

A variety of contemporary television programs have been known to make use of racial, sexist and homosexual stereotypes. Dave Chappelle often played on racial stereotypes of African Americans in his hit program *Chappelle's Show*. Likewise, Matt Stone and Trey Parker often portray Jewish, black, Muslim, gay, Asian, and female stereotypes in their seminal satire *South Park*. Stephen Colbert's *The Colbert Report* is a satire devoted entirely to stereotyping the political right while appearing to agree with them. The creators of these programs often use stereotypes as a critique of post-racial ideologies. However, we must also examine the role of the audience in the communicative process and how they understand the satirical construction of stereotypes.

The satiric form of comedy has deep roots in the western literary tradition. The Greek playwright Aristophanes often used satire as a method to critique the traditions and patriarchal hegemony of his own culture. Similarly, the artist William Hogarth used parody to comment on the conditions of the working class of 18th century England, as well as the aristocracy that looked down on them. Satire was quickly adopted in mass communication in the early part of the 20th century as well. Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) was a brutal send-up of the fascist regimes in contemporary Europe. Contemporary satires like *South Park*, *The Colbert Report* and *Chappelle's Show* follow in these footsteps, using satiric stereotypes to construct biting critiques of those who believe the stereotypes.

Nevertheless, satire is a tricky critical method that primarily relies on the audience's interpretation of the text in order to fully subvert the stereotypes. The authors of the satire rely on the audience's ability to construct three personae. First, they must acknowledge the author of the satire (not a difficult task), and second they must acknowledge their own role as audience (slightly more complex, but still easily done). Finally, the audience must also conceive of the person who believes the stereotype. Often, this persona is provided for you. On *South Park*, Eric Cartman perpetually believes in the depicted stereotypes, following them to their logical conclusions (anti-Semitic marches or spying on Muslims). Ideally, the audience recognizes Cartman's erroneous racist ideologies and understands that the stereotypes portrayed are fallacious.

Not every satire contains the same political and critical potentialities. For instance, although Stephen Colbert does not often portray racial stereotypes explicitly, he parodies the post-racial ideologies of right-wing pundits such as Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh. Colbert often insists, "I don't see race. People tell me I'm white and I believe them" because he conforms to a stereotype of a white person (e.g., owning several Jimmy Buffet albums, consuming drinkable yogurt, or getting good service at a restaurant). Colbert adopts the color-blind ideology in order to expose the fallacy post-racial discourse

Finally, other programs portray various social stereotypes but seem to lack the subversive content of *South Park* or *The Colbert Report*. Seth McFarlane's *Family Guy* is often guilty of constructing racial, sexist or homophobic stereotypes, but failing to construct a critical subversion. The third persona of the homophobe, sexist or racist never appears on screen (like Cartman) and is never referenced implicitly (like O'Reilly, Hannity or Limbaugh). Rather, the stereotype is portrayed and then dismissed with a cut-away gag, lacking any sort of critical analysis.

Often, satirical programs do not completely reinforce or subvert stereotypes. *Chappelle's Show* was particularly apt at subverting racial stereotypes of black Americans. Chappelle depicted stereotypes but hyperbolized them to expose their fallacious logic. However, Chappelle was also guilty of depicting multiple homophobic stereotypes and failing to construct a homophobic third persona. Often the racial stereotypes were subverted while the homophobic stereotypes were reified.

The use of stereotypes in contemporary television satire can often provide a biting critique of contemporary post-racial ideologies, discourses and politics. Programs like *South Park* and *The Colbert Report* construct stereotypes only to subvert them through an implicit or explicit depictions of a third persona: one who believes the stereotype. However, if the audience fails to construct that third persona, the stereotype may simply be reinforced by the satire rather than subverted. Satire may be a way to smuggle stereotypes back on to television, but the onus lies in part with the audience; the audience must actively engage the text in order to understand criticism of post-racial ideologies.