

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park's* "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

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Abstract: Humor lends itself as a convenient tool to address sensitive issues such as race. Since 1997, the TV series *South Park* with its brash satire and rampant irony has been a prime example of how such issues are negotiated in American popular culture. However, the utilization of highly rhetorical devices such as satire or irony has divided scholars on whether the series promotes or stifles social discourse on race and ethnicity. In this article, I examine the episode "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson" (2007), focusing on how white feelings of anxiety are portrayed in this episode that is permeated by racial tension. The particular representation wavers between a social critique of the state of race relations in the United States and a portrayal of white anxiety as hindering open discourse on the topic. Ultimately, the article demonstrates that the scenes containing elements of white anxiety are portrayed in such a way as to critique the current dysfunctional state of race relations in the United States, urging viewers to critically consider issues of race rather than to inhibit such discourse.

In the United States, issues pertaining to race are emotionally charged and difficult topics. In fact, they are so difficult that Maurice Berger states, "Americans are simply not ready to talk about these things in public" (qtd. in Maini et al. 110). Fortunately, humor is especially equipped to publicly address such problematic issues. In his book *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, Rod A. Martin maintains that humor can be a useful tool in addressing situations that may be "too confrontational, potentially embarrassing, or otherwise risky" if handled in a direct manner (17). In the introduction to their book *A Decade of Dark Humor: How Comedy, Irony, and Satire Shaped Post 9-11 America*, Ted Gornelios and Viveca S. Green state that humor is a mode of conflict resolution that can "negotiate the dangers and pitfalls of [a heterogeneous] community" (xviii).

Nicole Binder

Although humor may on its surface seem like a relief from the stress of everyday life, the complexities associated with using humor as a mode of conflict resolution should not be overlooked. Several different theories attempt to explain how humor works to make us laugh. According to the

incongruity theory, humor results from the unexpected but appropriate juxtaposition of two or more frames of interpretation usually not associated with one another [...]. *Superiority theory*, by contrast, suggests that people laugh at those they find to be inferior to themselves [...] and in *catharsis theory* humor comes from a momentary eruption of relief of psychological and/or social tension. (Gournelos and Green xvii-xviii)

However, humor is “a highly complex rhetorical, social and political tool,” and one “can never be quite certain *who* is laughing, *how* they’re laughing, or *why* they’re laughing” while at the same time being quite a powerful force in society as it leads people to act by delighting them (Gournelos and Green xviii).

Additionally, Gournelos and Greene also recognize a shift in the role of humor in the post-9/11 US political realm, marked by “an increasingly media-saturated and heavily managed and branded political atmosphere” (xiii), in which humor—due to its complex and powerful nature—has proven to be quite influential in swaying public opinion and influencing political discourse (xv). In this context, humorous pieces can mean many different things to many different people and, as Gournelos and Greene state, “it is precisely this ambivalence that marks the increasingly socially active overall landscape of humor, irony, and satire in the post-9/11 United States” (xvii). All in all, the complex dynamics of humor as a rhetorical device together with the ambivalent nature of political irony and satire within the post-9/11 context makes investigating the accomplishments of humor in society quite challenging.

Gournelos and Greene identify this challenge in their examination of ironic and satirical pieces that play with race and racial stereotypes. First, it is important to note that irony and satire are two distinct and complex modes of humor. According to *Oxford Dictionaries*, irony is “the expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite” (“Irony”) while satire is “the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people’s stupidity or vices” (“Satire”). Using these modes of humor to address a contentious sociopolitical issue such as race relations can lead to ambivalent readings. On the one hand, such a piece might be misunderstood as racist humor. On the other hand, if the irony or satire is not lost on the audience, the piece may be understood as critiquing racist attitudes and encouraging open discourse on matters of race (Gournelos and Greene xxiv).

However, despite the potential problems associated with humor, it is a very common way to address taboo issues in US culture. One of the most popular

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park*'s "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

programs that humorously addresses the most taboo issues in American popular culture is Comedy Central's *South Park*, which first aired on 13 August 1997 and has since become the most popular show on Comedy Central (Stratyner and Keller 1). In April 2008, it finished as the "#1 show in Prime[time] across all of television among Men 18-24" and "#1 with Men 18-34 in all of television in its timeslot" with a total of 3.5 million viewers ("Comedy Central Records"). The series has also won a number of prestigious awards, such as four Emmy Awards for Outstanding Animated Series and a Peabody Award in 2005, which was awarded with the words that *South Park* "pushes all the buttons, turns up the heat and shatters every taboo" (qtd. in Stratyner and Keller 9). Jake Tapper and Dan Morris argue that viewers seem to relish "the eagerness of [show creators] Stone and Parker to impale every sacred cow they can reach," which means that just about anything can become comedic fodder on the show (qtd. in Stratyner and Keller 8). Due to its six-day production schedule and simplistic design, *South Park* is able to accomplish this in a very timely manner.

One of the taboo issues addressed regularly by *South Park* is the racial tension that permeates US society. In his introduction to *Taking South Park Seriously*, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock points out that the series does not support or attack one racial or ethnic identity in particular but is rather "[inclusive] via mockery" ("Taking" 13). In "[t]his 'all or nothing' approach to satirizing" racial and ethnic identity, viewers are given permission to laugh at everyone since no one is left untouched by *South Park*'s satirical wit ("Taking" 13). However, as Weinstock notes, this begs the question of why viewers are really watching the series. Do "self-aware viewers" laugh at the realization that the series's humor pokes fun at and critiques human folly, or does *South Park*'s "all or nothing" approach "liberate a fundamental but generally repressed aggressiveness" toward minority groups ("Taking" 13)?

In this article, I will analyze the episode "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson" (season 11, episode 1), which aired on 7 March 2007 and centers on racial tension between whites and blacks after a racist blunder is committed by the white character Randy Marsh. On the whole, my analysis of this episode follows those scholars who maintain that *South Park* is indeed critical of bigoted thinking. Firstly, while some scholars argue that the series's use of ironic or satirical racial humor runs the risk of being misunderstood as sympathetic to prejudicial thinking, my analysis reveals that such a reading is rather simplistic. Despite potentially sending ambiguous messages, the irony used in *South Park* can be read as being far too exaggerated to be construed as supporting bigoted thinking. Secondly, although some scholars contend that *South Park*'s noncommittal attitude encourages cynicism or apathy with regard to social and political issues and may even work to justify bigoted thinking, my analysis supports the contention that "*South Park* does not 'take sides,' opting instead to demonstrate the

Nicole Binder

fallibility of all perspectives” (Ott 47) by acting as a ‘devil’s advocate’ for society and, thus, actually encourages viewers to think critically about race. In fact, this particular episode even provides viewers with some guidance with regard to navigating the complexities of race relations. Finally, the question of whether *South Park* is critical of bigoted thinking can be approached by considering if the series privileges the white dominant culture.

It is interesting to note here that the scholars who have thus far investigated whether or not *South Park* supports bigoted thinking have done so by looking at how marginalized minorities are portrayed in the program and how their portrayal either reinforces or challenges dominant discourses. The ways in which the dominant culture is portrayed, however, have seldom been addressed. The only scholar to explore how the dominant culture, or whiteness, is portrayed in *South Park* is Phil Chidester. In his article “‘Respect My Authori-tah’: *South Park* and the Fragmentation/Reification of Whiteness,” he argues that whiteness is not determined by the presence of the Other but rather by the various forms whiteness takes on through the series’s four white main characters. The question of how whiteness is portrayed when it collides with other ethnicities has not been explored so far.

Ultimately, I will argue that, rather than stifling discourse by presenting overt racism under the guise of humor, *South Park*’s episode “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” addresses racial tensions by means of portraying white anger and white guilt in a way that works to criticize the dysfunctional nature of race relations in the United States. It urges its viewers to reconsider how they deal with the very complex issue of race.

SCHOLARLY DEBATE

As already indicated, scholars are divided on the question whether *South Park* contests or affirms prevalent racial stereotypes. Some scholars maintain that *South Park*’s all-inclusive brand of offensive humor ultimately invites viewers to be critical of racist or prejudicial thinking. In the introduction to their book *The Deep End of South Park*, Leslie Stratyner and James R. Keller call *South Park*’s brand of humor “‘fart jokes with [the] higher purpose” of “correction and change” (3). They argue that through its ‘equal opportunity mockery,’ *South Park* acts as a ‘devil’s advocate’ in American society in that it urges all viewers to “question [their] own motives, and the motives of everyone else” (3). Furthermore, the series points to and criticizes overarching problems in society rather than attacks or supports any one group or position in particular (8).

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park*'s "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

In their article "Beyond a Cutout World: Ethnic Humor and Discursive Integration in *South Park*," Matt Sienkiewicz and Nick Marx explore whether or not the series's use of humor, which plays with racist and racial stereotypes, works to critique bigoted thinking and racial prejudice in America. While Sienkiewicz and Marx recognize that in some episodes, the viewer is likely to understand offensive humor as critical of prejudicial thinking due to the use of an obvious "lens of hyper-irony" through which positions like racial stereotypes are advanced only to be undercut, they also demonstrate that there are episodes in which the satirical use of racism or racist stereotypes is not as straightforward (8). Sienkiewicz and Marx argue that these episodes run the risk of sending a message that could be "regressive within the confines of the text" if they are not considered within the greater societal and cultural matrix (10). In fact, they stress that, especially with regard to racial or ethnic humor, the consideration of intertextual connections helps to clarify that the humor is meant to be critical of bigoted thinking (6). Ultimately, Sienkiewicz and Marx conclude that *South Park*'s depictions of race and ethnicity "should not be dismissed as merely crude or potentially regressive" (17). Especially when considered in a broad discursive context, the series's use of humor in "discussions of [racial and] ethnic prejudice works to show such prejudice as a systematic, social problem" that cannot "be blamed on certain 'bad' individuals" (5) and "invites the viewer [...] to give critical consideration to the way society and the media engage ethnic prejudice" (17).

Brian L. Ott explores why viewers are drawn to the series as he investigates the various ways in which *South Park* produces pleasure. One of the modes of pleasure he identifies is the series's use of irony. Ott differentiates between what he terms "the classical version of irony" (46), whereby the ironist means the opposite of what he or she says in order to promote his or her own opinion, and a second, humbler version of irony, whereby the ironist's statement is "devoid of certainty because he or she is aware that there are no universal truths" (47). The latter is used with the intent of "demystify[ing] prevailing views" that "imprison thinking" (47). Ott argues that *South Park* utilizes the second form of irony and that the series consistently "demonstrate[s] the fallibility of all perspectives," operating outside the paradigm of discourse typical of whichever social issue they address—also supporting the notion that *South Park* invites viewers to think critically about social issues (47).

Finally, in her article "Shopping at J-Mart with the Williams," Lindsay Coleman demonstrates that *South Park*'s portrayal of prejudicial slurs and stereotypes works to "satirize the racism that still pervades" American society (132). She contends that while Trey Parker and Matt Stone also include slurs that refer to religious beliefs or body images, they especially depict how "central [racial and ethnic] prejudice is to the structure of an American story of an American town" (134) and "most consistently

Nicole Binder

expose” racial slurs “as grossly superficial” (132). Coleman also argues that in episodes portraying racial or ethnic tension, the series often establishes “a ‘counterhegemony’ in which minorities are shown as more talented or capable than” their white counterparts, thereby challenging assumptions of white superiority (134). Coleman concludes that although the series tends not to offer a solution to the problems brought about by bigoted thinking, it does “illustrate the potential for positive outcomes to emerge from racial and ethnic tension” through its narrative and characterizations (141).

Opposed to this position that highlights *South Park*’s subversive potential, some scholars maintain that the offensive humor in *South Park* hinders rather than helps viewers cope with navigating the complexities of racial or ethnic relations in American society. In his article “Freud Goes to *South Park*,” Robert Samuels discusses the societal effects of ethnic prejudice against Jewish people in the film *South Park: Bigger, Longer, Uncut*. He argues that the film contributes to a “rhetorical reversal” (99) of prejudice and bigoted thinking, arguing that because *South Park* mocks everyone, those who take offense at such humor are often viewed as oversensitive or even ironically intolerant of the right to express one’s self freely (100, 104-05). He maintains that the film teaches viewers “to be intolerant of tolerance and tolerant of intolerance” and that it is actually “part of a larger social effort to challenge and reverse [...] efforts to fight stereotypes and prejudices in American culture” (99). Samuels also argues that the use of humor to portray serious issues “creates a responsibility-free zone where people are given the opportunity to state anything they like without fear of censorship or restraint” (105). Effectively, this unites the party relaying the joke and the viewer against the butt of the joke, oftentimes social, political, or ethnic minorities.

Similarly, in his article “Cynicism and Other Postideological Half Measures in *South Park*,” Stephen Groening discusses the effect of *South Park* on viewers living in an era that he calls “postideological,” in which “ideology [has been] rendered obsolete” (114) and “cultural values [have become] increasingly relativized and consequently devalued as a matter of lifestyle choice” (113). Groening argues that *South Park* has a cynical attitude toward social issues that is comforting to viewers because it allows them to “[adopt] a position of safety” (114) in which they are encouraged to criticize the ideological but are saved from the responsibility of committing to a single perspective, which ultimately works to excuse them from taking any action to remedy social problems (125). With regard to ethnic or racial issues, Groening identifies a number of negative effects that *South Park* has on its viewers. Firstly, he maintains that a cynical attitude “allows viewers to feel comfortable with their own use of prejudicial remarks” precisely because they are used ironically—with an awareness that such remarks are false and based in ignorance—and that this ultimately works to “ostraciz[e] those who do not find the jokes funny” (116, 117). Secondly, he states that *South Park*’s

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park*'s "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

cynical brand of 'equal opportunity mockery' provides the comforting illusion that everyone is laughing at everyone equally but it "avoids the notion that different groups have different histories of oppression in the United States" (122). Groening concludes that *South Park* "creates the comfort of laughter in an impossible situation" by humorously promoting a cynical attitude of mistrust and apathy and that it supports a "worldview in which nothing can be done about a flawed and corrupt political system" (120, 125).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS

Like any other racial or ethnic construct, whiteness is an artificial, "fractured, unstable, and mutable" cultural construct that "defines and limits" (Foster 2). Moreover, it is neither static nor fixed but rather dynamic as it "interacts with class, gender, and a range of other race-related cultural dynamics," whose borders are "constantly negotiated [...] as individuals engage the forces and discourses that shape them" (Kincheloe 167, 170).

Whiteness fundamentally differs from other constructs of race or ethnicity in several ways. Firstly, the concept of whiteness has developed into the dominant or hegemonic cultural force. Joe L. Kincheloe writes that the dominance of whiteness began during the European Enlightenment around the "notion of rationality with [...] a transcendental white, male, rational subject who operated at the recesses of power" (164). Whiteness was eventually assumed to be a universal norm to which all human beings should aspire, and in fact, it soon became the "White Man's burden" to be the "beneficent teachers of the barbarians" (165). Furthermore, J. Blaine Hudson argues that in the United States the tradition of white dominance informed the institutionalization of democracy as "affluent white males" created "a body of laws designed (by them) to protect their property and privilege" (263). The cultural hegemony of whiteness has had adverse effects on marginalized groups in terms of access to economic, social, and political power; these effects have also had a psychological dimension and have manifested themselves, for example, in self-hatred, anger, and division (Hudson 267; Kincheloe 179).

Secondly, whiteness differs from other ethnic or racial constructs in that the cultural hegemony of whiteness has become so pervasive in today's power structures that it has become largely unmarked or invisible (Kincheloe 163; Griffin 12). Kincheloe argues that white norms of rationality and reason have become infused into free market values and inextricably linked with global economic power and success, thereby forming "a hegemony so seamless" within these modern power structures

Nicole Binder

(166). In fact, when Irma Maini asked her culturally diverse group of students to define whiteness, they did so using terms such as “Opportunity, Money, Power, and Respect” (104). Critically approaching issues of race in contemporary society is certainly a great challenge due to the hegemonic yet unmarked construction of whiteness.

Thirdly, whiteness can be differentiated from other racial constructs because of white privilege. In their respective articles, Ronald E. Hall and Hudson explore the institutionalization of white cultural hegemony in American social, political, and economic power structures; the existence of a privileged white position within these power structures; and the negative effects that exclusion from such a privileged position has had on nonwhite groups, particularly African Americans. Hall sees US democracy as a system that “values citizens for their amount of power” and maintains that privileged access to power structures has resulted in a higher standard of living for whites whereas marginalized groups who have not had the same access to such privileged positions consequently do not enjoy the same standard of living (567). Hudson maintains that although not all whites have benefited equally from a privileged economic and political position, not having access to a privileged position can account for the striking economic discrepancy between whites and marginalized groups (270-71). Both scholars argue that in order to remedy the inequality brought about by white privilege, measures designed to empower marginalized groups, such as affirmative action programs, are necessary (Hudson 271-72; Hall 576-77).

Critically exploring the concept of whiteness in all its complexity has proven to be a fertile and influential area of inquiry for scholars. In his book *White*, Richard Dyer addresses the various facets of whiteness and dedicates his first chapter to discussing it as a dynamic ethnic construction and a dominant yet invisible force. He approaches whiteness from a male as well as political perspective and in terms of its historical development. Dyer ultimately recognizes whiteness as a paradoxical construct that is both “everything and nothing” (39).

In addition to critical whiteness studies, whiteness is the object of academic inquiry in fields of study such as gender, postcolonial, ethnic, and sexuality studies, where dominant white, European, male cultural values are further problematized. In this context, whites have “come to see themselves through the eyes of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and indigenous peoples” (Kincheloe 163) and have been forced to “confront for the first time their own ethnicity,” which has resulted in what Kincheloe calls “an unprecedented crisis of whiteness” (171). However, he points out that many scholars “seem better equipped to explain white privilege than to define whiteness itself” (162). This emphasis on privilege when discussing a complex construct like whiteness can prove quite problematic. A number of scholars have provided valuable insight

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park's* "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

regarding the problems that addressing whiteness critically can present. In her article "Speaking of Whiteness: Disrupting White Innocence," Gail B. Griffin notes that when asked to critically "contemplate their own whiteness," her students' reactions range from "angry resistance" to "avoidance and digression [...] or blankness" (4). Jane Wood notes that her white students "[wait] for the inevitable burden of guilt to descend" (Maini et al. 108). Jeanne Phoenix Laurel will not even engage the topic openly but rather "by stealth" (Maini et al. 108). In short, the stress of grappling with this identity crisis can result in anxiety-ridden emotional responses from whites ranging from intense anger to intense guilt—even in a critical academic setting.

Regarding my analytical point of departure in this article, I view these feelings of anxiety as an emotional response to what Kincheloe calls "[t]he crisis of whiteness" (171), and I consider both white anger and white guilt as manifestations of this anxiety. As I will explore how white anger and white guilt are portrayed in "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson" amidst the commission of a racist blunder that pits blacks against whites, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss what is meant by both of these terms.

White anger stems from the idea that whites are being unjustly punished or victimized for past sins that they themselves have not committed. Embedded in this anger is the denial of a privileged position of whites and the perception of white victimization as formerly marginalized groups allegedly use "a distant past of oppression [to] gain advantages [...] at the expense of Whites" through programs like affirmative action (Kincheloe 179-80). The idea of white privilege can evoke especially potent anger among whites who have not enjoyed the benefits of white privilege, such as poor whites or immigrant groups who have also had to overcome obstacles in order to achieve success (Kincheloe 177; Maini et al. 115). The concept of color blindness, which "assume[s] that being white is no different than being any other race or ethnicity," is also embedded in feelings of white anger and effectively denies the existence of diverse cultural histories (Kincheloe 176). Anger can also arise as some whites grapple with and ultimately reject the notion that they should feel guilty about their own position within the social, economic, and political infrastructure (Griffin 9-10). Furthermore, the perception that white culture has come under attack or is being systematically alienated can also be a strong source of anxiety or anger (Kincheloe 177). For example, Hall argues that "[d]ifferentiations in power have enabled those of European descent to rationalize self-beneficial bias" (562), resulting in a sense of entitlement with regard to their current privileged economic position, and identifies anger toward programs like affirmative action as an "entitlement disorder" (574). Hudson views this type of white anger as a new form of racism, which he dubs "the Madison Avenue version of the old racism—an old poison in an attractive new bottle" (268).

Nicole Binder

On the other end of the spectrum of white anxiety is white guilt, which is characterized by a sense of sorrow or shame for being associated with white privilege, injustice, or oppression and is marked by the desire to repair relations between whites and other groups. This feeling of guilt has been criticized by some conservative groups as excessive political correctness or an assault on white culture (Kincheloe 179-80). White guilt can manifest itself in a number of ways, one being the self-denigration of white ethnicity whereby nonwhite cultures are held in higher esteem than the white one (Kincheloe 172). White guilt can also be marked by a desire to seek forgiveness in order to alleviate the pain of racial consciousness. One way in which this can be done is by seeking “‘authentic’ knowledge” of marginalized identities, which can exacerbate racial tension as these identities either risk being “swallowed whole by the white whale” or being intruded upon by well-meaning whites who inadvertently “violat[e] [cultural] boundaries” by “[presuming] access and welcome” (Griffin 6-7). Another very common manifestation of guilt is to avoid it entirely by identifying with and celebrating an oppressed facet of one’s cultural identity in order to escape having to grapple with the complexities of being white (Kincheloe 174; Griffin 11-12; Maini et al. 115-16).

Clearly, the concept of whiteness is anything but straightforward and simple. It is artificial, dynamic, dominant, and unmarked; addressing whiteness elicits many different emotions. Scholars like Griffin and Kincheloe both offer advice on how whiteness can be critically explored without entering into a battle of emotional wills. Griffin states that successfully approaching whiteness will involve “defamiliarizing the ‘normal,’ articulating the assumed, problematizing the ‘given,’ and implicating the subject in all its various dimensions” (12-13). Kincheloe states that “a critical pedagogy of whiteness must balance a serious critique of whiteness and white power with a narrative that refuses to demonize white people” (185). In short, if the construct of whiteness is to be explored, it must be done in a critical manner whereby different perspectives and emotions are recognized and embraced.

THE STRUCTURE OF MY ANALYSIS

With racial tension and feelings of white anxiety as its centerpiece, the biting humor episode “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” makes for a particularly interesting case study to determine whether *South Park*’s humor works to criticize or privilege whiteness. In this episode, racial tension and humor collide when Randy Marsh commits a racist blunder on the television show *Wheel of Fortune* when challenged to solve the puzzle “N_GGERS” with the clue “People who annoy you.”

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park's* "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

Randy reluctantly answers with the word "NIGGERS" only to find that the correct answer is "NAGGERS." During the rest of the episode, the fallout of Randy's blunder runs its course both in the adult world as well as in that of the series's ten-year-old main characters, Stan Marsh (Randy's son), Eric Cartman, Kenny McCormick, and Kyle Broflovski.

In the main plot, Randy seeks to remedy his use of this offensive word in a number of humorous scenes. He is first shown kissing Jesse Jackson's posterior as an apology to the African American community. Next, in an attempt to better understand African American culture, Randy attends a comedy show, which runs smoothly until the comedian recognizes him and mockingly points out that the "nigger guy" is in the audience. After Randy sadly saunters out of the club, he is subjected to even more social derision as he is refused service by two whites at a convenience store and is accosted in the street by a group of white children. In the next scene, Randy attends a poetry slam and unsuccessfully attempts to obtain sympathy by sharing a poem about his own ostracism. He then again tries to make amends for his blunder by dedicating the "Randy Marsh African American Scholarship." After narrowly escaping an attack by three socially progressive 'rednecks,' Randy joins forces with a group of "nigger guys" who have also been ostracized from society for their use of racial slurs. The group consists of Michael Richards, a comedian who publicly used the n-word; Mark Fuhrman, a detective in the O. J. Simpson case who perjured himself after having denied using racial slurs, thereby jeopardizing the entire case; as well as two other white 'everymen' who have also committed some sort of racist blunder. The group invites Randy to work with them to fight back against their collective 'victimization' and successfully lobby Congress to pass a law that prohibits the use of the words "nigger" and "guy" together unless separated by at least seven words. In contrast to Randy, his son Stan is able to successfully resolve the conflict with his peer Token Williams, one of the few African American characters.

I will analyze the scenes to evaluate whether white anxiety, amidst the fallout of such a racially charged situation, is portrayed in a literal manner, sympathetic toward whites, and as a legitimate response to racial tension or whether it is shown in a more ironic and satirical manner, thereby treating this anxiety as part of the problem of racial tension. As many of the scenes are presented in an exaggerated manner, such as the apology scene with Jesse Jackson, I read the episode as a satirical comment on white anxiety because considering these scenes in a literal manner seems rather inadequate and simplistic. Also, reading this episode as a satire provides for a much more in-depth and critical discussion of race relations in contemporary American society.

Nicole Binder

In the first part of my analysis, I will show how feelings of white anger and guilt are immediately evoked as Randy is forced to apologize to Jesse Jackson. As the episode progresses, he begins to feel sorry for himself as he incurs incessant ridicule from those who are intolerant of his racist blunder. In fact, this goes so far that Randy considers himself a victim and displays various facets of white anger in a series of ‘discrimination’ scenes.

While Randy might perceive what he experiences in these scenes as discrimination or victimization by a racial discourse that no longer tolerates expressions of white supremacy, the scenes challenge the merits of this variation of white anger. If there is a form of oppression occurring in these scenes, one must consider if the oppression suffered by Randy is comparable to the oppression suffered by African Americans. Kincheloe discusses white victimization as a reaction to the crisis of whiteness in his article. He asserts that “[t]he color blind construct, the new discourse of white victimization and its rhetorical reversal works only if we assume that being white is no different than being any other race or ethnicity” (176). Ultimately, he concludes that “white racism holds more serious ramifications for Blacks than does black racism towards Whites because of the power inequities between Blacks and Whites” and that the color-blind construct works to “sever the connection between white people’s contemporary privileged social location with historical patterns of injustice,” thereby fostering a false sense of victimhood (176). The scenes analyzed in this article force the viewer to grapple with this question and ultimately work to discredit white victimization.

Various manifestations of white guilt are also portrayed and problematized in these scenes as South Park reels from Randy’s blunder. They depict the divisive and convoluting effects that feelings of white guilt have on race relations and society as they all ironically portray Randy’s ‘oppression’ at the hands of emotionally divided white people, who either passively allow Randy’s ‘oppression’ or actively make a point to show racial tolerance by expressing their intolerance of Randy’s racist remarks. Even if Randy’s experience of oppression cannot be compared to that of African Americans, the scenes highlight the fact that while race relations have significantly improved since the Jim Crow era, racism is still a prevalent part of American society and the history of oppression still influences the relationship between white people and marginalized groups.

In the second part of my analysis, I will then investigate the subplot involving Stan and Token and how they handle Randy’s blunder. At first, Stan, feeling guilt for his father’s blunder, attempts to apologize to Token but fails to obtain forgiveness as his apologies are laden with his own cultural assumptions regarding the African American experience of racism. However, upon recognizing this, Stan approaches Token, who

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park*'s "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

forgives him, harboring no residual anger toward Stan. In this successful resolution scene, neither white guilt nor white anger are present. Instead, Stan and Token's discourse is marked by openness and honesty. Ultimately, the episode "Apologies to Jesse Jackson" critically approaches the concept of whiteness and its role in today's racial discourse by not adhering to simplified binaries that pit white against black.

ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN PLOT

The function of the *Wheel of Fortune* scene in this episode is to involve viewers personally in the racist incident that is the central focus of the entire episode. As Randy is asked to solve the puzzle with the clock ticking and his winnings on the line, viewers are immediately drawn into the 'live' television scene and its corresponding pressure and are confronted with their own subliminal racist impulses. The tension is palpable: the predominantly white audience with brows furrowed and mouths agape in nervous anticipation and the African American cameraman glaring directly at the viewer, everyone assuming the worst. As the clock ticks, Randy hems and haws uncomfortably but finally decides to solve the puzzle by giving the 'obvious' answer, "NIGGERS." Neither he nor anyone else seems to consider that the word "NAGGERS" might be the answer. His failure to solve this simple puzzle literally spells out for viewers the underlying racism in American society and "force[s] [them] to confront [...] [their] own assumptions and latent prejudices" (Sienkiewicz and Marx 8).

The apology scene with Jesse Jackson problematizes feelings of both white guilt and white anger. Understanding the usage of the phrase 'to kiss ass' is relevant to reading this scene. *Oxford Dictionaries* defines this as to "behave in an obsequious or sycophantic way" ("Kiss Ass"). The word "sycophantic" suggests that one is overly eager to please a person in power in order to gain an advantage of some sort. Thus, on the one hand, this humorous representation of Randy literally kissing the posterior of Jesse Jackson exhibits white guilt as one must wonder why Randy would employ such drastic means to apologize. Griffin notes that white guilt can be characterized by whites who seek forgiveness in order to lose a "painful racial consciousness" (6). In this scene, the viewer cannot be sure if Randy is willing to degrade himself in order to apologize because he is sincerely sorry for what he has said or if he is rather apologizing to quell the embarrassment and negative fallout stemming from his racist blunder. Regardless, the positioning of this scene at the beginning of the episode—before Randy experiences all of the negative repercussions headed his way—shows that Randy's overeager and exaggerated attempt to seek forgiveness is to no avail. This

Nicole Binder

scene, therefore, questions if an apology designed to make whites feel better is an effective way to improve race relations in the United States.

On the other hand, the word “obsequious” suggests that the act is excessive or servile. The fact that Randy is forced to “kiss ass” in order to be forgiven may appeal to angry whites who believe that they are unfairly victimized by attempts to remedy inequality in society. However, white anger also falls flat when one considers the presence of Jesse Jackson in this particular scene, in which Jackson’s reputation is satirically portrayed.¹ Firstly, Randy assumes that Jackson’s status as a prominent African American religious leader and civil rights activist who is associated with Martin Luther King somehow equates to an official, legitimate pardon from the entire African American community—an assumption later invalidated by Token’s comment that Jackson “is not the emperor of black people.” Secondly, through the exaggerated manner in which Randy is forced to seek forgiveness, the more controversial and unsavory aspects of Jackson’s reputation emerge, thereby further problematizing the assumption that Jackson unequivocally represents the interests and attitudes of the African American community. Here, Jackson is presented as an opportunist—quite literally, as he uses the occasion as a photo opportunity—revealing that he is more interested in what Randy’s action means for himself than in what it means for improving race relations. This scene visually takes problematic race relations to the extreme as Randy degrades himself for forgiveness at Jackson’s politically motivated behest and ultimately satirizes both men’s self-serving actions as neither ends up alleviating the racial tension brought on by Randy’s blunder. While this clip of Randy “kiss[ing] ass” may first appear supportive of white angry feelings of injustice, the use of such a controversial and divisive character like Jackson—whose politics in this scene are shown to be self-serving and not representative of African American sentiments toward or experiences of racism—works to undermine an overly simplistic emotional response to the complexities of today’s racial discourse.

1 Jackson is a very prominent member of the African American community, a politician, a pastor, and a civil rights activist. On his biographical page for the Rainbow Push Coalition website, an organization he has founded and of which he is currently president, he is described as having played “a pivotal role in virtually every movement for empowerment, peace, civil rights, gender equality, and economic and social justice” (“Reverend Jesse L. Jackson Sr.”). He worked with Martin Luther King in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. However, Jackson is also a very controversial figure. He has been called “brazen, hypocritical and reckless” for actions such as having extramarital affairs, accepting money from organizations he accuses of not being involved in minority affairs, and benefiting financially from his role as an activist, among others (Belluck). His politics have also been called divisive, as evidenced by an alleged “uneasiness” between him and President Barack Obama stemming from the fact that Obama was raised by a white mother and is, therefore, viewed by Jackson as not “mainstream African-American” (Harnden). In fact, Jackson had to apologize for using the word “nigger” (Harnden). Even his “role as the nation’s pre-eminent African-American figure” has been said to be “on the wane” by black clergy members (Belluck).

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park*'s "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

The comedy club scene, in which Randy is heckled by a black comedian as the "nigger guy," is poignant as it is a reversal of an incident involving the white comedian Michael Richards using the n-word repeatedly during his show to respond to African American hecklers in the crowd. This constitutes a well-known example of the social backlash that follows when a white person publicly utters this word. While on its surface, the unequal treatment of both comedians by the audience could potentially affirm white anger toward society's supposed hypocrisy, this scene does not support such a sentiment. Firstly, it is not only African Americans who heckle Randy; in fact, the nearly all-white audience who laughs at Randy's expense works to highlight the divisive effects that feelings of white guilt have on white people. Secondly, viewers must consider whether the African American comedian's use of the phrase "nigger guy" carries the same weight as Richards's usage of the n-word. I maintain that it does not. The n-word is a loaded racist term drawing meaning from a feeling of white superiority over African Americans and from the legacy of institutionalized racism. Along with his obvious anger toward the African American hecklers, Richards's usage of the term also carries this weight, whereas the African American comedian's usage of the word reflects only his own amusement or perhaps anger at Randy for having used the term on *Wheel of Fortune*, with no historical connotation of racial superiority or historical legacy of racism attached. This scene, therefore, invalidates the notion that Randy's experience with oppression is comparable to that suffered by African Americans.

Later, Randy's experiences, being accosted by a gang of children and denied service at the convenience store, evoke infamous scenes of racial segregation, thereby adding a historical perspective that problematizes white anger and victimization. Viewers are reminded of photographs depicting the Jim Crow South with 'whites only' signs and the brutal treatment of African Americans by citizens and police alike—scenes that appear in every high school student's American history textbook. These visual references to African American oppression even more strongly force viewers to consider whether or not Randy's oppression is indeed comparable to the oppression suffered by African Americans before and during the Civil Rights Era. Feelings of white victimization are completely discredited when one considers that Randy is accosted by children in the street—a far cry from the murderous mobs and police dogs that attacked African Americans. Neither are there signs at the convenience store indicating an official policy that would point to institutional racism. By portraying Randy's 'oppression' at the hands of white people rather than African Americans, which highlights the divisive nature of white guilt, as well as considering the fact that the discrimination suffered by Randy is his own fault and not the result of the

Nicole Binder

institutionalization of racism, feelings of white victimization at the hands of marginalized groups are also rendered invalid in these scenes.

In the poetry slam scene, Randy delivers the following poem about his own ostracism:

Words with venom, words that bind,
Words used like weapons to cloud my mind.
I'm a person, I'm a man, but no matter how I try,
People just say, "Hey! There's that nigger guy."
Everywhere I go it's always the same,
Everyone just thinks of me as that one single name.
"Hey nigger guy!" "Nigger guy!" "Hi nigger guy!" Stop!
Now go, call me nigger guy, fill me with your hate,
Try to bring me down, boop bop you're too late.
When will it end? Will there ever be a time
Where I can be thought of as more than just nigger guy?
Respect.

Slam poetry is a genre "often [...] drawing upon racial, economic, and gender injustices" ("A Brief Guide"). As a member of the dominant culture, Randy appropriates an art form traditionally utilized by marginalized groups, which they have used to draw attention to their circumstances. Both the content of his poem as well as the manner in which he chooses to deliver it force Randy's audience as well as the viewer to consider whether Randy's 'oppression' is actually comparable to forms of oppression experienced by marginalized groups. The reaction of the diverse audience indicates a negative reply as they incredulously stare back at Randy after he delivers his poem. Griffin offers valuable insight to the audience's reaction toward Randy. She argues that the integration of marginalized cultures by the dominant white culture can actually drive a deeper wedge between them as their "interests, values, and culture [are] swallowed whole by the white whale" (7). In this scene, as a member of the dominant culture, Randy's hijacking of slam poetry to express his own perceived feelings of victimization actually works to undermine his claim of oppression as audience members refuse to validate Randy's feelings of victimization—a negative experience that is actually his own fault rather than the result of systematic oppression by the dominant culture.

In the same vein, I contend that this scene also highlights problems with feelings of white guilt. Among the diverse audience are a woman and a Goth, both of whom are white but could emphasize a facet of their personality that would allow them to qualify as a member of a minority as well. According to several scholars, the foregrounding of such a factor in order to escape having to grapple with being white is a manifestation of white guilt (Kincheloe 174; Griffin 11-12; Maini et al. 115-16). In

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park's* "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

the poetry slam scene, everyone, even the whites, refuses to accept Randy's claims of oppression. He is clearly viewed as a member of the dominant, oppressive white culture, which would require the whites in the audience to more strongly identify with their oppressed identities rather than their white identities. In fact, their very presence at a slam poetry event further supports this contention. Their failure to sympathize with Randy in this scene, thus, highlights the divisive nature that feelings of white guilt have among white people.

In the following scene, Randy dedicates the "Randy Marsh African American Scholarship" and delivers the following speech:

And so, it is my honor to announce the Randy Marsh African American Scholarship Foundation. It is my hope that this foundation will prove my commitment to the education of African American students and erase, once and for all, my identity as "the nigger guy." You really, you really don't know how hard it is to be constantly reminded of something lame that happened in your past. I mean, I just wanna move on from what happened on *Wheel of Fortune*, you know? And when people call me "nigger guy" they're bringing up a painful chapter of my history and all the negativity that went along with it. You just can't imagine how that feels.

The African American audience has the same incredulous response as the audience at the slam poetry event; one man even asks, "Is this nigger guy serious?" In outlining his sadness at constantly being called "nigger guy" and being reminded of "something lame that happened in his past," he fails to recognize the experience of African Americans. Randy's humorously ironic and amnesic attempts at seeking pity from his audience, especially as he donates money to an African American cause, highlight the problem that Kincheloe mentions when discussing the construct of color blindness. By completely failing to recognize the United States' historical legacy of racism toward African Americans, Randy invalidates these "[d]angerous historical memories," thereby "[severing] the connection between white people's contemporary privileged social location with historical patterns of injustice" (176). Kincheloe argues that "[s]uch a socio-historical amnesia [...] assure[s] us that white racism at the end of the twentieth century is rare" but it has not been completely eradicated, and certainly neither have the effects of institutionalized racism (176). Randy's lamentation that the use of the phrase "'nigger guy' [...] bring[s] up a painful chapter of [his] history and all the negativity that went along with it," juxtaposed with his utter failure to recognize the irony of his statement, forces the viewer to consider whether Randy's experience is analogous to that of African Americans as well as whether actions that promote social equality for African Americans are even necessary.

Nicole Binder

Some viewers may identify with Randy's words and find his dedication of the scholarship excessive as they feel anger toward the treatment of whites in today's racial constellation or feel victimized by policies promoting social equality, which they may deem unnecessary, or even threatening, and consider them attempts to use historical oppression to "gain advantages at the expense of Whites" (Kincheloe 179-80). However, such a literal reading of this scene is inadequate since Randy's words greatly contrast with his normal behavior in the series. Normally, Randy is characterized by his distinctly liberal viewpoint: He was a hippie, he was against the 2003 Iraq war, he supported Obama in 2008, and he usually exhibits tolerance with regard to controversial issues. Randy's cultural and historical amnesia with regard to the African American experience is thus unusual for his character. Given this context, taking Randy's claims seriously and reading this scene as sympathetic toward feelings of white anger and victimization is too simplistic. Instead, Randy is most likely totally caught up in the embarrassment and guilt he feels for having committed a racist blunder on national television. His action, however, suggests that he does recognize the need for policies that promote social equality. If anything, rather than sympathizing with white anger, this scene humorously illustrates the intense and adverse emotional impact that feelings of white guilt can have on a person's ability to navigate the complexities of racial discourse in contemporary American society.

The scene that depicts how Randy is attacked by 'rednecks' and rescued by "nigger guys" addresses the interrelations between race and class, thus further complicating feelings of white anger. This is achieved by confronting Randy with 'rednecks.' *Oxford Dictionaries* defines a 'redneck' as "a working-class white person from the southern US, especially a politically reactionary one" ("Redneck"). By using 'rednecks' in this scene, the episode points to the fact that not everyone has equally benefited from access to white privilege. Kincheloe states that overgeneralizing access to this privilege is "dangerous and highly counterproductive to the goals of a critical pedagogy of whiteness" due to the anger it produces in those who have not benefited from such a privilege (168). If anyone should be angry or feel victimized by the accusation of having access to white privilege or policies designed to promote social equality for marginalized groups, it is poor, uneducated whites whose own experience of poverty clashes with the idea that they have benefited from a position of white privilege. However, in this scene, the 'rednecks' exhibit their "politically reactionary" mindset by threatening Randy at gun point for having committed a racist blunder. Randy's terror is an ironic reversal of similar scenes of terror suffered by African Americans in the South at the hands of "politically reactionary" racists. Before any harm can befall Randy, he is rescued by the group of "nigger guys," who take Randy back to their hidden headquarters in order to plot how they can fight back against their collective

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park's* "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

'victimization.' In many cases involving African Americans, however, there was no such rescue and they had no way to effectively fight against their own victimization. In this scene, the 'rednecks' speak to the fact that, while whiteness is indeed a diverse construct and while not every white person has benefited equally from white privilege, even the low economic status of poor whites is not comparable to the African American experience of the violence and inequality associated with institutionalized racism.

The scene in Congress is ironic in that, as Randy and the "nigger guys" publicly declare themselves society's new 'victims,' they utilize their access to political power structures to pass legislation designed to benefit them. The very fact that they actually have the power to fundamentally change the law in their favor and are granted a hearing in front of Congress to plead their case calls into question their claimed status as oppressed people. Successfully convincing an incidentally all-white majority of Congress members that the words "nigger guy" could harm them too, the passage of the law prohibiting the use of the phrase should be read as the whites' attempt to "guard their interests more zealously" (Kincheloe 178) in the face of the perceived threat of being called "nigger guy" rather than as a move to promote social equality. It is quite clear that, rather than being oppressed victims, Randy and the other "nigger guys" actually still "operat[e] at the recesses of power" (164).

Meanwhile, white anger, feelings of victimization, and the idea of color blindness are challenged in this sequence as African Americans are still largely unable to truly assert their influence within this political power structure, as portrayed in the scene by the lone African American congressman who unsuccessfully votes against the legislation. The privileged position of whites as well as their utter unawareness of this fact is also underlined by a group of African Americans who have gathered outside and simply look dismayed at the blind irony of the entire situation: whites celebrating a legal victory designed to protect them from a perceived victimization, which they were easily able to obtain by accessing and utilizing political power. In this scene, white anger is ultimately subverted as it becomes clear that white privilege is still a reality today and that the impact of the historical oppression of African Americans has much deeper and far more negative social, economic, and political repercussions than does the superficial annoyance suffered by Randy due to his own mistake. As I have shown, the action in the main plot stems from either white guilt or white anger, both of which are portrayed in a critical manner and are ultimately undermined.

Nicole Binder

ANALYSIS OF THE SUBPLOT

In the first apology scene involving Stan and Token Williams, the following exchange occurs:

STAN. Listen, Token, my dad isn't a racist. He's just stupid, alright? He just blurted out the n-word, and it's no big deal, okay?
TOKEN. Uh, well, actually it *is* kind of a big deal, Stan. It may be a mistake, but *you* don't understand how it feels when that word comes up. So don't say it isn't a big deal. (my emphases)

In this dialogue, Stan exhibits a symptom of white guilt marked by a desire to seek forgiveness or acceptance. In her article, Griffin recognizes a number of problems with this variation of white guilt. Contrite feelings stemming from guilt can actually cause whites to lose sight of the fact that institutionalized racism has had a profound effect on African Americans that cannot be intimately understood by whites and to focus instead on obtaining forgiveness from “a Good Negro who will [...] accept them” in order to alleviate having to grapple with “a painful racial consciousness” (Griffin 6). Griffin maintains that this discourse of forgiveness and harmony oftentimes “speaks of [...] a dissolution of racial or gender definitions,” which, ironically, may actually risk deepening racial divisions as African Americans may interpret the white desire of harmony and merging as ignoring or as ‘whitening’ the African American experience of the legacy of racism (6-7). In this scene, Token refuses to accept Stan’s apologies, pointing out that Stan’s nonchalant assumption that his father’s stupidity should lessen the impact of the blow misses the crux of the problem: Regardless of the circumstances in which the word was uttered, Stan does not have access to the same racial legacy or cultural experience that Token does and, thus, cannot understand what it feels like when the n-word is used. Seeking forgiveness motivated by a desire for redemption that is rooted in guilt is rendered invalid by the scene, which is exemplified by Stan’s own assumptions clouding his apology and its motive.

In a second apology scene, which takes place after Randy apologizes to Jesse Jackson, Stan again runs into problems with Token and the following exchange takes place:

STAN. Hey Token, I just wanted to let you know that everything is cool now. My dad apologized to Jesse Jackson.
TOKEN. Oh I see, so I'm supposed to feel all better now.
STAN. Well, yeah.
TOKEN. You just don't get it, Stan!
STAN. Dude, Jesse Jackson said it's okay!

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park's* "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

TOKEN. Jesse Jackson is not the emperor of black people! [*storms away*]
STAN. He told my dad he was.

Here the problematic nature of whites seeking forgiveness or harmony as a means to remedy racial issues is again portrayed. Stan further exacerbates the situation by assuming that because his father apologized to Jesse Jackson, which he equates with apologizing to the entire African American community, all should be forgiven. However, Token again rejects Stan's attempt at seeking forgiveness, leaving Stan confused and frustrated. He fails to understand, however, that Token is more upset by Stan's assumptions than by Randy's comment. Stan feels frustrated with the fact that he cannot figure out how to obtain forgiveness from Token. The scene ends here, with both parties divided over an apology stemming from white guilt and laden with white assumptions.

After the two divisive apology scenes that left Stan confused and Token angry, the two are able to reconcile in a short and straightforward resolution scene in which the following exchange occurs:

STAN. Token, I get it now. I don't get it. I've been trying to say that I understand how you feel, but, I'll never understand. I'll never really get how it feels for a black person to have somebody use the n-word. I don't get it.
TOKEN. Now you get it, Stan. [*smiles*]
STAN. [*smiles*] Yeah. I totally don't get it.
TOKEN. Thanks, dude.

Stan is successful because, instead of viewing and trying to understand the situation through his own cultural lens, he recognizes the limitations of his perspective and approaches Token accordingly. Griffin offers similar advice to her own students as they engage in critically approaching texts from African American authors. She encourages them to "back off" and "not to presume that they can immediately understand or read evidence accurately, or even that they should be able to do so," and offers a paradoxical approach to opening up racial discourse across racial lines—to "accept distance and incomprehension as a *precondition* of intimacy and comprehension" (7). Stan's understanding and acceptance of his own cultural distance from Token's experience of Randy's racist blunder is precisely what Token was looking for.

Furthermore, the fact that Token never expressed anger over the racist nature of Randy's comment is also significant to this resolution scene. As Kincheloe states, "a critical pedagogy of whiteness must balance a serious critique of whiteness and white power with a narrative that refuses to demonize white people" (185). Throughout the entire episode, Token never once assumed the role of the angry victim, even though he arguably would have been far more justified in doing so than Randy was. In fact, he

Nicole Binder

strayed away from any controversy whatsoever, a fact especially evidenced by his refusal to associate with Jesse Jackson. In short, this successful resolution scene between Stan and Token portrays the potential for an open and honest racial discourse marked by recognizing and embracing cultural differences and limitations in a critical manner without demonizing one another.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, my analysis of “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” supports the contention that *South Park* promotes correction and change, as Stratyner and Keller maintain, since this particular episode is clearly critical of bigoted thinking. The episode also does not privilege the dominant white Anglo-Saxon culture, as scholars like Samuels and Groening accuse *South Park* of doing. In fact, in line with Coleman’s observation about *South Park* in general, this episode contains scenes in which the dominant culture is highlighted only to be undermined as white guilt and white anger are problematized, pushed to the brink in ironic and exaggerated ways, and shown to be dysfunctional approaches to issues of race. White guilt is discredited as it is shown to be both divisive and a dysfunctional basis for actions that aim to make whites feel better about being white rather than to remedy social problems stemming from the historical legacy of racism. The merits of white anger and victimization are also invalidated through comparison with the African American experience of institutionalized racism and the very real and negative social, economic, and political effects of oppression that prevail until today.

Many scholars on both sides of the *South Park* debate contend that the series’s use of satire or irony runs the risk of sending mixed messages to viewers, especially with regard to race. I, however, contend it is unlikely that the humor in this episode could cause viewers to interpret a scene as supportive of bigoted thinking or privileging white culture, especially after having viewed the episode in its entirety. Instead, they will be led to, as Marx and Sienkiewicz maintain, reading the scenes as satire or irony and considering intertextual references, which results in a richer interaction with the issues the episode raises. Furthermore, I disagree with Samuels’s and Groening’s contentions that the humor in *South Park* somehow works to discourage the improvement of race relations in the United States by pitting the dominant culture against a minority target. In this episode, all positions—from white guilt and white anger to Jesse Jackson’s controversial politics—are satirically undermined. Only Stan and Token are able to come to a successful resolution in a scene in which Stan admits that he does not have access to Token’s cultural experience of racial prejudice. In all its

The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park*'s "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

absurdity and humor, this episode works to show that feelings of white guilt and white anger are convoluting and dysfunctional factors in today's racial discourse.

Finally, another point of contention in the scholarly debate surrounding *South Park* is the series's effect on society. Samuels argues that *South Park* hinders racial discourse by encouraging viewers to be "intolerant of tolerance and tolerant of intolerance" (99) while Groening argues that the series' cynical and noncommittal attitude discourages viewers from seeking to remedy societal problems (125). Even Coleman, who views *South Park* in a positive light, claims that the series is not solution-oriented (141). However, in line with Ott's argument (52), my analysis reveals that in problematizing various facets of racial discourse, namely those stemming from white anger and white guilt, this episode encourages viewers to think critically about their own position within current racial discourses. This episode furthermore presents a pragmatic and positive alternative to white anxiety. All the scenes in which action stems from either guilt or anger ultimately do not resolve the conflict brought about by Randy's blunder—instead, racial tension is exacerbated. However, the resolution scene involving Stan and Token picks up the advice that scholars like Griffin offer with regard to successfully and critically approaching whiteness in today's complex sociopolitical environment. Stan recognizes and accepts the limitations of his own cultural perspective, following Griffin (7), and Token accepts this rather than levying blame or anger on Stan. Both boys are then able to move beyond the convolution of anger and guilt, thereby opening the door to an open and honest dialogue. This episode thus does indeed provide an example of what effective racial discourse looks like.

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