction is to rise up, to retaliate.



Another 'cool' character Dave Chappelle performs is named Leonard Washington. The first time the audience meets Leonard Washington is during the first season of "Chappelle's Show" in a sketch called "Trading Spouses," and he appears again during the second season. Leonard seems to represent a black man and masculinity from the 1970s, complete with a small afro and clothes that appear to come right out of that time period. He always has an unlit cigarette in his mouth, and it sits between his lips even when he is talking. Also, Chappelle lowers the octave of Leonard's voice when performing this character. When Chappelle performs various characters, he really has an exact image in his mind's eye of how he wants a character to sound, dress, and move and what each says.

The "Trading Spouses" sketch is meant to be a riff on the reality show "Trading Spaces." However, in this case, instead of swapping homes, families swap marital spouses. In this episode of "Trading Spouses," it is the first time the family swaps have gone interracial. Therefore, the sketch really utilizes this situation to amplify stereotypes of blacks and whites by positioning the families in contrast to one another, since one family is black and the other is white. Leonard Washington has a wife named Sharron and a son named T-Mart, a typical American family. The white family, the Jacobsons, also represent a heteronormative family with a white father, Todd Jacobson (played by Chappelle dressed in whiteface and a salt-and-pepper wig and mustache), and his wife, who is a blonde-haired woman named Katie, and their son Jeffery. In the sketch, both of the sons appear to be the same age, around ten or eleven. It is interesting when they depict the homes each family lives in because Leonard's home is much smaller and more

modest in appearance. Todd's home is a two-story, brick building with a long winding driveway. Neither families' profession is mentioned, but the audience is to assume that the men are the providers while the women tend to the home and take care of their children. However, once the spouses switch, we see differences in relationships and parenting styles. During the family dinner scene, Todd (the white father) prepares dinner for Leonard's wife Sharron and their son T-Mart. In contrast, when Leonard goes to live with Todd's wife and son, he expects Katie to do the cooking and cleaning.

T-Mart: What's for dinner, mister?

Todd: Uh...oh, I'm glad you asked little buddy. Umm, this here is cauliflower, this is corned-beef hash, and these are parsnips!

Sharron: What the fuck is a parsnip?

*Now switching scenes to dinner at the Jacobsons'*

Katie: Leonard just so you know, Todd would usually do the dishes after dinner.

Leonard: Well, just so you know, his ass will be back April 13<sup>th</sup>. Go on and do your thing girl. (Now addressing Jeffery) Mop-top, you do your homework?

Jeffery: Yeah.

Leonard: Go on upstairs and wash your ass, then we'll watch Martin Lawrence.

Katie: You want me to light your cigarette for you too?

Leonard: You better check your tone girl. Put your inside voice on before I put chya ass outside.

Chappelle exaggerates the cultural differences between white and black by literally switching the spouses of a white and black family, and he positions the issue of class distinction within the sketch with food preferences and disciplinary actions. For instance, when T-Mart misbehaves, Todd puts T-Mart on a time-out. Leonard, on the other hand, discovers Jeffery listening to 50 Cent, so he drops him off in the “hood”. Part of the humor is that the knowing viewer can almost predict what will happen in the following scenes. Then, the audience can question if they understand this humor and why. Leonard is given the final word during this sketch by stating that people, white or black, are fundamentally the same. Difference at its best is humorous, not a justification for hate.

Race and racism, as addressed in “Chappelle’s Show,” appear not just within a single episode or sketch, but throughout the entire series. The very first episode of “Chappelle’s Show” did not tread lightly in its subject matter by any means. It was very much in-your-face humor, and the audience either thought the joke was funny or it didn’t. Part of understanding or ‘getting’ a joke is based on knowing. This knowing is formed from cultural understandings, for something that is considered funny within one culture may not be in another, or at least not for the same reasons. The humor may not even be understood. In *Television in Black-and-White America*, author Alan Nadel contextualizes the technology of television, stating that, “[i]f television was a remarkable technology, it was an even more remarkable social phenomenon, for it provided midcentury a shared set of experiences and narratives within a homogenous space [...]. In many ways, television

appeared to make visually concrete the necessarily imaginary space of the United States” (6).

Television may have initially been a system of communication and information based on the assumption that T.V. audiences were white, hence those who populated the imaginary space of television were white (7). However, Nadel also points to the fact that blacks were not completely removed from the landscape of T.V. Prior to 1952, the Federal Communications Commission facilitated audience growth in the South, since blacks had more of a presence in broadcast television than in film (7). In fact, the phenomena of television coincided with the Cold War era, as well as the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. As such, television allowed the viewer not only to be informed, but also to engage with reality on a two-dimensional level without actually experiencing it. The viewer could objectively (to a degree) witness history but with some restraint of disconnect. The ways in which television educates and informs encompasses intricate layers, and the informed viewer does not want material that has been dumbed-down. The average T.V. viewers’ expectations have since the 1950’s and that is what I wish to demonstrate in analyzing sketches taken from “Chappelle’s Show”.

The sketch that particularly defined the signature comedy of “Chappelle’s Show” depicts Dave Chappelle as a black-white supremacist named Clayton Bigsby; I refer to this as the “Clayton Bigsby” sketch. However, the paradox of Bigsby’s character is not only that he is black, but also that he is blind—Bigsby does not realize that he is black, and no one tells him that he is black. Consequently, Chappelle plays on the concept of race and perception.

Newscaster: For the last fifteen years, a man named Clayton Bigsby has been the leading voice in the white supremacist movement in America. Though not sold in any major bookstores, his books—“Dump-truck,” “Nigger Stain,” “I smell nigger,” and “Nigger Book”—have sold over 600,000 copies combined. Despite his popularity (a photo of Clayton Bigsby wearing Ku Klux Klan garb pops up), very few have ever seen him due to his reclusiveness, but in an effort to bring his message to a wider audience, he agreed to give his first interview ever—to “Frontline.” But, getting to Mr. Bigsby was an odyssey in itself with backcountry hollers, shifty go-betweens, and palpable danger.

*Newscaster approaches a log cabin with Clayton Bigsby ( played by Dave Chappelle) and a white woman sitting on the front porch of a rundown log cabin.*

Newscaster: Excuse me, not sure we’re in the right place, we are looking for Clayton Bigsby.

Clayton Bigsby: (speaking with a southern accent) Look no further feller, you found him.

Newscaster: (in a puzzled voice) Uh? Clayton Bigsby the author?

Clayton Bigsby: What, you don’t think I can write them books? Just cause I’m blind don’t mean I’m dumb.

*Documentary video pauses*

Newscaster: How could this have happened? A black white-supremacist.

The school's headmistress Bridgette Wexler, speaking to "Frontline", states, "Well, he was the only negro we ever had around here, so we figured we make it easier on Clayton by telling him and all the other blind kids that he was white" (Chappelle's). The "Clayton Bigsby sketch" illustrates the manner in which racism, like race itself, is constructed, and at the same time, the joke is also directed at the absurdity of racism.

Then, towards the middle of the Bigsby sketch, Dave Chappelle uses Clayton Bigsby to depict the generational differences of what is traditionally viewed as black(ness) and white(ness). Hip-hop music and hip-hop culture are traditionally viewed as a 'black thing,' but hip-hop has been appropriated by whites, particularly white, American youth. Perhaps, the cooptation by white American teenagers is associated with rebellion. Hip-hop culture has been positioned by hip-hop artists of all genres as both a reflection of black culture and a universal culture regardless of race, class, gender, but it is still predominantly a reflection of heterosexual males. Of course, performances of hip-hop culture by white teens arguably are learned through the lens of the T.V. screen. Michael E. Dyson states, "Many whites have loved and identified with black culture while maintaining intellectual distortions, avoidances, and obstructions [...]. It's also about the power to shape a lens through which this culture is interpreted, and seen as legitimate, or viable, or desirable, or real by the dominant culture" (4). It is interesting that Dr. Dyson uses the words "distortions" and "avoidances" to describe how whites have chosen to engage certain aspects of black culture but render other aspects of it

invisible. These avoidances and obstructions speak to the white privilege that whites have no idea they possess. This portion of the “Clayton Bigsby” sketch shows Bigsby encountering a group of teenage boys gallivanting in a convertible, listening to hip-hop music. Since the Bigsby character is blind, he cannot see that these three teenage boys sitting in the convertible are actually white, making for a hilarious, yet telling scene.

Bigsby: (*Leaning out of the passenger’s window slamming the side of the truck, Bigsby yells at the young white teenage boys whom he perceives to be black.*) Hey! Why don’t you jungle bunnies turn the music down? Niggers make me sick. Woogie boogie, nigger. Woogie boogie.

Boy 1: Did he just call us niggers? (*High fiving his friend sitting in the passenger seat, they celebrate, unsuspecting of Bigsby’s blindness.*)

Awesome!

Within this small segment of the sketch, which only lasts a few seconds, the subtext encompasses various layers. This particular segment reiterates Clayton Bigsby’s blindness and ignorance to the appropriation of blackness by white society. Johnson states,

Davis and Hemphill testify that blackness is not something one necessarily wears on the outside (through black skin or clothing) but something more ephemeral and processual—a performativity that calls attention to the slippages among biology, culture, ideology, and politics. Thus, wearing kente or acquiring an African name is one kind of black performance, but

it is a no less authentic performance of blackness than wearing blue jeans or being named “John” or “Mary”. (Johnson 27)

The character of Clayton Bigsby is described as a recluse and living in what is assumed to be the backwoods of the rural south. He is an old man who has not had much contact with the outside world. The end of the sketch is finalized with the “Frontline” news journalist describing Clayton Bigsby as acknowledging and accepting that he is a black man.

Journalist: (narrating) Mr. Bigsby was not harmed that night, but irreparable damage has been done to his reputation, and in many ways the white power movement. We’re told in the last few weeks that he has accepted the fact that he is a black man and three days ago he filed for divorce from his wife. When we asked why, after nineteen years of marriage, he responded, “because, she’s a nigger lover.” I’m Kent Wallace, good night.

Narrator: Major funding for Frontline provided by the Trent Lott Foundation.

The end of the sketch uses miscegenation, which was once mandated illegal in the U.S., as comical climax. Therefore, this speaks to the racist construct linking to the conception of whites having to fear black masculinity or going back to the idea of the black rapist. It also illustrates how racism affects the psyche of the black community and individuals. At the beginning of the “Clayton Bigsby” sketch, Bigsby does not realize he is a black man. However, the apex of the sketch occurs when Clayton Bigsby removes his Klan hood to



an audience of his followers and his identity is revealed. The audience responds in shock and disbelief, one woman appears to be vomiting in her hand, and one man's head spontaneously explodes, splattering blood on the audience. His mind has been literally blown away by the irony. The sheer genius of the "Clayton Bigsby" sketch is the idea of a blind black-white supremacist leading the White Supremacist movement. An in-depth analysis of this sketch and character question how the social constructs of black and white can be explained to someone who is blind. He has been taught to perceive himself as of the dominant group, taking on racist perceptions and behaviors as well. Thus, Chappelle emphasizes the idea that race (gender and class as well) are socially constructed, are based in context based on location, culture, and the surrounding society. Self-hatred or internalized oppression becomes another layer of how racism psychologically afflicts the oppressed. In this instance, Clayton Bigsby could even be interpreted as an extreme case of internalized oppression. Since this sketch was aired on the very first episode of "Chappelle's Show", it clearly exemplifies Chappelle intentionally engaging humor as a means of critiquing ideas of race and racism.

### Race

Dave Chappelle informs the audience that he created the "Racial Draft" sketch in order to "stop arguing over who's what." He introduces the sketch by saying that he and his wife (whom he describes as Asian) have a dispute over which racial half of Tiger Woods's (who is half black and half Thai) golfing talent is attributed to his race (Chappelle's season 2). The "Racial Draft" sketch speaks to current discussions on race and how race performance exists on a continuum. In other words, racial characteristics

are not innate, which, again, is the subtext of many of Chappelle's sketches. What seems essential is truly a manifestation of cultural history. Since "Chappelle's Show" is presented as a comedy, the discourse of politics and history are veiled by humor, and the issues being addressed may not be viewed critically because they are perceived as just funny. The "Racial Draft" sketch is staged as if it were a sports draft, except instead of drafting team players, each race (white, black, Jewish, Latino, and Asian) is drafting individuals into the said races. The individuals are not actually "raced" until they are drafted. The show is called the "2004 Racial Draft", and there are three journalists covering the event. The race representatives are seated on stage, and the audience has view of the stage. Those who are drafted into one race are not necessarily represented by actual race. Some of the drafts are chosen based on traditional stereotypes of black, white, Asian, or Latino. However, these stereotypes do not necessarily signify someone as embodying the race of black or white. For instance, Rza and Jza from the Wu Tang Clan (hip-hop musicians who would be identified as black in our society) are inducted into the Asian delegation based on their appreciation for Asian culture, distinctly Kung Fu, when the newscasters argue that the Asian delegation will choose NBA star Yao Ming (Chappelle's season 2).

Rob: Ok, the Chinese delegation is up next. Although they're the last, they've been waiting with Zen-like patience.

Dave: My guess is Yao Ming. He's been spending a lot time with blacks learning slang and shit-talking. If they're not careful, they might lose 'em.

Asian representative: The Asian delegation chooses the RZA, the GZA, U-God, Inspectah Deck, Ghostface Killah, the Wu-Tang Clan!

Rob: I cannot believe my ears. This is, by far, the biggest upset of the night. The Chinese delegation pulling a fast one and choosing the entire Wu-Tang Clan.

Wu-Tang: Brooklyn.

RZA: This is big for us ya'll, because we always been a fan of the Kung-Fu and Chinese culture and shit. So it's like bong, bong ya know.

GZA: Yeah, I wanna remind everybody to diversify ya'll bonds, and RZA gotta announcement to make.

RZA: Oh yeah, Ol' Dirty has changed his name from Dirt McGirk to the Ol' Dirty Chinese Restaurant. *(The Asian audience starts chanting Wu-Tang and throwing up the Wu-Tang symbol.)*

Asian audience: Wu-Tang, Wu-Tang, Wu-Tang!

GZA: Konichiwa, bitches.

Dave: Folks, thanks for joining us on this incredible night. Our coverage ends here, but be sure to catch the rest on our website. Congratulations to all the races and 'konichiwa, bitches.'

In an effort to continue a critique of race and cultural difference in signature Chappelle fashion, Dave Chappelle presents another thought provoking sketch entitled "White People Dancing." The premise of the sketch is based on Chappelle's unofficial research of race and difference through the subject of dance. The sketch is formatted as a

documentary observing how various racial groups respond to different styles of music and instruments. Chappelle theorizes that white people not being able to dance is a stereotypical misconception. Indeed, white people do enjoy dancing and do dance. For his cultural experiment, musician John Mayer accompanies Chappelle playing songs on his electric guitar. They visit a business office and an up-scale restaurant to test Chappelle's theory. As Chappelle suspected, white people *can* dance, but in order to be rhythmically moved, electric guitar is part of the equation.

Dave Chappelle: *(narrating and showing footage of white people at an outdoor music festival)* It's my personal theory that when white people hear electric guitar, they cannot resist the urge to dance. No matter where they are, and me and John went to different locations to put this theory to the test.

*Now showing a business office meeting, there are white men and women engaged in conversation. Dave Chappelle and John Mayer sneak up and observe the men and women as experiment subjects. Chappelle and Mayer crouch down beside a guitar amp. Chappelle is holding a microphone and Mayer has his electric guitar in tow.*

Dave Chappelle: *(whispering)* Ok folks, here we are in a corporate boardroom. You can see people behind us working in the bull-pens, and right now a meeting is in progress. We wanna see what happens when you play electric guitar in the most professional of settings. Ready, John?

John Mayer: Yeah, I'm ready.

Dave Chappelle: Ok, cool go, go.

*Chappelle steps off to the side as Mayer begins playing a melodic tune.*

*Hypnotically, the people engaged in the board meeting stand up and begin slowly swaying to the sounds streaming from the amp. A man in the background, sitting at his desk, begins dancing. Chappelle looks on in awe at what he is witnessing. A lace bra is tossed over onto Mayer, and he is pleasantly surprised as the bra falls to the floor. The music ends.*

Chappelle: I knew it. I *knew* it. C'mon let's get outta here.

They then proceed to test the electric guitar theory at a Manhattan restaurant where the guests are all white. Mayer pumps out a hard-core riff on his guitar. The “Bush folks” immediately respond violently. One man squints his eyes in anger. A waiter smashes a dinner plate over his own head and then pushes another man onto the floor. Next, he proceeds to throw his body into a table, crushing it. With the sounds of electric guitar, the serene, civilized lunch scene transforms into a mosh pit. John and Dave then visit a barbershop in Harlem. Everyone in the barbershop is either black or Latino. At Dave’s command, John once again plays his guitar, and the music infuses the room. However, this time Dave does not receive the same results.

Man 1: Eh, yo! Shut the fuck up!

Chappelle: Ok, that went pretty much how I expected. Now let’s see how the blacks respond to drums.

*Sound of drum roll is heard, then Chappelle pulls a sheet that reveals ?uest love and a trap-set under it.*

Chappelle: ?uest Love, go.

*?uest love starts playing and people begin nodding their heads to the beat.*

*One man begins free-styling.*

Man 1: *(free-styling)* ahhh yeah! Yeah, yeah, uhhh!

*The customers and barbers begin dancing. Chappelle, unable to resist the beat, begins dancing.*

Man 2: Yo, yo, yo, yo, ... I can't see it. I came up in your face, oops, pow, surprise!

Chappelle: Woo, woo that worked like gang-busters, but I still happen to notice some of the Latin people were noddin' their heads but they weren't really feelin' it as much as I thought they would. But, I think I got the remedy.

*Chappelle pulls another sheet with a man and a piano being revealed.*

Chappelle: What would happen if I incorporated within that an electric piano? Sanchez, go!

*Sanchez starts playing along with ?uest Love. One woman begins dancing and literally rips the curling iron from the electrical socket. The Latin barbers and customers start to salsa.*

Chappelle: Alright, this is going great. Now I'm going to kick it up a notch. Watch this! *(Pulling out a megaphone, Chappelle begins shouting what is supposed to sound like Spanish). Ay carrumba! Ole! (Music then stops.)*

Chappelle: Hey guys have a good day, sorry to interrupt.

To really dismantle the idea of white(ness) and black(ness), the sketch ends with John Mayer and Chappelle wrapping up their experiment, when they are suddenly interrupted by two police officers. To distract the officers from giving them a ticket for not having a permit, John Mayer begins playing Guns n Roses. The first officer, who is white, cannot resist singing along with the tune. His partner, who is black, also knows the song and begins singing and swaying to the music. Chappelle asks, “Eh, my man, how you know that song?” The officer replies, “I’m from the suburbs man.” Then, Chappelle does a convincing impression of Axel Rose dancing, swaying from side to side, which the audience responds to uproariously. Chappelle proves his theory by using overt stereotypes about dancing and musical instruments, then surprisingly flips the script by being moved by a “white” instrument and an arguably well-known “white” song. Furthermore, this sketch translates the stereotypes an individual might believe in a three dimensional representation. A person truly invested in these stereotypes might respond, “hey, that’s true.” These sketches are positioned to induce analytical thought about stereotypes of race, gender, and racism.

### Language

Langston Hughes said,

Used rightly or wrongly, ironically or seriously, of necessity for the sake of realism, or impishly for the sake of comedy, it doesn’t matter. Negroes do not like it in any book or play whatsoever, be the book or play ever so sympathetic in its treatment of the basic problems of race. Even though the

book or play is written by a Negro, they still do not like it. The word nigger, you see, sums up for us who are colored all the bitter insult and struggle in America.” (Kennedy 89)

At the beginning of the “Clayton Bigsby” sketch, there is a “disclaimer” displayed on the screen that is meant to be comical and not an actual disclaimer.

Warning: For viewers sensitive to the issues of race, be advised that the following piece contains gratuitous use of the “N” word—and by “N” word, I mean nigger.... There I said it.” (Chappelle’s)

Of course, the use of the n-word in African American comedy is not a novel concept. Dave Chappelle’s predecessors Red Foxx, Richard Pryor, Paul Mooney, Eddie Murphy, Chris Rock, and a myriad of stand-up comics have all used the n-word in their stand-up performances, but some believe this pejorative word should not be used in any context—including comedy. Rather, they contend that the n-word should be strictly historical in reference and its use, Randall L. Kennedy discusses the history of the n-word in the United States and contextualizes the word’s current use, and more importantly, he questions whether or not it should be used today. Dave Chappelle uses the n-word in his sketches and during his stand-up comedy routines. Definitely, it is a controversial word. Kennedy argues “that nigger is the superlative racial epithet—the most hurtful, the most fearsome, the most dangerous, the most noxious” (87). Moreover, he posits that the origin of the n-word is unclear to historians, but it began being used with malignance and to assert power during the early nineteenth century (87). To discuss the integral component of language used in “Chappelle’s Show,” I contextualize the “Nigger Sketch” as social



commentary. In the second season of “Chappelle’s Show,” a follow-up sketch to the “Clayton Bigsby” sketch was unleashed on Dave Chappelle’s audience in the “Nigger Sketch.” In the introduction of this sketch, Chappelle examines how the black community views the word and how it is used in today’s language. He expresses to the audience his intentions for creating a sketch focusing on the n-word:

“You know, and that n-word is a doozy, especially for us black folks. You know, a lot of different feelings come up, when they hear that word. But I’m thinkin’, is it because black people identify themselves as n-words? No, I don’t know, maybe. But what if we used the word for just other people, would it be so bad? I don’t know. So, I made a sketch. It’s about a white family whose last name happens to be Nigger, that’s all. Let’s see how offensive the word sounds now.” (Chappelle’s)

Significantly, this is one of the rare moments when Chappelle actually addresses the audience members to inform them that his intention is to examine the use of predominantly negatively raced term to consider whether the impact holds racial lines and challenges the viewers to do the same to ask why it does or does not have the same impact when used against and by blacks.

The sketch opens like a 1950’s television show (say in the tradition of “Father Knows Best” or “The Donna Reid Show”) that has been filmed in black and white, giving it a more authentic feel. The Nigger family (white mother, father, and son) stand in front of the front door of their house and wave at the T.V. audience as their sitcom theme song plays. The opening credits end with a close-up shot of a sign showing the home address

and family name sitting in front of a bush in the yard. The n-word is used approximately twenty-six times throughout the sketch, and the spelling of this word has been slightly altered when it is visually depicted in the faux opening credits. Part of the shock value of this sketch is not only the number of times the word is utilized in such a relaxed manner, but also that it is being used by the white characters and they are being referred to as n-words. The white characters execute this word in a manner that is nonchalant, again *extremely* relaxed. They utter the n-word as if it were any other word accepted and identified in the American English language like dog or cat, but at the same time, there is a message in the discomfort of hearing white people say this word on a television show. Of course, the height of laughter ensues when Chappelle's character enters the scene and happily addresses this white family as n-words. It almost seems as if Chappelle breaks character by allowing his sheer joy and amusement to really come through this sketch.

Dave Chappelle portrays the character of the neighborhood milkman (not exactly a representation of black masculinity, he uses somewhat of a high-pitched voice) named Clifton. In the tradition of old-racist Hollywood, Clifton is constantly smiling in a goofy manner. What is interesting about this character is that it seems to make reference to Hollywood's construction of black characters before and during the 1950's. I am reminded of depictions of African Americans in films such as *Gone with the Wind* and *The Littlest Rebel*. Black characters were usually portrayed as simple-minded but happy and always smiling. Black female characters are depicted as mammies or domestics, and black male characters are emasculated, or if they are physically strong in appearance, the character is portrayed as mentally slow. As a Reagan baby (born in the 1980's), I really

cannot recall any black characters being featured in television shows during the 1950's. Therefore, if I were to imagine that this was an actual sitcom from the 1950's, Dave Chappelle's character, Clifton, would have been positioned as a character for comic relief, in the sense that the audience is laughing at him and not with him. More realistically, supporting characters like the neighborhood milkman would have been played by a white actor. Representations of African Americans in Hollywood have historically been racist and limited in their depictions of blacks and blackness. Christine Acham states, "Black humor's trajectory and significance can be situated around this duality: one type of humor in the mainstream public and another, private humor used within all black settings. Both were operational in order to maneuver through the hostile American terrain" (9). In opposition to old stereotypes of Hollywood films and TV shows, Chappelle's character Clifton gets to have the last laugh. This is Dave Chappelle's creation after all in which he has positioned himself to refer to white people as n-words. Thus, Chappelle's comedy and "Chappelle's Show" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century speaks to / challenges the separation of audiences, whether (white or mixed) or private (black).

Mother (has an early 1960's hairstyle and is cooking breakfast): Breakfast is served.

Father: Look, hon. My sister just had another baby (showing his wife a photograph). Look at this little bundle of joy.

Mother: She's got those Nigger lips.

Father: I know, so thin. Is Tim still asleep?

Mother: I think so.

Father: He sure is one lazy Nigger.

Tim (enters the kitchen): Good morning, mom (kisses mother on the cheek). Good morning, dad (patting his dad on the shoulder).

Father: Good morning. You know, Tim we're having a dinner party tonight. I trust you'll be here.

Tim: Oh, I can't. I have my first date with Jenny Hoffstead.

*Now showing Jenny Hoffstead eating breakfast with her parents*

Mother: Jenny has a date tonight with the Nigger boy from school.

Father: (looking worried) What?! Oh God, no!

Jenny: No, Daddy that's his name, Timmy Nigger.

Father: Oh, of course. I like that Nigger. He's a very good athlete and so well spoken. That family's going places. I mean we're rich, but their Nigger rich.

Mother: Oh, Ben.

*Scene goes back to the Nigger family eating breakfast. The milkman (Dave Chappelle) enters the scene.*

Milkman/Clifton (pops out from behind the door): Morning, Niggers!

Father: Why it's Clifton, our colored milkman!

Clifton: And it's my favorite family to deliver milk to – the Niggers!

Mmm mmm, sumthin' sure smells good; ya'll Niggers cookin'?

Mother: We sure are. There's some leftover bacon, if you'd like some.

Clifton: Oooh, none for me. I know better than to get between a Niggar and their pork. Might get my fingers bit.

Clifton (handing a bottle of milk to the mother): Here ya go. I ... I hate to bother ya, but uh why you didn't pay your bill last week? I know how forgetful you Niggars are, when it comes to payin' bills.

Father: Golly, Clifton it slipped my mind. (Stands up and takes money from his pocket) Here ya go, sorry about that.

Clifton: Oh, Niggar please, Niggar please! Take care, Mr. N-word. I gotta hot date with the wife tonight.

Father: Alright, take care.

Clifton: Alright, peace Nigga (throwing up a peace sign, then leaves the kitchen).

### Keeping It Real

“Keeping it real” links to the idea of the cool pose and part of the performative aspect of masculinity. In the second season of “Chappelle’s Show,” Chappelle introduces a new sketch that recurs throughout the season. The sketch is titled “When ‘Keeping it Real’ Goes Wrong.” The basic plot premise is that the characters are plagued by the decision either to “keep it real” or to ignore confrontation. In every “Keeping it Real” sketch, the main character must choose to save face or let whatever the issue is go. As the title of the sketch suggests “keeping it real” can sometimes go wrong. Therefore, the moral of the story is to know when and where to choose one’s battles because sometimes it may not be worth the effort. During episode seven of season two, “When ‘Keeping It

Real' Goes Wrong" tells the unfortunate tale of Vernon Franklin (played by Dave Chappelle). The sketch begins with the narrator describing the accomplishments of this successful businessman and his achievements, such as being the first person in his family to go to college and becoming the youngest vice-president in his company's history (Chappelle's). As Vernon's story is being told, the camera portrays his typical day at work. Unfortunately, Vernon is met with the decision of whether or not to 'keep it real' during a business meeting when a co-worker makes a thoughtless remark. Vernon and his co-workers are seated at a table. Everyone seated at the table is a white man except for Vernon (Chappelle's).

Narrator: The officers of his company were wrapping up the usual Thursday meeting in the south conference room when Frank Murphy, the man who had mentored Vernon, made an awkward comment.

Frank: Vernon, great job, buddy. You the man! Gimmie some skin, huh?

*At this point of the sketch, the image is paused to show Vernon's facial expression and he appears un-amused by this comment.*

Narrator: Vernon got along with all of the people he worked with, which in his heart of hearts made him feel like an Uncle Tom. Though he could have ignored the simple comment his mentor made, Vernon decided to 'keep it real.'

Vernon: Get your motherfucking hand outta my face. You heard me motherfucker, get that hand outta my face! Who you think this is? Just shake my hand like a man! (Changing the sound of his voice) I gotta give

some five on the backhand-side with all this crazy jive! That's bullshit.

(Inaudible) Soft-shoe, should I chunk some watermelon fo' you boss?

Fuck all that, nigga!

Some might interpret this sketch to be a reflection of the 'angry black man,' but that is the knee-jerk reaction. Yes, Vernon does allow his personal feelings to come to the surface and interfere with his work. However, many of these sketches are representative of a broader landscape. Though in every episode of "When 'Keeping It Real' Goes Wrong" the main character never chooses the high-road and his/her tale of 'keeping it real' always ends in tragedy, this particular episode seems to be an homage to the professional man or woman of color who is aware of the compromises he or she makes to navigate through a predominantly male-white world. Who hasn't had a moment at work where he/she wanted to correct someone's ignorant joke or comment? This then becomes another nuance of art, the ability to channel experiences and emotions indirectly. When watching this sketch, the individual can identify, acknowledging, "I've been through something like that or that happened to a friend of mine." Part of the appeal of any outlet of fiction is that you can live the experience without consequence. Of course, in Vernon's case, this is an extreme example of repressed anger in the work place. Not all of the male characters in "Chappelle's Show" are represented in a traditional masculine character. In fact, the character of Tyrone Bigsby (also portrayed by Chappelle) is neither quintessentially masculine nor feminine.

As a character, Tyrone has lost certain aspects of his humanity and agency because he is a crack addict. Like Clayton Bigsby, Tyrone Bigsby is an extremely

controversial character, maybe even dangerous when discussing negative images and stereotypes of black men. Tyrone is introduced in the first season of “Chappelle’s Show,” and similar to the “Nigger Sketch”, the “Tyrone Bigams” sketch is presented as if it were a television show chronicling the adventures of Tyrone. The first episode of the sketch depicts Tyrone visiting an elementary school as an anti-drug awareness speaker:

Dave Chappelle: I don’t know how many of you are from my generation, the Pepsi generation? Generation X, they call us. I refer to us as the Reagan babies. Anyone who grew up around Reagan had drug awareness week, right? Now, I don’t know if you guys know at home (*addressing T.V. audience*) what drug awareness week is, but that is a week of drug education for children in schools. And at the end of the week, to really drive the point home to the youth, they always have a real live crack-head come talk to the kids. I know that was the case at my school, and, uh, tonight we have a taping of just such an event. Please enjoy.

Again, Chappelle finds humor and irony using public policy as an inspiration to criticize Nancy Reagan’s ‘Just Say No’ anti-drug campaign. In an interview with a San Francisco radio show, Dave Chappelle stated that he lived in Washington, D.C., in the 1980’s when crack-cocaine was truly a prevalent epidemic in the U.S. Chappelle states that the character of Tyrone is a “two-dimensional portrayal” of what he witnessed living in the D.C. area during that time. Each time Tyrone is featured throughout “Chappelle’s Show”, his appearance remains the same. He wears tan pants that are held up by a piece of string and a matching tan sports coat. Underneath his sports coat, he wears a navy sweatshirt



and covers his head with a red beanie cap. The skin around his eyes is red and his lips are powdered white. He constantly scratches his skin, a symptom from smoking crack-cocaine. Tyrone has an unusually high-pitched voice.

Tyrone: Hi kids. Thank you very much teacher. It is truly an honor and privilege for me to be here at Pinehurst School or whatever your school is called today. I say it's a privilege because it's a violation of my parole to be around children, but enough about that. Hello little boys and little girls, mmm mm mmm.

Kids ya'll are lookin' at a dead man. I should not be in front of you today. Drugs and alcohol have ruined my life. I started doin' drugs when I was little, just like you fella (pointing at a student in the classroom). Me and my friends would go home and smoke marijuana after school. Can you say marijuana?

Students (enunciating): Marijuana!

Tyrone: That's when I would smoke it, sometimes dipped in embalming fluid. And me and my friends would laugh and giggle and eat all the cookies—it was terrible, terrible!

Teacher: I can definitely say he was the absolute worse anti-drug speaker in the history of drugs.

Tyrone: And I upgraded to a little drug called acid. Very inexpensive, even little children can afford it, it's so bad. I did two hits of that, and Bugs Bunny and Scooby Doo and all my favorite cartoons came to my

room and ate cookies with me and sang songs. For sixteen hours, goddamn! Talkin' bout, "Tyrone, go clean up your room," and Mickey Mouse was doin' the baseline, baba boom baba boom.

Teacher: And then, he basically told them where and how to buy the stuff.

Tyrone: We all know we can sneak into our mama's room when she's sleepin' and take five, ten, maybe twenty dollars out of her purse. Run on down to third street and catch the D bus downtown and meet a Latin American fella named Martinez—we know that. (students are shown taking notes) And we know that Martinez' stuff is the bomb. Kids, drugs is all around you. How would I know when drugs is around you might be a'ksin? Well, I'll tell ya. You with them magic markers, what you think that's some kind of crayon? No. (students observing magic markers) Take that cap off and sniff it, and you be high!

The most shocking part of the sketch occurs when Tyrone candidly divulges to the students the most humiliating and inevitable measure to obtain drugs.

Teacher: I thought the worst was over.... I was mistaken.

Tyrone: That, children, was the first time I sucked a dick for crack.

(Students are covering their ears and are in a state of complete shock).

Why, one time I seen Martinez...(the teacher then interrupts Tyrone).

Teacher: (grabbing Tyrone's microphone and tape recorder) Let's thank Bigams for that lovely and moving and graphic story.

As a character, Tyrone has been reduced to a humiliating existence. He exists on the very outskirts of society where is rendered virtually invisible. Again, Chappelle takes a very painful image and reality positioning it in America's homes on a pixelated screen. Then too, the children depicted in this sketch add another dimension. It may seem sinister, but if an individual lives in an environment where "Tyrone" is visible the reaction is to pretend not to see him. In an interesting fashion, Chappelle fleshes out Tyrone's life using provocative imagery and language.

### Inequalities

To discuss how "Chappelle's Show" addresses social inequalities while utilizing comedy as resistance, I analyze two sketches, the "Law & Order" sketch and the "Reparations" sketch. The "Reparations" sketch appeared during season one while the "Law & Order" sketch was featured in the second season of "Chappelle's Show." During the "Reparations" sketch, Chappelle fictionalizes what would happen if African Americans were to receive reparations from the U.S. government for slavery. To magnify the humorous aspect of this fictionalized historical event, Chappelle uses the stereotype of consumer excess, or the idea that black people as a collective are financially irresponsible. However, the consumer excess that is presented in the sketch speaks to the uneven distribution of wealth in the United States, particularly when race is factored into the equation. The concept of wanting more or possessing things comes from the influence of living in a capitalist society where position of power in society is based on access to

wealth. Wealth is more easily identified as being linked to white men, particularly elderly white men. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx states,

Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat [...] It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, *i.e.*, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image. (56-59)

The mainstream expectation of wealth, then, does not include blacks/African Americans or people of color overall, within the U.S.

Also, without directly discussing the history of minstrelsy, Dave Chappelle puts his own spin on blackface by dressing up in something akin to whiteface. However, when Chappelle performs whiteface, there is an absence of malice and oppression traditionally associated with minstrelsy in his portrayal of whiteness. Since this appears in the first season of the show, the “Reparations” sketch is the first time the audience is exposed to Chappelle’s two-dimensional portrayal of whiteness. The character Chappelle portrays is named Chuck Taylor. He is a newscaster covering the reparations news story. In opposition to minstrelsy, Chuck Taylor emphasizes the worst qualities and stereotypes of what it means to be a white man. Throughout the news coverage of “Reparations,” the audience witnesses his subtle and overt racism and his dry sense of humor:

Michael Peterson: Chuck, a lot of activity, as you can imagine here on the market. These people are spending money like hotcakes. Get this, Sprint

stock has skyrocketed. After the news, the two million delinquent phone bills have been paid just this morning, incredible. Gold is way up, diamonds are at their most expensive level ever. Catch phrase around here is certainly bling-bling. Oil has dropped to \$1.50 a barrel, while chicken shot to \$600 a bucket. Amazing news there, just about everything on the market is up. However, watermelon is surprisingly flat, (inaudible) many analysts out there. Chuck, get this, eight thousand record labels have been started in the last hour, incredible. Cadillac announced that they sold three million Escalade trucks this afternoon alone. It's incredible, Chuck, these people just seem to be breaking their necks to give this money back to us. Folks, I am happy to report that the recession is now officially over, and we have nobody to thank but all these black people. With their taste for expensive clothes, fancy cars, and of course body (inaudible) jewelry.

[...]

Chuck Taylor: Flabbergasting. A truly wild day that none of us will forget no matter how hard we try. We're gonna take a short break, but when we come back the crime rate has fallen to zero percent. (Pausing and looking confused) How could that be? Did the Mexicans get money today too? (Laughing, then realizing he is still on the air) I shouldn't have said that. (Show music starts playing and a woman working on the set approaches

Chuck) Listen, I think we'll be alright. Mexicans don't watch the news.

Now, if this was Telemundo, a hacachi chachi cachi.

In another sketch, one of the lesser known ones called the "Law & Order" sketch, Chappelle addresses racial discrimination and in the legal system. Specifically, Chappelle juxtaposes a corporate businessman and a crack-cocaine dealer within the American justice system. However, in this sketch, the corporate businessman is criminalized in the manner in which a black man in our society would be criminalized, and he is abused by everyone in the criminal justice system from SWAT team members to the court judge. In opposition, Tron, the crack-cocaine dealer, is given the treatment of a white-collar criminal. The district attorney politely calls Tron on the telephone and asks him to turn himself in since he is wanted for trafficking crack-cocaine.

Screen reads: Home of Charles Jefferies CEO of FONECOM

Wife: How was work today, Charles?

Charles: Ugh, same old, same old. Accounting's complaining about he's misleading the stockholders and blowing the employee pensions. What a bunch of babies. C'mon this is business people, right? And speaking of business...(now addressing their golden retriever laying on the bed)

Satchco, take a powder. And you (throwing his wife on the bed) arrrrr!

(inaudible).

*A grenade rolls onto the wooden floor where the dog is laying. It explodes and the SWAT team breaks down the bedroom door. Charles and his wife are screaming in chaos.*

SWAT 1: Shut that fucking dog up (the dog is not even barking, but he shoots the dog in between the eyes. Blood splatters all over Charles's wife as she screams hysterically. The SWAT member pushes Charles on to the bed.) Get on the fucking bed, stop resisting sir (he is not resisting but complying with SWAT).

Screen Reads: Home of Tron Carter Everglade Blvd.

*Tron's phone is ringing and he is looking at his handgun and watching music videos.*

Tron: Oh. (He picks up the phone) Nigga, I said to stop calling me alright! I'm baggin' the coke up as fast as I can.

Detective: I'm Detective Charles Stevens from the Dade County Police Department. I've got a warrant here for your arrest.

Tron: A warrant?

Detective Stevens: Charge's cocaine trafficking, and uh frankly, I...I'm afraid I don't know how to handle it.

Tron: Oh man! We gotta be careful with this, we don't wanna embarrass somebody like me in front of my family and my community. I tell you what, I'll come in and turn myself in around uh Thursday, o.k.?

Detective Stevens: Is one o'clock good for you?

Tron: Ooh no, that's no good for me. I got some trim coming at twelve. I'll turn myself in say between...two and six?

Detective Stevens: Thank you so very much for your help, and again, I'm sorry for the inconvenience.

Tron: Oh, no problem! One love.

Detective Stevens: Yeah, I love you too.

*13<sup>th</sup> Precinct Interrogation Room*

Charles: So, what am I charged with?

Cop 1: Yeah, like you don't know you little bitch! (blowing cigarette smoke into Charles's face).

Charles: (Coughing) Ah, could you do me a favor and not smoke. I'm allergic.

Cop 1: Oh, hey I'm sorry, Chuck. Why don't I do you a favor and put it out there for ya, huh? (He douses the lit cigarette onto Charles's head



while the other cop holds his head still. Charles screams from the pain.)

Piece of crap! I want answers punk!

*Charles, unable to control his fear urinates on himself and the floor.*

Charles: I wanna talk to my lawyer.

Cop 2: He wants to talk his lawyer.

Cop 3: Legal aid, you're on.

Legal Aid: Sorry, you're like my fourth case this week. Somebody take a piss in here?

Charles: (Crying) It was me. ... I peed.

Charles Jefferies, appointed with inadequate legal presentation, receives an unfair trial. A member of the SWAT team frames him by planting him with Columbian heroine. Mr. Jefferies denies this accusation or having any knowledge of the heroine. The jury, which is all black men dressed in hip-hop style, finds Charles Jefferies to be guilty on all counts, and he is sentenced to life in prison.

Judge: You're the worst kind of scum on the face of the earth. You're an animal, a filthy big-lipped beast. I'd like to congratulate the jury of your peers for reaching a verdict so quickly. Ten minutes is the new record. All your possessions will be seized immediately by the court. You will receive the mandatory minimum of life in prison. Plenty of time to lift weights and convert to *Islam*. (Slams his gavel) Get out of my sight, you fuck.

Meanwhile, Tron is seated at the Senate Sub-Committee Hearing on Narcotics. Tron uses his right to access the Constitution of the United States and pleads the fifth. His lawyers have his sentence reduced to a month in 'Club Fed.' Through his depictions reversing the arrests and sentences of the two men (one for a white collar crime, the other for drug-related crimes), Chappelle emphasizes the problems and inequalities of the justice system, from the ways accused persons are treated, to actual process of arrest, to legal representation and sentencing. Too, he highlights the roles that race and class play in the overall process. It even seems a way of emphasizing "white privilege", which is often unnoticed by those who benefit from it.

## Chapter 5

Racism still very much exists within America's social landscape in what some might articulate as a post-race era. Since the cancellation of "Chappelle's Show," one historical event stands out, which may aid in the cultivation of this myth—the election of President Barack Obama. Wood and Goodale quote Professor Joseph Boskin, "Obama's election is a 'momentous occasion, a game-changer for many blacks as they readjust their perspective on what's possible. [...] Many black comedians who have based their humor in victim mentality are going to have to reassess'" (2). Wood and Goodale contend, "If the 2008 election signals a sea change in American racial and class attitudes, the first signs are likely to come from African-American comedians" (1). This particular article, examining the position of race in the United States, after Barack Obama's presidential election, was titled "Black comedians adapt to Obama era. Is 'angry' out?" The article focuses on the material black comedians use in their performances and the conceptualization of the 'angry Black man.' The title of this suggests how black masculinity or the idea of the 'angry Black man' links to expressions of innate aggressiveness. Apparently, anger is an unacceptable response to the inequities produced by racism or the uneven distribution of resources. If not anger, what is the appropriate response? Anger then becomes more dangerous when expressed by a black man. More importantly, it implies that race and racism are passé, based on a single, however important, historical triumph. At the very least, this article articulates 'a black man has been elected president, therefore, *you* (read African Americans) have no more reason to complain.' However, this article was published during Dave Chappelle's now infamous

hiatus from the limelight and the entertainment industry, so one can only speculate what Dave Chappelle would have to say about the 2008 U.S. presidential election and the current discourse on race.

This is the very reason that we need artists such as Dave Chappelle to remain on the landscape of mainstream entertainment. Chappelle relentlessly reminds us that racism is flat out ridiculous and should be a part of the conversation. “Chappelle’s Show” innovatively takes various facets of race and masculinity and reveals the humorous aspects of these controversial subjects to put them on the table for discussion. He does not present this material in an academic lecture style; instead, he does it through comedy and stereotypes. It is a language that people understand and discuss behind closed doors, and Chappelle puts it right in the viewer’s face. One cannot ignore the truths drawn from the characters of Clayton Bigsby and Tyrone Bigsby. In 1991, twenty-five-year-old black man Rodney King was beaten by Los Angeles police officers after being pulled over for drunk driving. Fast forward to 2012, and a seventeen-year-old African American youth in Florida named Trayvon Martin is killed by a neighborhood watchman because he thought the young man was carrying a weapon. Trayvon Martin was carrying an ice tea and a pack of skittles he purchased from a gas station when he was killed, not a gun. Fear of black masculinity and black males obviously persists in the so-called post-race era. The disproportionate population of black men in the American prison industrial complex attests to the integral link of a historical fear and need to imprison black men.

Though few will admit it, much of the criticism and straight up disrespect for President Barack Obama is motivated by race, even though some constantly claim “it’s

not about race.” Strangely, the subject of racism has become even more of a taboo topic in the United States. It’s considered impolite to talk about such things, so the solution then is to make it invisible. Progress has created a backlash of silence. If I were to continue my research of comedy as resistance and “Chappelle’s Show,” I would continue this discussion through the medium of a documentary, since I am a visual artist by nature. A documentary would allow me to reach a wider audience, and I would like the opportunity to continue this interrogation of the intersections of gender and race as depicted and critiqued in “Chappelle’s Show”. Specifically, I would do this by interviewing people who “get” Chappelle’s work the way I “get” his work, who understand comedy as a means through which to resist racism and other social inequalities.

At the end of “Chappelle’s Show,” Chappelle was concerned that his jokes were perhaps reinforcing stereotypes rather than dispelling them. That is the fine-line of comedy and stereotypical humor: it creates this “see, it’s true” mentality. However, those who perceive this humor as truth have been infused with racist thought. “Chappelle’s Show” is not for the average television viewer, plain and simple. One must have an understanding of African American humor and the marginalization of the black narrative to truly appreciate “Chappelle’s Show” as a strong and critical example of comedy as resistance.

Understanding “Chappelle’s Show” as comedy as resistance means that the audience and/or individual must actively participate in the analysis of the comedy sketches. One must have an understanding of history and African American comedy in

order to contextualize what is spelled out for the viewer or understood by the novice. Hopefully, these sketches prompt the viewer to engage in critical thought and discussion, otherwise the audience has missed the point entirely. When thinking about the history of African American humor and “Chappelle’s Show”, the history of segregated audiences and veiled humor implicates an existing disconnect. Though we are far from the days of the TOBA, there are still misunderstandings as to why someone who does not identify as socially and politically marginalized finds humor in these sketches. Again, this speaks to the unsettling feeling that “Chappelle’s Show” and African American comedy have been grossly misinterpreted. Therefore, when examining satirical humor, particularly humor created around concepts of race, gender, and sexuality, those who are committed to resisting social inequalities maintain allegiance by voicing how and why “Chappelle’s Show” is funny, as well as continuing the critical discussions raised in such comedy. I have demonstrated this in my thesis on race, gender, and comedy as resistance. Now, it is up to the readers to take up this challenge, to push the limits – as teachers in the classroom, as popular culture theorists, as activists for social justice – and to make visible those topics from which we too often shy away. Taking a cue from Dave Chappelle, I challenge viewers to push the limits. Introducing an episode of the “Black White Supremacist” sketch, Chappelle states, “Welcome to “Chappelle’s Show”. I still haven’t been cancelled, but I’m working on it. This next piece might be the one to do it. This is probably the most wildest thing I’ve ever done in my career, and I show[ed] it to a black friend of mine, and he looked at me like I set black people back with a comedy sketch.

(shrugs his shoulders) Sorry.” While the critiques may be difficult, they are necessary, and we must engage.

## Appendix

### The Brady Show Sketch

(Sketch begins showing a corporate office, and “Comedy Central Headquarters” reads across the screen.)

Dave Chappelle: I can’t, I’m sorry. I’m sorry I can’t do this anymore.

Luke: What?! Why not?

Dave Chappelle: I’m burnt out, Luke. I got a family, man. I’m workin’ twenty-hour days every day. I ain’t makin’ no money, Mr. Hanky makes more than me.

Luke: Dave, you signed a contract for two seasons and I don’t know if you’ve read *U.S.A. Today*, but we expect you back for a third.

Dave Chappelle: Oh, oh really. Really, you just expect me back huh? Well guess what? Expect this my resignation effective immediately. I quit!

Female Executive: Suit yourself, Dave. You’ve already shot all of your sketches. At this point in the season, you’re replaceable.

*Dave responds with a snicker and laughter*

Dave: Replaceable? You’re gonna replace me? Dave Chappelle of “Chappelle’s Show.” I’d like to see that.

*Scene quickly switches to the “Chappelle’s Show” opening, which depicts two elderly men. One man plays a harmonica and the other is seated on a stool playing his guitar. There is a hat turned upside-down placed at their feet with money in it. The opening usually plays with the two men singing, “Chappelle’s Show, Chappelle’s Show, Chappelle’s Show” and Dave Chappelle walks up and throws some money into the hat. But now, they are singing instead, “The Brady Show, The Brady Show”, and now Wayne Brady walks up and begins singing. The banner reads “Wayne Brady’s Show.”*

Announcer: Wayne Brady!

Wayne Brady: Woo! Hey! Welcome! (He motions to the in-house audience.) Folks up top, people down here, everybody! Comedy Central, hey! Thank you guys so much. Umm, as you saw, this really is the “Wayne Brady Show,” no longer the “Chappelle’s Show.” Umm, Dave has been uhh downsized, and I umm I’ve been brou...(interrupted by audience member who has a bouquet of flowers for him).

Lady in the audience: You’re so wonderful.

Wayne Brady: No, you...aww thank you (the lady from the audience hugs Wayne Brady and the audience applauds).

Wayne Brady: (Now holding the bouquet of flowers in his arms. He is glowing with happiness and bows.) You know, one of things in Hollywood is uhh there’re only a few of us black actors



that happen to be working, and nothing makes me happier than to be able to take another black actor's job. (The audience laughs.) Thank you, I'm just doin' my thing. So, Dave, before he was let go, he taped a bunch of his sketches, so before we go on with the third season, which would be the "Wayne Brady Show", We have to burn off all of his sketches, so uhh, excuse me I'm gonna give my flowers to you, to you sir (handing the flowers to a man sitting in the front row) but not in that way, dude.

*Sketch plays*

*Now showing Dave Chappelle at home sitting on his couch and watching the "Wayne Brady Show" on T.V.*

Dave Chappelle: Ohhh, c'mon man.

*Takes out his cell phone and begins dialing. A cordless phone is ringing and we see a hand reaching for it. It's Big Boi.*

Big Boi: Hello

Dave Chappelle: Big Boi!

Big Boi: Uhh who's calling?

Dave Chappelle: It's Dave...Chappelle, man.

*He realizes that it's Dave Chappelle and place the phone down while placing his other hand over the phone saying under his breath "fuck."*

Big Boi: *(He picks the phone back up.)* What's happenin', Dave?

Dave Chappelle: Nuthin', man. I, you know, I got a bunch of free time now I figure I call you up, maybe we could get together and hang out.

Big Boi: Dave, I'm in the operating room...I'm gettin' back surgery...

*Dave furrows his brow and holds his phone out, looking at it in disbelief.*

Big Boi: *(He is actually sitting at home on his sofa.)* Uh, no, with the anesthesia. Stop.

Dave Chappelle: Well look, I'm just sayin' maybe we can get together maybe tomorrow. I'll come and bring some soup by.

Big Boi: Tomorrow might not be good. I'm supposed to be hookin' up with Don Cornelius tomorrow.

Dave Chappelle: Uh uh, alright.

Big Boi: Yeah, we're playin' tennis man.

Dave Chappelle: Umm, well, you know, I'm around man. Gimmie a call.

Big Boi: I'm playin' on the moon, bitch. Peace (inaudible). (He smiles then hangs up the phone.)

Dave Chappelle: What?

*Dave looks pensive and confused.*

Dave Chappelle: I gotta clear my head. *(He gets off of his sofa.)*

*Dave is shown leaving his apartment and walking out into the street. Some after-school special music plays as he strolls down the sidewalk. He looks up and looks upset and confused.*

Dave Chappelle: Hey! Son? Nick Cannon? OHHH!!

*Nick Cannon is standing on the street holding the hand of Dave's son.*

Dave Chappelle: What you doin' with Nick Cannon, boy?

Dave's son: I'm livin' my life. I told you Nick Cannon is hilarious. I'm done wit you, Dad.

Dave Chappelle: I'm hilarious too. Remember me? 'I'm Rick James, bitch!' Remember this? *(Begins singing and playing an air-flute.)* Doodle-oo, doodle-oo, doodle-oo doo, that was me, baby!

Nick Cannon: Dave, I'm tryin' to fulfill his needs. You know, he needs a working actor in his life. I'm sayin' man, you done fell off. You shouldn't of gave up your show, dog.

Dave Chappelle: Still got "Chucky Cheeses" huh, little man?

Dave's son: Leave me and my new daddy alone.

*Camera shifts to Chappelle and the "Batman" theme song begins playing.*

Dave Chappelle: I'm gonna get my show back now. I'ma get my show back! *(repeats)* my show back! *(Now repeating in slow motion)* My show back!

*Still in slow motion and the "Batman" theme continues to play. Dave runs down the street to reclaim his show.*

Wayne Brady: Thank you, thank you.

*The scene goes back to showing Wayne Brady hosting in front of the live audience. Backstage, Neal Brennan and the T.V. show executives are depicted watching as the "Wayne Brady Show" is being taped.*

Neal Brennan: He's better looking.

Executive 1: Agreed, agreed. Handsome guy.

Neal Brennan: And charming, and the other thing *cooperative*.

*Dave is hiding backstage and he creeps from behind Neal and the executives.*

Executive 2: I just can't believe how funny he is.

Executive 1: Agreed. *(Dave comes from behind and places a folded handkerchief over his mouth and nose. Executive 1 passes out, but the others do not notice. Dave proceeds to do the same thing to executive 2 and she passes out falling to the ground. Neal is left standing talking to himself. Dave taps his friend on the shoulder making his presence known. Neal turns around and looks surprised.)*

Neal Brennan: It's not what you think, Dave. Dave, it's not what you think *(Dave is staring down his best friend). They gave me... (Dave cuts him off by knocking Neal out. He throws down the handkerchief and moves towards the stage.)*

*Wayne Brady is still hosting and the audience is cheering him on. Dave slowly walks onto the stage.*

Wayne Brady: Huh, yeah! Woo! Right, right, right... *(Wayne Brady does not realize Dave is standing behind him. Dave pulls a microphone from the inside of his jacket.)* You guys are too kind, you guys are too kind.

*Dave abruptly interrupts Wayne.*

Dave Chappelle: Ha! Ha! Ha!

*The audience laughs with Dave.*

Dave Chappelle: Oh, fuck ya'll!

Wayne Brady: It's good to see you, Dave.

Dave Chappelle: What's up, Wayne?

Wayne Brady: What's up, brother?

Dave Chappelle: I want my show back.

*Wayne laughs.*

Dave Chappelle: Gimmie my show back now. Just give it back! C'mon, man!

Wayne Brady: O.k., you know what?

Dave Chappelle: Look Wayne... What?

Wayne Brady: Why don't we host it together?

Dave Chappelle: Nah, son.

*Wayne appears surprised by Dave's refusal.*

Dave Chappelle: Nah man, it can't be together, cause you do different things than I do.

Wayne Brady: What are you...

Dave Chappelle: The way you do it ain't like the way I do it. You got your thang. I got my thang. I'm tryin to do my thang! C'mon, Wayne, you know what I'm talkin about.

Wayne Brady: No. No, I actually don't know what your talkin' about...I...what's my thing, Dave?

Dave Chappelle: Oh, like, remember that time we was hangin' out? Remember that a few months back?

*Screen reads: 2 Months Earlier*

*Dave and Wayne are shown riding in an SUV. Wayne is driving and Dave is sitting in the passenger seat.*

Wayne Brady: Dave, I gotta tell you man...I...I'm really happy to be hanging out with you. This is nice.

Dave Chappelle: Aww, it's just been great, man.

Wayne Brady: Well, same here, man. You busy with your show, I got my stuff. This is really cool.

Dave Chappelle: Yeah man. See this is the thing with black actors, we need to just unify. We can't just be out...

Wayne Brady: Exactly.

Dave Chappelle: Eh, hold up, Wayne. I think you passed our turn. The restaurant's back that way.

Wayne Brady: Nah, that's alright. Relax.

Dave Chappelle: You goin' to get some weed?

Wayne Brady: *(amused, he laughs.)* No.

Dave Chappelle: You wanna get some weed, now holla atch'ya boy. I know the spots.

Wayne Brady: *(Pulling the car over.)* Hold on.

Dave Chappelle: Alright.

Wayne Brady: *(With the car window rolled down Wayne yells out the window.)* Break yourself fool.

*A group of men are standing outside of a nightclub.*

Man 1: Aww, shit! It's Wayne Brady, son!

The people outside of the club run and hit the ground. Wayne has pulled out a machine gun and begins shooting at them. He shoots one man repeatedly until he falls to the ground dead.

Dave Chappelle: Oh shit! What the fuck are you doin'?

Wayne Brady: Riverside motherfucker!

He ceases after the one man has fallen to the ground. He puts the machine gun away and drives off.

Dave Chappelle: What the fuck are you doin'?

Wayne Brady: Dave, calm down.

Dave Chappelle: Whatch' you mean calm down? You just...you just shot people, Wayne!

Wayne Brady: (Speaking at the same time Dave is panicking.) Dave relax. Dave...

Dave Chappelle: Look at all the people you shot. Goddamn man, you got a daytime Emmy. You ain't supposed to be doin' shit like this.

*Wayne pulls the car over.*

Wayne Brady: Dave, your making me nervous. Your making me think that you're gonna snitch. Now, you're not gonna snitch right?

Dave Chappelle: No, man. C'mon man, I ain't no snitch.

Wayne Brady: Now, you sure you ain't gonna snitch?

Dave Chappelle: I just mean, nigga...it's Dave, baby...

Wayne Brady: motherfucker, you gon snitch on me?

Dave Chappelle: C'mon nigga, yo nigga, it's Dave. We black actors man, we gotta stick together. We black actors (inaudible)...c'mon, it's me baby, it's Dave. Dave Chappelle. It's your boy.

*This manages to calm Wayne down and he appears relaxed.*

Wayne Brady: O.k. sorry, man. (He continues driving.)

Dave Chappelle: I gotta get some money, man. I gotta go to the ATM, I don't have no money.

Wayne Brady: I'll get some money.

Wayne Brady: Alright, right here.

Dave Chappelle: Where is the ATM at?

Wayne Brady: We at it. Hey! (He claps his hands then honks his car horn that plays the tune "LA cucaracha." Four prostitutes walk up to the driver's side of the vehicle.)

Prostitute 1: Hey, daddy!

Wayne Brady: Ho's, Dave. Dave, ho's.

Dave Chappelle: Good evening, bitches.

Prostitute 1: You look good tonight. (She hands Wayne some money.)

Wayne Brady: That's what I like to hear. Oh, that's nice. Hey baby (another prostitute hands him some money). Thank you. Alright, more power to me. (The last prostitute walks up and hands him a hundred dollar bill.) Alright, thank you baby...oh oh..Raquel, what's this? Mr. Franklin's lonely.

Raquel: Sorry, daddy.

Wayne Brady: What do you...what do you mean 'sorry daddy'? Is Wayne Brady gonna have to choke a bitch? I'm gonna have to get out this car and choke...I'm not violent...I tried not to be...you know what...

Dave Chappelle: Wayne, c'mon man. C'mon Wayne. No, it's not worth it! Will you please... Please man! C'mon just, just let it slide.

*Dave once again manages to calm Wayne down.*

Wayne Brady: You better thank Dave Chappelle (inaudible).

Raquel: Thank you, Dave and I like your show.

Dave Chappelle: Run bitch! Run for your life, get some help!

*Wayne appears angered by this outburst and turns to look at Dave.*

Dave Chappelle: You know...

*They drive away.*

Wayne Brady: (throws a roll of money to Dave.) Here you go. Pay me back whenever.

Dave Chappelle: I...I can't take this money man. This money ain't clean man.

Wayne Brady: Dave relax.

Dave Chappelle: Nah, man. I can't relax. I don't want this money.

Wayne Brady: Dave you are too uptight, you know. Here (he hands Dave a lighter and a pipe made of tin foil) here smoke this.

Dave Chappelle: Nah, I'm cool.

Wayne Brady: C'mon smoke this. Take it c'mon, smoke it.

*Dave continues to refuse and is mumbling his words under his breath.*

Wayne Brady: This is not an option, nigga. If you do not smoke this, we have a problem. This ain't no after-school special, smoke it!

*Unable to refuse, Dave begins smoking whatever is in the tin-foil pipe. He starts to cough heavily and Wayne starts laughing at him.*

Wayne Brady: Dave, I didn't know that you like to get wet.

Dave Chappelle: Whatta you mean wet?

*The sound of an Indian sitar is heard and Wayne Brady smiles.*

Wayne Brady: Yeah, brotha that's PCP, angel dust. Sherman Hemsly, "Love Boat," Ashy Larry.

*Dave passes out and he begins to hallucinate. An image of 'Negrodamas' (a character on "Chappelle's Show" played by Paul Mooney) pops up and he begins speaking.*

Negrodamas: White people love Wayne Brady because he makes Bryant Gumble look like Malcolm X.

*Dave comes to by the sound of a police car.*

Dave Chappelle: Where are we?

Wayne Brady: We got company.

*A policeman walks up to the driver's side of the car.*

Wayne Brady: Just let me do all the talking o.k.

Policeman: Good evening.

The policeman shines a flash light into the car and Dave silently mouths "help."

Wayne Brady: Good evening, officer. May I help you?

Policeman: Yeah, will you step out of the car please?

Wayne Brady: (he looks over at Dave) Not a word.

Wayne Brady: Coming.

*Wayne gets out of his car and walks up to the police officer. He holds both of his hands up to show that he is unarmed.*

Policeman: Can I see your license?

Wayne Brady: Absolutely.

*The officer looks at Wayne's license and realizes he has just pulled over Wayne Brady.*

Policeman: Holy cow! You're Wayne Brady.

Wayne Brady: Guilty as charged.

Policeman: My mother-in-law loves you.

Wayne Brady: Well, thank you very much. Thank you very much. *(He pulls out a microphone and a spotlight shines on him as he begins to sing "Say a little Prayer for you.")* The morinin' I

wake up and I put on my make-up. I say a little prayer for you...*(He continues singing and the cop begins dancing with him.)*

Policeman: She is not gonna believe that this happened!

Wayne Brady: That's cause she is never gonna know about it, bitch!

Policeman: What?

*Wayne then puts his hands around the officer's head and snaps his neck.*

Wayne Brady: (speaks into his microphone to his imaginary audience) Thank you, good night!

Dave Chappelle: What the fuck, man! *(Crying)* This is not my thing man, it's not my thing.

Wayne Brady: I'm sorry. Well actually, I'm not sorry. I don't give a fuck. They cancel my show and shit goes crazy!

Dave Chappelle: (Still crying) I just wanna go home and see my family man.

Wayne Brady: Dave, you hungry? C'mon ya hungry? You wanna sandwich?

*Dave and Wayne are sitting on the sidewalk eating sandwiches. Dave cries as he eats his sandwich.*

Dave Chappelle: I just wanna go home.

Wayne Brady: Eat your sandwich, Dave.

Wayne Brady: Gimmie your sandwich.

*Dave shakes as he slowly hands his partly eaten sandwich to Wayne.*

Wayne Brady: I said gimmie your damn sandwich.

*Now back in the car and driving.*

Wayne Brady: I make Bryant Gumble look like Malcolm X huh, motherfucker.

Dave Chappelle: This is me.

Wayne Brady: Whatever. Get out.

Wayne Brady: Hey Dave? Really, I had a great time tonight. Thank you.

Dave Chappelle: Black actors, man.

Wayne Brady: Black actors, alright. Oh...Dave...

Dave Chappelle: Yeah.

*Wayne motions to Dave. Dave moves towards the car and Wayne pulls out a handgun and shoots Dave in the knee.*



Wayne Brady: I'm Wayne Brady, bitch!

Dave Chappelle: It was Mooney (inaudible)!

### **The Black Bush Sketch**

Dave Chappelle: Dave you talk about everybody except the President. Why don't you do that? Well, (now using a serious voice) cause he's the President. Now I know my limits ladies and gentlemen and I wouldn't wanna cross 'em, but I will say this. If our President were black we would not be at war right now, not because a black President wouldn't have done something like that. Just because America wouldn't *let* a black President do something like that without asking him a billion questions. You know they always do poles (switching to a 'white' vernacular) 'minorities just don't seem to trust the government.' Because you don't understand what it looks like for us, so let me help paint the picture. Ladies and gentlemen I bring to you now "Black Bush."

Dave Chappelle portrays "Black Bush" in this sketch.

Screen reads: The Lead Up To War

Photo of President Black Bush appears on the screen.

Newscaster 1: President Bush continues to make his case for invasion of Iraq.

President Black Bush is sitting with news journalists discussing the war.

Black Bush: After carefully examining the region, me and my cabinet definitely agree that that area is definitely right for regime change.

Cabinet member 1: Aight

Black Bush: But if I were real about it.

Cabinet member 1: Be real, son.

Black Bush: Real.

Cabinet member 1: Be real, real, son.

Black Bush: He tried to kill my father, man.

Cabinet: (in unison) What. Word.

Black Bush: I don't play that shit.

Cabinet member 1: Say word, he tried to kill your father, son.

President Black Bush reaches for the camera man's microphone and begins yelling into it.

Black Bush: That nigga tried to kill my father!

Screen reads: British Intelligence

Newscaster: Meanwhile, President Bush and Minister Toni Blair offered a spirited explanation for a possible war with Iraq.

Black Bush: This nigga very possibly has weapons of mass destruction. I can't sleep on that. Not on my watch! That's not how I roll that shit is serious. Now if you don't wanna take my word for it why don't you aks Tony Blair. He got a whole another set of intelligence. Whussup Tony?

Black Tony Blair: (Cameo appearance by Jamie Fox.) We don't know about this (inaudible). But we can't trust random niggas with things like that, as George so eloquently put it. I'm with him one hundred percent of the way. We don't know what he has.

Screen reads: Proof

As another newscaster speaks, video footage depicts tanks, military men wearing gas masks, and video footage of Saddam Hussein riding a horse.

Newscaster: If United States goes to war with Iraq, will it first have to provide evidence that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction. So far the U.N. has found nothing but President Bush counters with this.

Black Bush: The nigga bought aluminum tubes! Do I need to tell you what the fuck you can do with an aluminum tube. Aluminum! That don't scare ya, fine. I didn't wanna say this...the motherfucker bought some yellow cake, o.k., in Africa. He went to Africa and he bought yellow cake.

News journalist 1: Are you sure?

Black Bush: Yes, I'm sure, bitch! I got the CIA right here. They'll tell ya!

Black Head of the CIA: (played by Mos Def, who is dressed in a winter ski coat with fur hood, gold chains, sunglasses, and a stocking) I can't believe you white (inaudible). Ridiculous! Me and Jeb just coming back from Africa.

Camera switches to another man dressed in a suit and coat with fur trim. The screen reads: Some Black Dude.

Some Black Dude: Cradle of fuckin' civilization!

Black Head of the CIA: This nigga out here buyin' yellow cake.

Some Black Dude: From the motherland.

News journalist 1: Are you sure it was yellow cake?

Black Head of the CIA: Ya'll niggas don't believe me. I got some yellow cake right here! (Holding a napkin with actual yellow cake) Look, see believe this shit now?

Some Black Dude: Don't drop that shit!

Black Head of the CIA: I know, I know what to do wit it! That's why I got it wrapped up in this special CIA napkin.

Some Black Dude: Just don't drop that shit here.

Black Head of the CIA: Ya'll hope I won't drop that shit!

Some Black Dude: Pray to God you don't drop that shit.

Black Head of the CIA: Yellow cake.

Some Black Dude: Fuckin' right.

Screen reads: Oil

Newscaster: A sensitive accusation for this administration is the theory held by many that the real reason the U.S. is so interested in toppling Saddam is control of the oil that Iraq is sitting on.

*Black Bush is now being shown in another cabinet meeting with news journalists.*

News Journalist: What about people saying you're only interested in the middle east for oil?

Black Bush: What? Huh, oil? Who said something about oil, bitch? You cookin? Oil? Man, I don't know wha... (tips over a pitcher of water and darts from his chair). C'mon ya'll, get outta here (the rest of his cabinet flees).

Screen reads: U.N.

Newscaster: President Bush met with U.N. Secretary General, Kofi Annan and made it clear the U.S. will act, even if U.N. is reluctant.

*Black Bush stands behind lectern addressing news journalists.*

Black Bush: U.N., you have a problem with that? You know what you should do? You should sanction me. Sanction me with your army. Oh! Wait a minute, you don't have an army. I guess that means you need to shut the fuck up. That's what I'd do if I didn't have no army. I would shhh the fuck up. Shut. The. Fuck. Up. That's right, Kofi Annan. You think I'm gonna take orders from an African? You might sixteen languages but you gon' need 'em when you in Times Square sellin' fake hats. I know Gucci when I see it, nigga, I'm rich. I got a coalition of the willing. I got forty nations ready to roll, son!

News journalist: Like who?

Black Bush: (He looks around) Who the fuck said that? Huh? Huh? Like who—England. Japan's sendin' Playstations. Stankonya said there willing to drop bombs over Bagdad. Rigidyrowl is coming. Avica Babada and the Zulu Nation. That means I am not doin this by myself and I'm not disrespecting the U.N., even though they don't got no army. Go sell some medicine, bitches! I'm trying to get that oil (tries to cover with a fake cough).

Screen reads: Invasion

Newscaster: The U.S. fired the opening (inaudible) in the war on Iraq with at least forty tomahawk cruise missiles and precision guided bombs. Centering on Bagdad.

#### Victory

Newscaster: Good evening. Tonight, President George Bush is on board the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln off the California coast. It will be the site of what is essentially his victory speech in the war against Iraq.

Black Bush: (Clearing his throat) What did I say? I'm not gloating but what did I say. Did I not say that we would win that shit? We rocked em' (inaudible) We rocked em.

*He turns to engage in a side conversation with a pilot standing next to him.*

Black Bush: Nigga you see me coming on that plane (Uses his hand to imitate a jet airplane) shhhh bababababa!

#### Civil Unrest

Newscaster: For the second straight day, hardline Iraqi's protested the American presence here.

*Again, President Black Bush is holding a press conference to address the war in Iraq.*

News journalist: Mr. President, when do you think they'll hold general elections in Iraq?

Black Bush: Damn, I knew I shouldn't have called on this nigga...I should not...have called on you cause you always trying to distract motherfuckers with thangs like the war and skirt all the real issues. (Takes a long pause) Gay people are getting married folks. Yes. Nasty! Imagine that, two women touchin' on each other's titty-balls. Restlin'. Gently stroking those nipples 'til they get just so, so stiff and erect! Blowin' on em. Brrr. Men/barbeque: 'I like you,' 'I like you too dog let's get married man.' It's crazy.

Journalist: What about you're...

Black Bush: That shit is gross!

#### Saddam Captured

Journalist: Mr. President, Mr. President, sir how do you explain the continual upheaval in Iraq even after the capture of Saddam Hussein? (This particular journalist questioning the President is black).

Black Bush: (Looking and sounding disappointed) Why you doin this, man? I thought you was my black brother, why you ask me questions like that? Fine, I'll answer your stupid-ass question. Here's how I feel about Iraq. I feel like you guys keep trying to distract people with Iraq, when I'm focusing on other things. Namely, the moon. Yes, I said it the moon. Can't be distracted with 'what's wrong with the war, what's wrong with the economy.' Stop worrying about that. I got that shit under control. Let's focus on space nigga. The United States of Space, cause I ain't stopping at the moon. Write this down—M.A.R.S., Mars, bitches. That's where we are going, Mars. Red rocks!

Cabinet member 1: Yyyyyyeah yay!

### **When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong season 2 episode 7**

Narrator: You're watching "When 'Keeping It Real' Goes Wrong." Vernon Franklin was an exceptional young man. He was the valedictorian of his high school class, won several scholarships, and became the first person in his family to attend college. He got a good job and worked fourteen hour days six days a week, quickly becoming the youngest vice-president in the history of the Viacorp Corporation. Ending the cycle of violence and drug addiction that had plagued his family for generations. The officers of his company were wrapping up the usual Thursday meeting in the south conference room. When Frank Murphy, the man who had mentored Vernon, made an awkward comment.

Frank Murphy: Vernon, great job buddy. You the man! Gimmie some skin, huh?

*This moment is paused showing Vernon's facial expression. He appears disconcerted by the comment made by his peer.*

Narrator: Vernon got along with all of the people he worked with which in his heart of hearts made him feel like an Uncle Tom. Though he could have ignored the simple comment his mentor made, Vernon decided to 'keep it real.'

Vernon: Get your motherfuckin hand outta my face. You heard me motherfucker, get that hand outta my face! Who you think this is? Just shake my hand like a man! (Changing the sound of his voice) I gotta give some five on the backhand-side with all this crazy jive! That's bullshit. (Inaudible) soft-shoe, should I chunk some watermelon fo you boss. Fuck all that, nigga!

Frank: Vernon, buddy?

Vernon: Get your motherfucking hands off me Frank! This ain't a game.

Frank: This isn't the Vernon I know.

Vernon: Allow me to re-introduce myself my name is Ohhh! You never heard of that before have you. That's rap music it's dangerous. I use to beat motherfuckers up just like you just for walking around my way, nigga!

Frank: Vernon, Vernon, buddy?

Vernon: You better sit the fuck down, Frank. (He pushes Frank into his chair) Better sit down, bitch. Thug life! Think this is a game, nigga argh, argh, argh! Wu Tang!

Narrator: Today, Vernon works at Sunny's Filler-Up on route 80 in New Jersey. He makes 6.45 an hour and stinks of gasoline even when he's not at the station. It's as real as it can be.

*A driver hands Vernon some money for his services.*

Vernon: a dollar? What am I gonna get with a dollar, nigga, I got kids...and that's real!

Narrator: Vernon Franklin once a heartwarming story of perseverance. Today a (inaudible) example of When “Keeping It Real” Goes Wrong.

### **Trading Spouses season 1, episode 12**

Host: Hi, and welcome to “Trading Spouses.” The show where we take two married couples and you guessed it, make them trade spouses for a whole month. Watch the sparks fly today, because for the first time on our show we’re going interracial!

Leonard Washington: Daddy’s goin away for a little while alright? I’m going to live with a white family. Ya’ll be good.

T-Mart: What you gonna be doin with a white family?

Leonard Washington: It’s a T.V. show. Say “hi” to America. Anybody try to touch your mother, punch him in his dick.

White family

Todd Jacobson: Look son, dad’s going away for a few weeks so I want you to be good o.k. squirt?

Jeffery: Whatever.

Todd: I love you.

Katie: Eskimo kisses.

Screen reads: Getting Acquainted

Todd: You must be little T-Mart. Would you like to call me daddy?

T-Mart: Is it o.k. if I call you Mr. Deez?

Todd: Mr. Deez?

T-Mart: Deez nutz!

Todd: I...I don’t understand.

*Leonard arrives at the Jacobson’s home. Leonard has a small afro and is always shown with an unlit cigarette in his mouth even when he is speaking.*

Leonard: What’s happenin’?

Katie: You must be Leonard.

Leonard: That’s right.

Jeffery: Can I call you daddy?

Leonard: Hell no. Only your mama calls me daddy. C'mon mop-top take my bag up to my room, and if I find out you been goin through my shit, I'm gonna beat chya' in ya ass. Ya understand? (Leonard closes the door behind him looks out the widow and locks the door.)

Katie: Welcome, it's good to have you here.

Leonard: Good to be here (begins to hug Katie and proceeds to kiss her on the cheek) c'mon, girl.

Katie: Oh? Oh, yes.

Leonard: I don't smell no dinner cookin. (Lightly taps her on the behind). So run along and make some grits. (Katie looks confused) Run along.

*Back at the Washington's home. Todd is preparing dinner for T-Mart and Sharron. He is wearing a white full-length apron with flowered on it.*

T-Mart: What's for dinner, mister?

Todd: Uh...oh, I'm glad you asked little buddy. Umm, this here is cauliflower, this is corned beef hash, and these are parsnips!

Sharron: What the fuck is a parsnip?

*Now showing dinner at the Jacobson's home*

Katie: Leonard just so you know, Todd would usually do the dishes after dinner.

Leonard: Well, just so you know, his ass will be back April 13<sup>th</sup>. Go on and do your thing girl. Mop-top, you do your homework?

Jeffery: Yeah.

Leonard: Go on upstairs and wash your ass, then we'll watch Martin Lawrence.

Katie: You want me to light your cigarette for you too?

Leonard: You better check your tone, girl. Put your inside voice on before I put chya ass outside.

*Todd is sitting on the toilette after dinner and he picks up a magazine that reads "Mahagony."*

Todd: Racial profiling?

Leonard is at the Jacobson's engaging in the same after dinner ritual, except he has now picked up a copy of "White People" magazine.

Leonard: Who the fuck is Rene Zell-wedger?

Child Rearing

Todd: What's wrong sweetie?

Sharron: T-Mart's been back-talkin me and I need you to take care of him for me.

Todd: T-Mart! Excuse me, I'll be right back.

Todd: (he is now speaking to T-Mart) You're in big trouble, mister.

T-Mart: What? You gonna hit me or somethin'?

Todd: You're going on time-out (T-Mart rolls his eyes). For fifteen minutes o.k.?

T-Mart: Yeah.

Todd: Starting now T-Mart! Time-out!

T-Mart is sitting in his bed a bottle of lotion and a magazine.

T-Mart: Time-out is sweet. Halle Barry, here I come!

The scene switches to Jeffery sitting at a computer desk listening to hip-hop music. He has acquired a beanie cap that he is now wearing. Leonard then enters the room.

Leonard: Eh, mop-top! What the hell you listenin' to?

Jeffery: New 50-Cent. I'm from the streets man, g,g,g,g,g, g-unit!

Leonard: C'mon get in the car. G,g,g,g,g, get chyo ass in the car!

The scene changes to an urban area, and Leonard and Jeffery arrive in the car stopping in front of an apartment high-rise.

Leonard: Well, here you are mop-top, home sweet home. The hood. Alright little fella (he opens the car door on the passenger's side to let Jeffery out), say hello to your people for me, and tell em when you seem em that Leonard Washington is glad he made it out, go on. Go on! G,g,g,g,g, good-bye! (Jeffery reluctantly gets out of the car and is standing in the street) And if ya need money sell rocks, I heard that's what they do around here. (Leonard drives off.)

In The Bedroom

*Leonard is looking around the Katie's bedroom and he discovers a vibrator in the headboard of the bed.*

Leonard: What the hell is this? (Holding and examining the vibrator, he is unsure of what it is exactly) Damn, bitch, what's this a light-saber or somethin'? (He smells it)

*Todd and Sharron are now in bed together preparing to fall asleep.*

Todd: Night, night.

Sharron: Do you wanna have sex with me, Todd?

Todd: Yes, I would like that very much.

Sharron: O.k.



*The lights have been turned out and they are fumbling in the dark.*

Todd: (He reaches towards the lamp and switches it on) Excuse me. Do you mind if I turn off this R&B music? I kinda wanna hear you...breathing.

Sharron: O.k...

Todd: Alright.

Sharron: Oh, do you wanna take off your pajama bottoms?

Todd: Actually, I'd feel more comfortable if I just pulled my penis through this hole.

*The scene now switches to the bedroom where Leonard and Katie are sitting in bed.*

Leonard: I'm sorry, baby. I don't go south of the boarder. It's just one thing Leonard Washington don't do.

Katie: But...But, Leonard it's o.k. I'm...I'm waxed. (She lifts up the bed cover to show him that she is indeed waxed.)

Leonard: Damn! Now I done heard about trimming the hedges but you done scorched the earth. (He sniffs the air) I smell your light-saber.

Katie: Light-saber?

*The scene flashes back to earlier in the day when Leonard discovers Katie's 'light-saber' and he is playing with as if he were a Jedi-Knight. The vibration provides instant sound-effects.*

Therapy Time

*Leonard and Katie are sitting in a therapist's office discussing their problems as a couple and as parents.*

Katie: Leonard and I hardly even talk anymore. The other night he came home at 3 in the morning, I had no idea where he was. He uses profanity around Jeffery. I...I just don't feel like we're sharing. I...I don't feel like there's any reciprocity there.

Therapist: How do you feel about all this, Leonard?

Leonard: (He looks over at Katie to address her) Bitch, I'll never forgive you for this. Go on get in the car. Warm it up.

Therapist: This is good. You can let out whatever you feel in here, Leonard.

Leonard: Alright, I'm a tell you right now, I ain't crazy. I don't need no psychiatrist and if you ever tell anybody I been in here, I'll fuckin' kill ya.

Therapist: Its confidential here, Leonard. I won't tell anyone it's just between us.

Leonard: Well then confidentially, I am crazy and I'll fucking kill you.

Host: Well it's been a wild and crazy month. Let's see what our interracial families have learned.

Todd: I learned a lot from Sharron, and I learned a lot from little T-Mart, and quite frankly, I'll miss them both very much. And for the first time in my life, I tasted brown-sugar and not in my oatmeal (he laughs).

Leonard: Bein' on this show taught me that no matter where you come from, know what I'm sayin, or what color skin is, we all pretty much do the same things in our life: raise our kids, make love from time to time, and wash. Speaking of which, I learned that white people don't use wash cloths. Did you know that? I'm serious they have one bar of soap in the house. Every time I use it somebody else's pubic hair was in it. It's like use a cloth, why your ass gotta put a raw bar of soap in your butt and all this? I may wanna wash my face or my feet.

Sharron: Todd and Leonard are very different, although Len is the love of my life. In a different world, I could see myself with Todd, although the penis through the hole thing was kinda weird...and I am missing some of my drawers.

*Todd is in the bedroom going through a laundry basket of clothes.*

Todd: (He picks up a pair of panties and begins to sniff them) Oh my gosh! (He then picks up a bra and kisses it. He puts his finger in the bra and then licks his finger) Titi residue. Hello (he is seeing if anyone is in the house to catch him in the act). Hello.

### **The Law & Order Sketch**

Screen reads: Home of Charles Jefferies CEO of FONECOM

Wife: How was work today, Charles?

Charles: Ugh, same old, same old. Accounting's complaining about he's misleading the stockholders and blowing the employee pensions. What a bunch of babies. C'mon this is business people, right? And speaking of business...(now addressing their golden retriever laying on the bed) Satchco, take a powder. And you (throwing his wife on the bed) arrrrr! (inaudible).

A grenade rolls onto to the wooden floor where the dog is laying. It explodes and the SWAT team breaks down the bedroom door. Charles and his wife are screaming in chaos.

SWAT 1: Shut that fucking dog up (the dog is not even barking, but he shoots the dog in between the eyes. Blood splatters all over Charles's wife as she screams hysterically. The SWAT member pushes Charles on to the bed.) Get on the fucking bed, stop resisting sir (he is not resisting but complying with SWAT).

Screen Reads: Home of Tron Carter Everglade Blvd.

*Tron's phone is ringing and he is looking at his handgun and watching music videos.*

Tron: Oh. (He picks up the phone) Nigga, I said to stop calling me alright! I'm baggin the coke up as fast as I can.

Detective: I'm Detective Charles Stevens from the Dade County Police Department. I've got a warrant here for your arrest.

Tron: A warrant?

Detective Stevens: Charges cocaine trafficking, and uh frankly I...I'm afraid I don't know how to handle it.

Tron: Oh man! We gotta be careful with this, we don't wanna embarrass somebody like me in front of my family and my community. I tell you what, I'll come in and turn myself in around uh Thursday, o.k.?

Detective Stevens: Is one o'clock good for you?

Tron: Ooh no, that's no good for me. I got some trim coming at twelve. I'll turn myself in say between...two and six?

Detective Stevens: Thank you so very much for your help, and again I'm sorry for the inconvenience.

Tron: Oh, no problem! One love.

Detective Stevens: Yeah, I love you too.

*13<sup>th</sup> Precinct Interrogation Room*

Charles: So what am I charged with?

Cop 1: Yeah, like you don't know you little bitch! (blowing cigarette smoke into Charles face).

Charles: (Coughing) ah, could you do me a favor and not smoke, I'm allergic.

Cop 1: Oh, hey I'm sorry, Chuck. Why don't I do you a favor and put it out there for ya huh. (He douses the lit cigarette into Charles head while the other cop holds his head still. Charles screams from the pain.) Piece of crap! I want answers punk!

*Charles unable to control his fear urinates on himself and the floor.*

Charles: I wanna talk to my lawyer.

Cop 2: He wants to talk his lawyer.

Cop 3: Legal aid, you're on.

Legal Aid: Sorry, you're like my fourth case this week. Somebody take a piss in here?

Charles: (Crying) It was me...I peed.

District Attorney's Meeting with Tron 3:00PM

*Three white men are sitting in the District Attorney's office waiting for Tron to arrive.*

Screen reads 7:00PM

*And the men are still patiently waiting for Tron.*

11:55 PM *Tron finally arrives for his meeting with the District Attorney. He is wearing a windbreaker jacket, sunglasses, hat, and gold chain. There are trays of cheese and fruit, wine, and sparkling water.*

Tron: I would like to compliment you gentlemen on a very classy, baller-ass spread, with cheeses I've never even seen before...and my apologies for being late, but I got caught up with some punani!

Detective Stevens: So, it's like I tell ya. We don't wanna make a big deal outta this thing. You're a cocaine dealer but you've done a lot of good for the community.

Tron: Oh, I know man. On Thanksgiving I be passing turkeys out like Nino Brown, baby.

Man 1: But seriously, we have to do something. How about you testify before ascended committee and spend...two months in club fed?

Tron: When I get out...can I still traffic rocks to the community?

Detective Stevens quickly picks up a tape recorder that has been placed on the table.

Detective Stevens: Absolutely not! (He point to the tape recorder).

Tron: You're right. Selling rocks would be wrong (laughing). Jail is the shit!

County Courthouse Charles Jefferies' Trial

Cop 1: Anyway, he points the gun at me and he tells his dog to sick us. It was at that point that I fired upon the canine, and we were able to subdue Mr. Jefferies. Upon further search of the mansion, we were able to locate this (pulls out a plastic package). Pure Columbian heroine.

Charles: (he is wearing an orange jumpsuit) Ohh, yeah wait a minute. Your Honor...I don't know whose heroine that is, but it certainly isn't mine.

Cop 1: Then his wife threw her titties in my hand...it was weird, your Honor.

Charles: You grabbed her titties. I *saw* you!

County Courthouse Charles Jefferies' Sentencing

Judge: Before I sentence you, is there anything you would like to say?

Charles: O.k., First of all...

Judge: Alright, that's enough. You're the worst kind of scum on the face of the earth. You're an animal. A filthy big-lipped beast. I'd like to congratulate the jury of your peers (now showing the jury and they are all black men dressed in street clothes) for reaching a verdict so quickly. Ten minutes is the new court record. All your possessions will be seized immediately by the court.

You will receive the mandatory minimum of life in prison. Plenty of time to lift weights and convert to *Islam*. (Slams his gavel) Get out of my sight you fuck.

Senate Sub-Committee Hearing on Narcotics

Senator 1: Sir, is it true you were a crack-cocaine dealer for seven years?

Tron: I plead the fifth (he winks at his attorney).

Senator 2: Sir, will you tell us about the cartels you dealt with in your time as a crack-cocaine dealer?

Tron: Umm no...but I can tell you that I plead the fizif.

Senator 3: Exactly how much money did you earn in your time as a crack-cocaine dealer?

Tron: (singing) Fifth! I...I said there are so many amendments in the constitution of the United States of America! I can only choose one (dips his finger in a glass of water then rolls his finger around the rim of the glass). I can only choose one. I plead the fifth (bangs on the table) I plead the fifth (bangs the table. Five! One, two, three, four, fifth! Anything you say, fifth. Go ahead ask me a question.

Senator 4: Did you...

Tron: Fifth! Sir, I have a secret document that I think you need to say (pulls out paper that says fif) fif!

Senator 4: That'll be all sir. Good afternoon.

Attorney 1: I got your sentence reduced to a month, buddy.

Tron: Oh! (He holds his attorneys' hands in the air in victory.)

The End

### **Black White Supremacist-episode 1 season 1**

Introduction to sketch: Welcome to Chappelle Show, I still haven't been cancelled, but I'm working on it. This next piece might be the one to do it. This is probably the most wildest thing I've ever done in my career, and I show it to a black friend of mine, and he looked at me like I set black people back with a comedy sketch (shrugs his shoulders) sorry.

Warning (newscaster)

For viewers sensitive to the issues of race, be advised that the following piece contains gratuitous use of the "N" word—and by "N" word, I mean nigger...There I said it.

*Shows title pops up on the screen and reads "Frontline."*

Newscaster: For the last fifteen years, a man named Clayton Bigsby has been the leading voice in the white supremacist movement in America. Though not sold in any major bookstores, his books- "Dump-truck," "Nigger Stain," "I smell nigger," and "Nigger Book" have sold over

600,000 copies combined. Despite his popularity (photo of Clayton Bigsby pops up he is wearing Ku Klux Klan garb) very few have ever seen him, due to his reclusiveness, but in an effort to bring his message to a wider audience he agreed to give his first interview ever—to “Frontline.” But, getting to Mr. Bigsby was an odyssey in itself with backcountry hollers, shifty go-betweens, and palpable danger.

*Newscaster approaches a log cabin with Clayton Bigsby (Dave Chappelle) and a white woman sitting on the front porch of a rundown log cabin.*

Newscaster: Excuse me, not sure we’re in the right place, we are looking for Clayton Bigsby.

Clayton Bigsby: (speaking with a southern accent) Look no further feller, you found him.

Newscaster: (in a puzzled voice) Uh? Clayton Bigsby the author?

Clayton Bigsby: What, you don’t think I can write them books? Just cause I’m blind don’t mean I’m dumb.

Documentary video pauses

Newscaster: How could this have happened? A black white-supremacist.

Newscaster: (standing outside a southern home) Our search for answers led us here to the Wexler Home For The Blind, where Mr. Bigsby spent the first nineteen years of his life.

Newscaster: (camera now viewing an elderly women) Bridgette Wexler is the home’s headmistress.

Bridgette Wexler: (in Southern accent) Well, he was the only negro we ever had around here so we figured we make it easier on Clayton by telling him and all the other blind kids that he was white.

Camera viewing a photo of Wexler children with a young Clayton Bigsby in dark-glasses

Newscaster: And he never questioned it?

Bridgette Wexler: Why would he?

*Scene changes back to the Newscaster and Clayton Bigsby sitting on the porch*

Journalist: You’ve written four books now.

Bigsby: I’ve written six books, they’ve published four.

Journalist: What would you say is the overall message of your books?

Bigsby: Sir, my message is simple—Niggers, Jews, homosexuals, Mexicans, A-rabs, and all kinds of different Chinks stink! And I hate ‘em.

Journalist: I noticed you referred to ni... uh African-Americans. What exactly is your problem?

Bigsby: How much time ya got buddy? Where would I start? Well first of all there lazy good for nothin' tricksters, crack smokin' swindlers, big butt havin' wide nose, breathin' all the white man's air. (Scene switches to Bigsby and the journalist walking over the bridge as a representation of time, Bigsby continues his list) They eat up all the chicken, they think they're the best dancers—and they stink! Did I mention that before?

Journalist: Yes, I believe you did sir.

Bigsby: As a matter of fact, I think my friend Jasper told me one of them coons came by his house to pick his sister up for a date. He said, "Look here nigger, that there is my girl. If anyone has sex with my sister it's gonna be me (Clayton slams down his walking stick).

Journalist: You've never left this property have you Mr. Bigsby?

Bigsby: No sir not in many years.

Journalist: What if I were to tell you, you are an African American?

Bigsby: Sir! I'm gonna make this clear. I am in no way shape or form involved in any niggerdom! You understand?

Journalist: Yes sir, but uh..

Bigsby: But nothing'. Now if you'll excuse me, I got a book signin' to go to. Why don't you bring your media cameras there, if you wanna see some real truth. Prudence! Prudence, have Jasper load the truck.

Scene now changes to Jasper, the journalist, and Clayton Bigsby arriving at a country gas station

Journalist: And Clayton Bigsby, black white-supremacist, ventured out into an unsuspecting world.

Inside the gas station is the Journalist and Jasper. Bigsby is sitting in the truck.

Journalist: Sir, you're a friend. Why not tell him he's African American?

Jasper: Listen man, he's too important to the movement. If I tell em he's black, he probably kill his self, it just be one less nigger around—his commitment is that deep.

Journalist: I'm overwhelmed by the irony.

*Jasper and the news journalist notice a group of men approaching the truck*

Man 1: What you lost boy?

Man 2: Run boy, we don't like your kind around here.

Man 1: You better get outta here 'fore somethin' bad happens.

*Clayton Bigsby is standing between Man one and two*

Bigsby: That's right. That's right. (placing his hand on Man one's shoulder. Man one looks at Clayton Bigsby's hand with a confused expression) Kill that nigger. Beat 'em dirty nigger...

Jasper: (Rescuing Bigsby) Come on, Clayton we gotta go

Bigsby: Jasper there's a nigger a'round here. That dirty monkey was beatin' my hood.

*Now Jasper and Bigsby are sitting in the truck. Clayton's window is rolled down*

Bigsby: (holding his fist out to the men as a symbol of camaraderie) White power!

*The truck drives away, and the group of men are standing around looking confused*

Journalist: The confusion did not end there.

*Bigsby and Jasper still sitting in the truck come to a stop light. The car next to them is a convertible with three white teenage boys dressed in hip-hop fashion and blasting hip-hop music*

Bigsby: (Coming outside of his car window slamming the side of the truck, Bigsby yells at the young white boys.) Hey! Why don't you jungle bunnies turn the music down? Niggers make me sick. Woogie boogie, nigger. Woogie boogie.

*Jasper and Bigsby drive away. Now the scene depicts the three teenage boys sitting in the convertible*

Boy 1: Did he just call us niggers? (High fiving his friend sitting in the passenger seat, they celebrate) Awesome!

Scene Change- Book signing

Journalist: The anticipation was at a fever-pitch as we arrived at Mr. Bigsby's book signing.

Man introducing Clayton Bigsby: The man who should be the next president of the United States (Continues preaching).

*Jasper, Clayton Bigsby, and news journalist waiting in another room*

Bigsby: Alright Jasper, time to show these people what white power is all about.

Jasper: (holding Bigsby's Klan hood) You better put your hood on, Clayton.

Bigsby: Alright.

Jasper: Might wanna...might wanna hide your identity, be safer. You know, in case some radical and sympathetic to the cause wants to shoot you.

Bigsby: (placing his Klan hood on backwards) Yeah, it's good thank you. Alright, let me put my hood on.

Jasper: (clearing his throat) here, let me get that (turns Bigsby's hood around).



Man introducing Clayton Bigsby: Without further ado, the man who made us proud to be white, none other than Clayton Bigsby!

*Audience stands up and applauds*

Bigsby: White power!

*Audience sits down*

Bigsby: Everybody, I have a lot of things to discuss, mainly nigras. America is at war with Al-Qaida, but we're still losin' the war to Al Sharpton!

Journalist: (narrating) The Asian community was a target as well.

Bigsby: Let's talk about Chinese people. With their Kung Fu and all that silly ching chang chong talk, I can't understand you. Go back to your country. White power!

Journalist: (narrating) Mr. Bigsby was also critical of the entertainment industry.

Bigsby: Don't let the liberal media tell you how to think and feel. If you have hate in your heart, let it out. If you don't like "Will and Grace," that don't mean there's sumthin' wrong with you; it means there's sumthin' wrong with Will! He's a homosexual.

Journalist: Politicians weren't spared either.

Bigsby: White power! Collin Powell...Condellingus Rice! Condellingus Rice sounds like a Mexican dish, maybe we should put her on a plate send her to Mexico so the Mexicans will eat her, white power.

*Crowd cheers*

Bigsby: Open up your heart and let that hate out.

Man in the audience: Show us your face, we wanna see your face.

*The audience agrees and eggs Clayton on*

Bigsby: Who said that? You wanna see my face?

Man in the audience: Clayton, go on brother.

*The audience keeps cheering and Jasper tries to settle the crowd*

Bigsby: Don't be afraid, Jasper.

Bigsby: (addressing Jasper) Jasper, don't be afraid (Clayton Bigsby rips off his Klan hood and his real identity is revealed. The audience stops cheering. One woman is depicted moving in closer to her husband, and another woman appears to be vomiting. The climatic point of the scene occurs, when one man sitting in the audience is so shocked his head explodes. Blood is shown splattering on the audience and the news journalist ).

Bigsby: There is cookie and punch for us to enjoy and meet, talk about white brotherhood.  
(Camera depicts the stunned audience) Thank ya'll for comin', white power!

Journalist: (narrating) Mr. Bigsby was not harmed that night, but irreparable damage has been done to his reputation, and in many ways the white power movement. We're told in the last few weeks that he has accepted the fact that he is a black man and three days ago he filed for divorce from his wife. When we asked why, after nineteen years of marriage? He responded, "because, she's a nigger lover." I'm Kent Wallace, good night.

Narrator: Major funding for Frontline provided by the Trent Lott Foundation. White People Dancing sketch

Dave Chappelle: Hey, gang. You know all my life I've heard that white people can't dance. I don't believe that. I don't think it's so much that white people can't dance; it's just that they like certain musical instruments. That instrument my friend is electric guitar. It speaks directly to the soul of the white person. They find it irresistible. Now with me as you can see is my good friend, John Mayer (the actual John Mayer)

John Mayer: How are ya?

Dave Chappelle: And, we are going to test this theory this afternoon. Ya ready?

John Mayer: I'm ready.

Dave Chappelle: Let's do it.

Dave Chappelle: *(narrating and showing footage of white people at an outdoor music festival)* It's my personal theory that when white people hear electric guitar, they cannot resist the urge to dance. No matter where they are, and me and John went to different locations to put this theory to the test.

*Now showing a business office meeting, there are white men and women engaged in conversation. Dave Chappelle and John Mayer sneak up and observe the men and women as experiment subjects. Chappelle and Mayer crouch down a guitar amp. Chappelle is holding a microphone and Mayer has his electric guitar in tow.*

Dave Chappelle: *(whispering)* Ok folks, here we are in a corporate board room. You can see people behind us working in the bull-pens, and right now a meeting is in progress. We wanna see what happens when you play electric guitar in the most professional of settings. Ready, John?

John Mayer: Yeah, I'm ready.

Dave Chappelle: Ok, cool go, go.

*Chappelle steps off to the side as Mayer begins playing a melodic tune. Hypnotically, the people engaged in the board meeting stand up and begin slowly swaying to the sounds streaming from the amp. A man in the background, sitting at his desk, begins dancing. Chappelle looks on in awe at what he is witnessing. A lace bra is tossed over on to, Mayer and he is pleasantly surprised as the bra falls to the floor. The music ends.*

Chappelle: I knew it. I knew it. C'mon let's get outta here.

*Scene changes to a fine dining restaurant, Chappelle and Mayer go into the restaurant.*

Chappelle: Ok, we've seen how white people respond to guitar music at work. Now we're at a chic Manhattan restaurant, its lunch time, the business crowd is here, lotta Bush folks in the room. Let's see how the conservative crowd acts when they hear guitar music, while they're eating. John, play, play the fight riff. Play it!

*Mayer pumps out a hard core riff. The Bush folks immediately respond violently. One man squints his eyes in anger. A waiter smashes a dinner plate over his own head, he then pushes another man on to the floor. He then proceeds to throw his body into a table and crushing it. The calm lunch scene transforms into a mosh pit.*

Chappelle: *(music still being played)* I've never seen anything like this, folks. *(Chappelle smashes a bear bottle over Mayer's head and he is un-phased. The music stops and the people go back to eating their lunch.)* Enjoy your lunch, everybody.

*Scene changes to a barber shop*

Chappelle: Alright, every experiment needs control. Now right now me and John are at a barber shop in Harlem. Everyone here is either black or Latino. Let's see how electric guitar works on them. Ready, John?

Mayer: Yeah.

Chappelle: Ok, go, go.

*Mayer begins playing a classic rock piece on his guitar. The barbers and customers look annoyed and shake their heads in disgust. They are visibly upset and irritated by the sound.*

Man 1: Eh, yo! Shut the fuck up!

Chappelle: Ok, that went pretty much how I expected. Now let's see how the blacks respond to drums.

*Sound of drum roll is heard, then Chappelle pulls a sheet that reveals ?uest love and a trap-set under it.*

Chappelle: ?uest Love, go.

*?uest love starts playing and people begin nodding their heads to the beat. One man begins free-styling.*

Man 1: *(free-styling)* ahhh yeah! Yeah, yeah, uhhh!

*The customers and barbers begin dancing. Chappelle unable to resist the beat begins dancing.*

Man 2: Yo, yo, yo, yo,.....I can't see it. I came up in your face, oops, pow, surprise!

Chappelle: Woo, woo that worked like gang-busters, but I still happen to notice some of Latin people were noddin' their heads but they weren't really feelin' it as much as I thought they would. But, I think I got the remedy.

*Chappelle pulls another sheet with a man and a piano being revealed.*

Chappelle: What would happen if I incorporated within that an electric piano? Sanchez, go!

*Sanchez starts playing along with "I Wanna Dance with Somebody". One woman begins dancing and literally rips the curling iron from the electrical socket. The Latin barbers and customers start to salsa.*

Chappelle: Alright, this is going great. Now I'm going to kick it up a notch. Watch this! *(Pulling out a megaphone, Chappelle begins shouting what is supposed to sound like Spanish). Ay carrumba! Ole! (Music then stops.)*

Chappelle: Hey guys have a good day, sorry to interrupt.

*Scene change, Chappelle and Mayer are standing on a sidewalk.*

Chappelle: So what have we learned gang? We learned that white people can dance if you play what they like, electric guitar. Course, we the blacks can't resist drums, and Latin's love congos and electric piano with Spanish gibberish over it...I guess? So the next time someone says that someone from another race can't dance you tell em...*(Chappelle is interrupted by a cop).*

Cop 1: Alright, alright I gotta see permit.

Chappelle: Excuse me.

Cop 1: You have to have a permit to shoot out here, and we will fine you.

Chappelle: John do somethin'.

*Mayer begins singing Guns n Roses*

Mayer: Every rose has its thorn

Cop 1: *(Begins singing the song upon immediate recognition and happily sways to the familiar tune. His partner (who happens to be black) begins singing the song.*

Cop 1&2: Just like every night has its dawn!

Cop 2: That's my shit!

Chappelle: Eh, my man how you know dat song?

Cop 2: I'm from the suburbs man, I can't help it. I can't help it!

*Chappelle shrugs his shoulders looking into the camera, then begins doing the Axel Rose-sway exactly the way Axel Rose would do it.*

*The sketch ends with text: People of Earth, no matter what your instrument, keep dancing.*

Season 1 episode 2

### **The Drug Awareness Week/Tyrone Bigams Sketch**

Introduction:

Yeah! Yes, hey welcome back gang. Yes folks we're back. Now, I don't know how many of you are from my generation, the Pepsi generation? Generation X, they call us. I refer to us as the Reagan babies. Anyone who grew up around Reagan had drug awareness week, right? Now, I don't know if you guys know at home (addressing T.V. audience) what drug awareness week is, but that is a week of drug education for children in schools. And at the end of the week to really drive the point home to the youth, they always have a real live crack-head come talk to the kids. I know that was the case at my school, and, uh, tonight we have a taping of just such an event. Please enjoy.

Sketch is presented as a television show with a music opening, depicting Tyrone Bigams (Dave Chappelle) a crack-head in various situations.

The lyrics of the song:

He's been waitin' for a while, but he's back around

He's the craziest crack-head in the town

...back in the joint—He's Tyrone

Narrator: This week Tyrone visits a local middle school to promote drug awareness.

Teacher: We have a very special surprise today. Let's hear it for Tyrone Bigams!

Tyrone: Hi kids. Thank you very much teacher. It is truly an honor and privilege for me to be here at Pinehurst School or whatever your school is called today. I say it's a privilege because it's a violation of my parole to be around children, but enough about that. Hello little boys and little girls, mmm mm mmm.

Kids ya'll are lookin at a dead man. I should not be in front of you today. Drugs and alcohol have ruined my life. I started doin' drugs when I was little, just like you fella (pointing at a student in the classroom). Me and my friends would go home and smoke marijuana after school. Can you say marijuana?

Students: (enunciating) Marijuana!

Tyrone: That's when I would smoke it, sometimes dipped in embalming fluid. And me and my friends would laugh and giggle and eat all the cookies—it was terrible, terrible!

Teacher: I can definitely say he was the absolute worse anti-drug speaker in the history of drugs.

Tyrone: And I upgraded to a little drug called acid. Very inexpensive even little children can afford it, it's so bad. I did two hits of that, and bugs bunny and Scooby doo and all my favorite cartoons came to my room and ate cookies with me and sang songs. For sixteen hours, goddamn! Talkin bout "Tyrone go clean up your room," and Mickey Mouse was doin' the baseline baba boom baba boom.

Teacher: And then, he basically told them where and how to buy the stuff.

Tyrone: We all know we can sneak into our mama's room when she's sleepin, and take five, ten, maybe twenty dollars out of her purse. Run on down to third street and catch the D- bus downtown and meet a Latin American fella named Martinez—we know that. (students are shown taking notes) And we know that Martinez stuff is the bomb. Kids, drugs is all around you. How would I know when drugs is around you might be a'ksin? Well, I'll tell ya. You with them magic markers, what you think that's some kind of crayon? No. (students observing magic markers) Take that cap off and sniff it, and you be high!

Teacher: These little ones are ten and eleven years old.

Tyrone: You. You know what dog food tastes like, do ya? It tastes just like it smells—delicious. Let me show you how I go to the bathroom. (Tyrone grabs trash can and pulls down his pants, sitting down on the trash can. He is shown laughing then farting as he goes to the bathroom in front of the students. The students are making facial expressions depicting discomfort and disgust.)

Teacher: I thought the worst was over...I was mistaken.

Tyrone: That, children, was the first time I sucked a dick for crack. (Students are covering their ears and appear shocked). Why, one time I seen Martinez...(the teacher then interrupts Tyrone).

Teacher: (grabbing Tyrone's microphone and tape recorder) Lets thank Bigams for that lovely and moving and graphic story.

Tyrone: You're welcome teacher-bitch

Teacher: HHHUH

Tyrone: I'm not finished but that's alright. Umm, can I get cash for this I got some errands to run, and I don't think I'm gonna make it to the bank.

Teacher: uh? uh? uh? (looking around the room)

Tyrone: It's my money, bitch! I earned it. Gimmie my speakers back. Thank you, kids. Good-bye.

Credits roll

Tyrone as Himself

Directed by Mario Van Peebles

Written by Nicolas Stevens

Produced by Nancy Smeller

Hair and Make Up- Filth and Grime

Craft Services by The Trash

Consultant- "Dirty" David Edwards

Special Thanks-The Reagan/Bush Administration

### **The Reparations Sketch – Chuck Taylor**

Season 1 episode 4 Reparations sketch (broken into two sketches)

Newscaster: And now a news center 3 special report with Frank Dobson and Chuck Taylor.

Chuck Taylor (Dave Chappelle is dressed as a white-man in white make-up): Good afternoon, I'm Chuck Taylor. Frank Dobson died last night in his sleep. Our top story, as we all know, congress recently approved paying over a trillion dollars to African Americans in reparations for slavery. Well, today the first checks were sent out. Wendy Mullen is standing by live in Queens with more, Wendy.

Wendy Mullen: Thanks Chuck. We're standing here in front of the Olympic liquor store in Queens, where scores of African Americans have been lined up for hours. We spoke with a few of them earlier.

Wendy Mullen: Ladies maybe get a word?

Woman with purse full of money (she is fanning herself with stack of bills): Hide the money ya'll, there's poor people round, ha ha ha ha ha. Wit chya broke-ass ha ha ha.

Wendy Mullen: Sir, now that you've got your check do you plan on quitting your job driving this truck?

Man in truck: Truck driver? I ain't no truck driver. I'm a janitor

Wendy Mullen: Janitor?

Man in truck: That's right baby. I just bought this truck, straight cash, and I got enough cigarettes to last me and my family for the rest of our lives! I'm rich, biyatch! (honks the truck horn and drives away)

Wendy Mullen: So Chuck, as you can see it's been a pretty amazing day. Back to you.

Chuck Taylor: Wait Wendy, let me get this straight. Why aren't there any banks in the ghetto?

Wendy Mullen: Well, Chuck that's because banks hate black people, but I think that's about to change, back to you.

Chuck Taylor: I bet your right, Wendy. Hot damn almighty, I bet your right.

Chuck Taylor: Well these checks aren't just affecting things on Beat Street. Wall Street is having a big day as well. Our financial correspondent, Michael Peterson, is there. Michael, what's happening?

Michael Peterson: Chuck, a lot of activity, as you can imagine here on the market. These people are spending money like hotcakes. Get this, Sprint stock has skyrocketed. After the news, the two million delinquent phone bills have been paid just this morning, incredible. Gold is way up,

diamonds are at their most expensive level ever. Catch phrase around here is certainly bling-bling. Oil has dropped to \$1.50 a barrel, while chicken shot to \$600 a bucket. Amazing news there, just about everything on the market is up. However, watermelon is surprisingly flat, to find many analysts out there. Chuck, get this, eight thousand record labels have been started in the last hour, incredible. Cadillac announced that they sold three million Escalade trucks this afternoon alone. It's incredible, Chuck, these people just seem to be breaking their necks to give this money back to us. Folks, I am happy to report that the recession is now officially over, and we have nobody to thank but all these black people. With their taste for expensive clothes, fancy cars, and of course body (inaudible) jewelry.

Michael Peterson: Chuck, I can't believe my ears. The news just keeps rolling in here. I have just been told that Fubu—Fubu is now the world's largest corporation after merging with Kentucky Fried Chicken. This is another amazing development on an already amazing day. Chuck.

Chuck Taylor: Flabbergasting. A truly wild day that none of us will forget no matter how hard we try. We're gonna take a short break, but when we come back the crime rate has fallen to zero percent. (Pausing and looking confused) How could that be? Did the Mexicans get money today too? (Laughing, then realizing he is still on the air) I shouldn't have said that. (Show music starts playing and a woman working on the set approaches Chuck) Listen, I think we'll be alright. Mexicans don't watch the news. Now if this was Telemundo, a hacachi chachi cachi.



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