Laughing At or With Racism: Humor, Satire & Race in American Culture: From Blackface to Borat

Wednesday, November 7 from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.
Living Learning Center Auditorium

Tim McMahon
Humor can be broken down into five distinct categories
By David J. Parker and Samuel Stoddard
http://www.rinkworks.com/funny/

• Pain
• The Unexpected
• Lies and Other Untruths
• Wordplay
• Puns
Humor can be a form of self-assertion and of defense; it can also be a particularly effective weapon to ridicule others, as so often the case in visual satire and caricature. The Institute will aim to deepen our understanding of humor’s wounding and healing properties by addressing, among other things, the following questions:

Can visual stereotypes be more damaging than verbal stereotypes?
Can visual stereotypes be critically 'adopted' but also internalized by those stereotyped?
Can visual humor be shared across racial, national and ethnic divisions?
How do humor and laughter function in establishing difference and community?
What is the role of 'passing' and disguise in visual humor?
Are there common strategies in using humor to demean racial, national or ethnic groups?
Does such humor work differently in different media e.g. printed satire, film, video, television, or performance?
What is the interplay between the visual, acoustic/verbal, and performative?
What gender, class, and age issues are raised by visual humor?
Richard Pryor & Chevy Chase
Saturday Night Live

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x24w0dlO6k

Funny or Not Funny?
Laughing At Racism or Laughing With Racism?
Buhweat Tings
Saturday Night Live

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrW7OtZSRmM

Funny or Not Funny?
Laughing At Racism or Laughing With Racism?
I'm gonna get me a shotgun and kill all the whities I see,
I'm gonna get me a shotgun and kill all the whities I see.
When I kill all the whities I see, then whitey he won't
bother me,
I'm gonna get me a shotgun and kill all the whities I see.

Funny or Not Funny?
Laughing At Racism or Laughing With Racism?
Don Imus

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF9BjB7Bzr0

Funny or Not Funny?
Laughing At Racism or Laughing With Racism?
Imagine....

- Jeff Foxworthy doing Chris Rock
- Chris Rock doing Jeff Foxworthy
- Would either work?
How many of these have you heard?

- I was just kidding...
- I didn’t mean to hurt anyone...
- I’m an equal opportunity offender...
- It’s all about being PC...
- They said it! Why can’t I?
- It doesn’t bother me, why does it bother you?
- What’s the big deal? Everybody’s doing it!
- I’m not a racist...
Questions to Consider

- What’s “funny”? Is “funny” just “funny”?
- Is there truth in all humor?
- Is humor just tragedy that is happening to someone else?
- Do these factors matter?
  Who said it? What was said? To whom was it said?
- What’s “too far”?
- Is there a line?
  What do you have to do to cross it?
- Do setting and audience matter?
Finally.....

• What’s the relationship between humor and power?

• Are there rules about what’s OK? Do the rules apply to everyone or are they selectively used?

• Is humor, like beauty, in the eyes (or ears) of the beholder?

• How can humor be used to bring us together instead of tearing us apart?
I recently attended a panel titled “Look Who’s Laughing” at the Tribeca Film Festival. The panelists -- five female comedians/comic actresses – gathered to refute a recent Vanity Fair article titled “Why Women Aren’t Funny” by Christopher Hitchens. (It should be noted that if you Google Image “unfunny misogynist” Hitchens’ bloated, sweaty face shows up).

Jay Roach moderated the panel. His accomplishments include directing Austin Powers, producing Borat and being a dude. Mr. Roach kicked it off with a question as to why women are, in fact, not funny.

Samantha Bee of The Daily Show quickly reframed the discussion: The question isn’t why women aren’t funny. Of course women are funny. The question is why men don’t think women are funny?