

...But is it *Really* Funny Though?: Perspectives on Satire as Transgression

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There is no doubt that the most recent United States presidential election has coruscated the influence of media attention on political climates in the 21st century. Particularly, this election has cast a watchful eye on satire as having a crucial role in shifting cultural views and asserting or shirking societal norms. This is not to suggest that satire has never held a role in politics, undoubtedly it has had a long and tenuous relationship with world and U.S. history. Rather, it is to suggest (and perhaps confirm) that many of us woke up in the weeks following the election asking ourselves: *Did we poke fun at the wrong people? Did we say the wrong thing? Did we laugh when we should have listened?*

My research explores not only the historical use of satire as political propaganda via satirical cartoons and messaging during the early 19th and 20th centuries, but the contemporary use of satire in pushing particular political agendas. How do we understand humor in the context of an increasing reliance on social media? From where do we *actually* get our information? What methods do we use to understand people existing in marginal and liminal spaces? If we derive our understanding predominantly through a media that often uses satire as a way of information projection, then what responsibilities does satire have? Does it even have a single responsibility? What is the role of satire moving forward?

Utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin's characterizations of satire as a method of transgression or reaffirmation of the status quo, as well as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work on the subaltern and representation vs. re-presentation, I analyze modern satirical programming including *Atlanta*, *The Boondocks*, and *30 Rock* to discuss the role of satire as an effective method of transformation. In this I propose:

- (1) Using examples of satire in the earliest days of political propaganda, we can trace a line from the representation of marginalized groups (predominantly people of color) all the way from the early 19th century through the 2010's.
- (2) This mis-representation has become increasingly difficult to divorce from reality. Taking this presidential election as an example, I seek to analyze how re-presentations of working class voters as un-intelligent and misguided became normalize. This, in turn, highlighted the elitism inherent in much of the mainstream media. In addition, it underlined the lack of understanding of cultural nuance that has pervaded much of American history.
- (3) Satire *can* operate as both transgressive and pleasurable when deployed effectively. We see this kind of effective satire in shows such as *Atlanta*, *The Boondocks*, and *30 Rock*. I break down effective satire into three different types, each of which utilizes humor in an individualized way, but does such in an effective and transformative manner.

Bio: Michelle Dominique Burk received her BA in English Literature from Roosevelt University, her MFA in Creative Writing from Columbia University,

and is currently in the PhD Literature and Creative Writing program at the University of Houston. Her academic work focuses on multicultural/multiethnic approaches to understanding art, American culture, and operating within liminal spaces.