

# Critical Intersections and Comic Possibilities: Extending Racialized Critical Rhetorical Scholarship

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*Communication scholars conducting work on race must engage work from complementary critical communities to bolster their own critiques and further advance progressive racial coalitions. Critical, rhetorical scholarship and Critical Race Theory (CRT) share principle aims that provide significant ground for interdisciplinary racial projects. Together, these interrelated disciplines can find reinforcement in comedic discourse. This essay locates racial comedy as a space for transformational critiques. More specifically, the author argues that critical rhetorical scholarship and CRT taken jointly can illuminate parallel comic discourses and advance their important correctives pertaining to race and racism.*

## Introduction

Race saturates everyday life in the form of dynamic, racialized symbols and performances that circulate in public culture. These messages shape racial ideologies, influence race consciousness, and inescapably impact civic judgment and action ranging from the personal and mundane to the institutional and cultural.<sup>1</sup> Speaking to the complexity of racial discourse, Howard Winant and Michael Omi put it simply: “Racial hegemony is ‘messy.’”<sup>2</sup> As such, a web of competing discourses animates racial tensions and contradictions that citizens often have difficulty putting into words, let alone resolving. Incidents such as Professor Henry Louis Gates’ arrest, tragedies such as Hurricane Katrina, and controversies such as the Jena Six case in Louisiana illustrate the vexing consequences of racial discourse in public culture. In such instances, deeply ingrained beliefs and habits surrounding race complicate inescapable power relations and yet often spark progressive accounts of racialized experience in public discourse. For example, then-Senator Barack Obama’s speech on race entitled, “A More Perfect Union,” prudently navigated the uncertainties and contours of racial meaning and experience in United States culture.<sup>3</sup> Within this culture of competing racial discourses, citizens must regularly contend with what Lisa Flores and Dreama Moon call the “racial paradox,” wherein racial ideologies and identities are socially and politically constructed.<sup>4</sup> However when these ideologies take hold in public consciousness, they create undeniable material realities. Consequently, we cannot simply eliminate race or racialized beliefs, nor from a critical stance can we tolerate essentializing, dehumanizing constructions.

Communication scholars in general and rhetorical scholars in particular are uniquely equipped to address the racial paradox because the study of rhetoric seeks to understand how public culture and

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discourse mediate social meaning, knowledge, judgment, and civic performance.<sup>5</sup> Kent Ono and John Sloop warn, however, that a critic errs if she “believe[s] herself to be competent at rendering a significant, if important, self-critique without outside help” as if she were an “all-powerful center.” They argue instead, “criticism should be moved nearer to the social and cultural communities from which criticism derives.”<sup>6</sup> To this end, some communication scholars enact what Marouf Hasian and Fernando Delgado call “racialized critical rhetorical theorizing” with a commitment to interdisciplinary intersections with critical race theory (CRT).<sup>7</sup> Working from this foundation, I build on previous efforts to position CRT in communication scholarship to further illuminate how racial realities can be analyzed and ideally transformed through discursive critique. My primary interest in doing so is to continue moving criticism closer to pre-existing critical, cultural communities by enlisting help from popular culture texts such as political humor. More specifically, turning serious attention to the perspectives in racial comedy will help critical, rhetorical race theorists advance their critiques and expand the struggle for social justice to new cultural fronts.

My argument proceeds in two parts. First, I identify principle orientations and goals that critical rhetoric and critical race scholarship share. Second, I present a case analysis of a satiric, mock-editorial by Stephen Colbert on *The Colbert Report* in which Colbert addresses the debates surrounding Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor’s confirmation.<sup>8</sup> Positioned as critical racial comedy, this comic text invites the audience to examine the “multiple and contradictory undercurrents that have racial overtones” in the debate over Sotomayor’s judicial neutrality.<sup>9</sup> Through this analysis I illustrate how sustained engagement between rhetorical scholarship and CRT functions to address racial oppression and simultaneously work toward positive social transformation. Of importance to note is that when these disciplines join together with critical discourses such as racial comedy, they amplify the transformative messages in the comic texts.

### A Rhetorical View of Racial Culture

Critical rhetoric performs politically oriented cultural criticism that aims to unmask discourses of power and interrogate hegemonic strategies of domination. This form of critique rejects universal standards of reason, celebrates contingency, and examines the intricate relationships among discourse, power, and knowledge.<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Critical Race Theory (CRT) advances a radical understanding of law as a political, ideological, and racialized social institution that profoundly impacts the lived experiences of people of color.<sup>11</sup> The origins, aims, and strategies of critical rhetoric and CRT present opportunities for reciprocal engagement. First, both fields share a concern for the ways communication informs attitudes and ideologies, orchestrates civic action, and consequently, impacts racialized realities.

For this reason, both disciplines illuminate the often overlooked features of racialized public culture. Second, critical rhetoric and CRT accent the human capacity to resist essentialized notions of race and transform cultural attitudes and habits. They promote intervention through rhetorical, performative practice. Third, both disciplines strive to navigate the racial paradox. They adeptly manage the difficult work of addressing a dynamic social construct with rigidified material consequences. I discuss these shared projects of critical rhetoric and CRT below.

### Communication and the Construction of Race

Rhetorical scholarship and CRT reject race and racial meanings as biological reality, natural fact, or common sense. Instead both disciplines direct attention to the ways communication shapes racial reality. John Calmore explains, “Critical race theory begins with a recognition that ‘race’ is not a fixed term ... [but] a fluctuating, decentered complex of social meanings that are formed and transformed under the constant pressures of political struggle.”<sup>12</sup> Popular public discourses create racialized meanings, inform public attitudes about race, and influence race consciousness. In turn, these racialized ways of thinking and knowing guide civic interactions and complicate judgments in all facets of everyday life. For these reasons, critical race scholars demand careful attention to the “terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness,” including but not limited to legal decisions, speeches, news reports, educational curricula, advertising images, popular music, and comedy.<sup>13</sup> CRT’s examination of legal discourse specifically complements rhetorical scholarship that considers how discursive formations mediate meaning, power, and identity. Michael Calvin McGee summarizes the rhetorical view of culture shared by CRT in the following way: “[H]uman beings are ‘conditioned,’ not directly to belief and behavior, but to a vocabulary of concepts that function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, communication scholarship informed by critical race scholarship offers a powerful heuristic to examine the intersecting discourses that characterize and construct racial culture.

Rhetorical scholarship and CRT strive to critique the unquestioned, unexamined characteristics of public culture through which racial reality becomes naturalized as common sense. Through repetition and reinforcement, dominant ideologies pertaining to race and racism gain currency and become deeply embedded in cultural rules, habits, assumptions, and discourses. For this reason, CRT promotes a self-reflexive “race-consciousness” and an understanding of the ways legal discourse informs our understandings, actions, and interactions.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, critical rhetoric promotes skills and sensibilities necessary to confront racial injustice on the “surfaces of society,” including the public discourses we amplify, social identities we privilege, available ranges of action we constitute, cultural myths we circulate,

and texts in which we encode racial meaning and ideology.<sup>16</sup> Thus both rhetoric and CRT scholars pursue projects that “examine and attend to the specifics of race, as it emerges in concrete conflicts and practices, communities and culture” in order to reveal and interrogate the rhetorical strategies, discursive practices, and cultural attitudes sustaining racial injustice.<sup>17</sup>

### Reconstructive Power of Communication

Both disciplines also promote rhetorical intervention by emphasizing citizens’ capacity to alter and reinvent the racialized discourses that inform our everyday lives. Critical race theorists strive to amplify marginalized voices so that new narratives and experiences become significant in public discourse and inform civic judgment.<sup>18</sup> For instance, T. Alexander Aleinikoff argues that “the story that America tells about itself” ensures people of color remain “strangers,” positioned as “outsiders” with a “badge of otherness.” Aleinikoff suggests reframing contemporary narratives of United States history to highlight the stories not of immigrants who chose America, but of those who built America—collective stories incorporating the narratives of slaves, free blacks working in factories, women in factories and the home, Chinese railroad workers, and Mexican crop harvesters.<sup>19</sup> Such revision of dominant socio-political narratives may remedy lingering problems of racial exclusion and injustice because new, inclusive myths give value and status to traditionally marginalized citizens. CRT also strives to redefine ideologically infused terms that shape racial meaning and interactions such as the “substance of freedom,” to create a conception of freedom that rejects any “right to degrade and humiliate another human being.”<sup>20</sup> Such an ideographic analysis seeks to understand the ideologies circulating in public discourse so as to create new relationships and knowledge for common terms that might positively influence political consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

These projects challenge existing discursive patterns and reinvent cultural knowledge in efforts to move citizens toward more just democratic practices. These projects participate in the “to and fro of assembly and disassembly” as they define, create, and contest cultural formations. They transform race consciousness by integrating a broad range of voices, experiences, and interests.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the rhetorical ventures taken up by CRT recognize that the “artful deployment of language ... has real effects upon language itself, upon meaning, and finally upon what humans do.”<sup>23</sup> This constructive power of rhetoric and its emphasis on civic intervention is valuable to scholars dedicated not only to deconstructing oppressive conditions but also to constituting new, just communities.

### Navigating Racial Paradoxes

The aforementioned intersections of critical rhetoric and CRT give rise to another intersection. Although the terrain of race is unstable, dominant racial discourse nevertheless constructs oppressive realities to which citizens must respond. In the midst of the contingencies of racial constructions, both

disciplines stress the need to move purposefully toward a just future. Ian F. Haney López's *White by Law* models scholarship contending with this racial paradox. López reveals the complex legal construction of racial meanings and consciousness in United States' racial culture, and he challenges the consequences of these constructions.<sup>24</sup> López examines racial prerequisite cases that constructed racial boundaries as they determined conditions for United States citizenship. Through often contradictory rulings, judges and legal practitioners defined citizenship according to different manifestations of whiteness and then rationalized whiteness as a natural, pre-existing category proven by scientific and common knowledge. The ramifications of the legal construction of racial identity carried far-reaching social, political, and economic consequences, privileging a white consciousness that marked non-white "others" as unworthy, undesirable, and unfit for citizenship. Legal discourses on whiteness and citizenship determined migration decisions, neighborhood development, job opportunities, and wealth distribution. These cases even shaped the physical appearance of the United States populace because court decisions influenced courtship, marriage, and reproduction. López's work clearly emphasizes the constructed and contingent reality of race and also how these constructions carry significant, material consequences. Thus his work models a sensibility necessary to act purposefully in the midst of this racial paradox.

Like CRT, rhetorical scholarship is well-suited for navigating these contradictory and complex racial formations because of its emphasis on the social construction of truth, contingent knowledge, and the material realities racial formations produce. Rhetorical invention maintains a foundation for judgment and performance while recognizing this foundation as temporary and alterable. Rhetorical critics recognize that judgment occurs "in the face of contingency, with countless uncertainties, and incredible consequences."<sup>25</sup> In other words, rhetorical criticism is suited to work with the paradox of racial constructions and consequences; it is well-equipped to navigate and orchestrate action amidst dynamic racial realities. Thus, critical rhetorical scholarship complements critical race scholarship as they both strive to remedy the tensions of racialized culture without deferring to whiteness as the invisible status quo.

#### Comic Possibilities for Rhetorical Criticism

The previous section illustrates shared ventures and orientations which facilitate careful engagement between critical rhetoricians and race theorists. In this section I expand the scope of this interdisciplinarity and accent another opportunity for supplementing critical, rhetorical race scholarship with criticism already circulating in popular culture. Sloop and Ono stress, "[A]ll critics interested in public political change" have a responsibility "to investigate the judgments and forms of judgment that operate materially in various communities and subcommunities in contemporary culture" and to engage

existing critical discourses.<sup>26</sup> While humor may be an unlikely path to social and racial justice, comedy provides a valuable popular discourse that scholars and educators should utilize to their pedagogical advantage.<sup>27</sup> In particular, I argue that communication scholars must give serious attention to racial comic discourses complementing the shared attitudes and aims outlined above.

To be sure, throughout United States history some discourses passing as “comedy” have worsened racial tensions and actively reinforced anti-democratic attitudes. While such comedy offers pause, it does not constitute sufficient ground to dismiss the reconstructive and inventive potential of racial comedy.<sup>28</sup> Because comedy exaggerates features of our everyday life it reveals overlooked tensions and contradictions. Simon Critchley argues that comedy requires congruence between jokes and social structure so that the comic reflections of society and culture will help audiences see “the familiar defamiliarized, the ordinary made extraordinary and the real rendered surreal.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, comedy shows us what humans have created, yet accepted as natural and given. Popular humor complements critical rhetorical scholarship on race because it reveals racialized constructions and their material impact on actions, judgments, knowledge, and power relationships. Additionally, comedy models a process of intervention and reconstruction of discursive patterns and practices. The earliest comic poets sought to “influence public thinking about matters of major importance” and provoked the audience “to think about their lives and civic duties in ways not encouraged on other occasions.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, comedy works in the realms of contradiction and paradox, presenting guidelines to help the audience live within these inescapable conditions. Like rhetorical race scholarship, critical comedy recognizes and counters problematic racial constructions in U.S. culture. Furthermore, comedy offers an essential discourse that could guide citizens toward prudent civic judgments and just performances as they navigate complex relationships.<sup>31</sup> In this vein, humor can serve a liberating function via critiques of democratic incongruities.

The joint articulation of critical rhetoric and CRT promises to help communication scholars identify progressive comic perspectives with the capacity to help achieve racial justice. To illustrate how popular comic discourses complement CRT-inflected, critical rhetorical scholarship, I analyze a comic critique from faux-conservative news anchor Stephen Colbert on Comedy Central’s *The Colbert Report*. This case analysis illustrates how comic discourse strongly supplements critical rhetorical race scholarship. In his recurring mock-editorial segment “The Word,” Stephen Colbert commented on Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor’s sharply contested claim that life experiences inform and enrich judgment. Colbert’s editorial disputes familiar discourses of colorblindness and offers a counter-

hegemonic critique of naturalized ideologies of whiteness. Thus, his comedy has the potential to disrupt dominant patterns of white consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

Colbert begins his comedic commentary with an overview of the presumed problem of judicial bias: “Nation, I have never let past life experience get in the way of how I approach a situation. For instance, I don’t prejudge whether a hot stove will burn my hand. Who knows what will happen next time?” Colbert holds up his hand to reveal circular burn marks from a range-top. Contrary to his claim, his illustration seems to suggest that everyone is inescapably shaped by past experience and that we regularly call on past experience to make decisions. His burned hand suggests that ignoring life experiences in judgment is undesirable and imprudent because it may lead to serious consequences. “But listen to what Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor believes,” he continues. Colbert cuts to footage from Sotomayor’s confirmation hearings where she explains, “I can state what I believe very simply: life experiences help the process of listening and understanding an argument.” Colbert’s character scoffs at this supposed bias and sides with the “impartial senators” who attacked her position as “inconsistent with the impartial, neutral arbiter” a judge should embody. Concluding this background, he segues to the editorial segment: “Because of Sotomayor’s obvious ‘things-I-have-learned’ bias, the Supreme Court’s neutrality is in danger, which brings us to tonight’s Word: ‘Neutral Man’s Burden.’” The editorial title creatively imitates Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden.”<sup>33</sup> The metonym—replacing “white” with “neutral”—immediately transforms his warning that the “Supreme Court’s neutrality is in danger.” This substitution reminds the audience that the Supreme Court’s whiteness is in “danger” as well. Colbert’s implied defense of whiteness begins to raise questions about the racialized ideologies motivating opposition to Sotomayor.

Colbert begins his editorial: “Folks, over the past 220 years the vast majority of our Supreme Court justices have been *neutral*, like Samuel Alito.” His emphasis on the code he revealed in the title again cues the audience to identify the double-meaning: the vast majority of justices have been white (and male). Demonstrating Justice Alito’s presumed neutrality, Colbert cuts to a clip of Alito’s 2006 confirmation hearings where Alito explained, “When I get a case about discrimination, um, I have to think about people in my own family who suffered discrimination because of their ethnic background or because of religion or, or because of gender ... I do take that into account.” Like Colbert’s burned hand, this contradictory fragment directs attention to the inescapable partiality and positionality of judgment. Alito can no more escape the “things he has learned” as a white male, than Sotomayor can avoid incorporating similarly racialized experiences in her judgments as a Latina. In alignment with CRT and rhetorical scholarship, Colbert shows how inescapably racialized subject positions influence our

interpretations of and attitudes toward civic life. More pointedly, in a culture saturated with racial messages, our experiences necessarily induce specific civic judgments and promote particular actions in relation to race. Yet our perspectives are also always incomplete and partial.<sup>34</sup>

Colbert's ignores the blatant contradiction between his valuation of objectivity and Alito's testimony. Instead, he affirms Alito's statement as evidence of judicial neutrality: "Yes! He takes *his* life experiences into account. But he does it *neutrally*." Colbert's emphasis highlights the contradiction. How can Alito take his biases into account "neutrally?" Furthermore, why is Sotomayor denied the same privilege? Colbert's comic incongruities invite the audience to recognize that claims to "neutrality" cannot escape rhetoricity or subjectivity.<sup>35</sup> Alito's testimony juxtaposed with critiques of Sotomayor's so-called "things-I-have-learned" bias prompts the audience to reflect on the fallacy of the attacks on Sotomayor's presumably radical bias. This juxtaposition also provokes consideration for the unspoken racial dimensions motivating the debate. Utilizing critical racial commentary, Colbert moves forward in his critique by abandoning subtle hints at white subjectivity and naming the privileged position of whiteness. "So why is [Alito] neutral and not Sotomayor? It's because Alito is *white*. In America, *white* is *neutral*." The side bar offering a running meta-commentary on Colbert's editorial states: "Fair's fair." This juvenile warrant hints at the injustice of marking whiteness and white racial consciousness as neutral while Sotomayor as a woman of color is marked as both a dangerous threat and as a person whose experiences should be silenced.

Colbert attempts to corroborate his claim to white neutrality with examples ranging from everyday life to institutional practices; instead, his satirical illustrations illuminate white privilege and racial consciousness. First, he offers everyday examples of white privilege. "For years, Band-Aids came in only one color: white person. It's standard person color. In fact, it is so standard that when I was a kid, in Crayola boxes it was the color called 'flesh.'" The sidebar accompanying his argument offers a mock-citation: "Source: Bureau of Whites and Measures." Comedic instances such as these epitomize everyday privileges resulting from the presumed universality of whiteness, and reveal how cultural messages implicitly construct notions of normality and shape racial identity. Furthermore, his pun on the International Bureau of Weights and Measures underscores that presumptions of universality are neither natural, nor commonsensical. Rather, racial constructions and realities result, in part, from privileged access to institutional systems and cultural practices which grant whites the power to name realities and dictate cultural knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Next, Colbert explicitly gestures toward the problem of limited race-consciousness. "Most Americans accept *this* [pointing to the back of his hand] as neutral without thinking about it. And that is

why the decisions made by all those *white* justices were not affected by their experiences—because their life experiences were neutral. That led to *neutral* decisions.” The exaggerated emphasis on white as neutral chides citizens’ limited self-reflection which results in overlooking prominent biases. The sidebar again adds force to the comic critique by underscoring the inescapable positionality of white race-consciousness with another play to make whiteness visible: “Landmark case: *Eggshell v. E cru*.” The fictional court case emphasizes the necessarily valenced perspective of white citizens. Just as many shades of white exist, racialized attitudes, orientations, and experiences shade judgments and perspectives for all white citizens. Despite claims to race neutrality, we can escape neither the material realities of racial constructions nor our racialized performances. Speaking to and with the work of rhetorical and CRT scholars, Colbert unambiguously challenges the privileged neutrality of whiteness and refuses to let white identity persist as an unmarked political subjectivity. Amplifying unexamined white neutrality via comedy, he reveals the hegemonic practices that maintain white privilege and sustain racial injustice.

Colbert extends his critique to institutional practices with reference to two Supreme Court cases: “Take the *Dred Scott* case. Those justices’ life experiences—being white men in pre-Civil War America, some of whom owned slaves—in *no way* influenced their decision that black people were property.” Again, the sidebar intensifies the unmasking of white consciousness and political subjectivity: “Judges’ Robes Were White.” First, he prominently features the conflict of interest and biased position of white slave owners as justices; then, he supplants traditional imagery of black-robed justices with reference to Klan garb. These reminders of racial realities and subject positions leave little room for the audience to embrace comfortably the presumed impartiality of whiteness. Then, Colbert moves to another Supreme Court case. “[The Justices’] personal backgrounds had nothing to do with the all-neutral court’s decision that it was legal to send Japanese Americans to internment camps in 1942. Imagine how the life experience of an Asian judge would sully that neutrality.” Colbert revisits the “all-neutral court” metonym, marking once again the strategic rhetoric of white invisibility.<sup>37</sup> These legal examples reveal the consequences of presumed white neutrality as they highlight the racialized perspective of white justices whose life experiences and biases impacted decisions that legitimated anti-democratic exclusion. As such whiteness emerges as a salient political subjectivity that impacts judgment. In addition, Colbert offers implicit support for Judge Sotomayor’s contested claim that lived experience in a marginalized position might yield more just, prudent judgments. With an invitation to imagine the judgment of an Asian American judge deciding *Korematsu v. United States*, Colbert prompts the audience to take the position of another and consider marginalized perspectives. Although he decries the way his hypothetical

Justice might “sully” the court’s neutrality, this comic incongruity in alignment with CRT provokes the audience to respect how the inclusion of broader perspectives might inspire more just judgments.

Although performing a reactionary colorblindness in his discussion of these cases, Colbert undermines ideals of colorblindness and race neutrality with his comic juxtapositions. He rejects a typical colorblind narrative that rewrites history “into concrete and disparate moments in which such horrors as slavery and the internment occurred” but which remain “moments of the past, not the present.”<sup>38</sup> In the examples above, Colbert brings past injustices to bear on the present when he accents the historical whiteness of the Supreme Court and the consequences of its long-standing racial exclusion. Recurring reminders that the highest court continues to be dominated by white justices are juxtaposed to discriminatory rulings resulting, in part, from the racial consciousness of white justices. This deliberate introduction of past legal and racial bias together with his previous examples of everyday privilege highlights the contemporary exclusion of marginalized perspectives in all registers of civic life.

Before he concludes his editorial, Colbert acknowledges Sotomayor’s remarkable personal history, but he warns, “If that compelling, humble, strong, admirable life story in any way informs her judgment, she will destroy our nation.” Articulating overwhelmingly positive attributes with the fear of national decay implicitly raises questions about the racial dimension of the challenges to Sotomayor. Thus Colbert extends a subtle invitation to “ask the other question” and investigate the coded racial and gendered attitudes underlying these debates.<sup>39</sup> More specifically his commentary sparks a vital question, why the opposition to a “humble, strong, admirable,” Latina nominee? Clearly, the dispute over Sotomayor’s confirmation represents more than a fight over perceived judicial bias. Operating from a rhetorical standpoint infused with CRT, these discourses reflect ongoing themes such as defending whiteness, protecting privilege, and perpetuating democratic exclusion.

Conceding that Judge Sotomayor’s confirmation is almost guaranteed, Colbert offers his closing comment and returns to his previous illustration of everyday racial privilege:

[T]he best we can hope is to neutralize her personal background—the way Band-Aids did when they reached out to minorities. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, ‘After hearing calls to make Band-Aids more inclusive of varying skin tones, the company released its sheer Band-Aid.’ So in addition to *white* Band-Aids, we also have *invisible* Band-Aids. Problem solved! [The sidebar critiques: ‘Or at Least Band-Aided.’] The same goes for the court. If you’re a white male like Sam Alito, naturally everything that happened in your life just helps make you a completely neutral, objective person. But—if you’re Sonia Sotomayor, everything that happened in your life should be invisible. And that’s the Word.

With each turn in his editorial, Colbert amplifies markers of privilege, which render people of color invisible, from Band-Aids and crayon colors to a history of Supreme Court cases reflecting white race

consciousness and the covertly racialized reactions to Judge Sotomayor's statement. Colbert's maneuvers remind the audience that colorblind, race-neutral orientations are anything but. Instead, discourses of neutrality mute experiences of people of color and ignore realities of racial injustice while maintaining and protecting whiteness. This comic critique resonates with Cheryl Harris' analysis of whiteness as a "set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white." In addition, Colbert's reference to the Supreme Court cases demonstrates how racialized values and meanings "have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by law" and result in the subordination and erasure of people of color.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, his attention to the surface appearances and strategic maneuvers of whiteness reveals the ways that public culture and everyday practices construct and reinforce racialized realities and attitudes. Like rhetorical scholarship and CRT, Colbert "expose[s] whiteness as a cultural construction," reveals "the strategies that embed its centrality," and challenges its "influential political position."<sup>41</sup> Carrie Crenshaw argues, "[R]hetorical silence about whiteness sustains an ideology of white privilege," and Colbert comically rejects and successfully disrupts "whiteness' rhetorical silence."<sup>42</sup> As such, he magnifies the often overlooked maneuvers of whiteness to create space for progressive interventions.

Colbert's closing comments also name another consequence of allowing universal white subjectivity to stand unchallenged as the center against which we measure pluralistic perspectives. More specifically, he accentuates how public discourses communicate "characteristics, roles, actions, or ways of seeing" to be avoided.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Colbert's comedy exaggerates the familiar practice of validating white perspectives while abrogating perspectives such as Judge Sotomayor's, and consequently, underscores the injury to people of color whose racialized experiences and perspectives are regularly dismissed and discounted. This lesson complements CRT's consideration of the personal and spiritual experiences of racial injustice, what Patricia Williams calls "spirit murder," the dehumanizing and assaultive dimensions of racism, marginalization, and invisibility. Legal proceedings and public discourse often exacerbate these consequences when victims must convince the court or the public of the legitimacy of their perspectives and lived experiences. Such practices result in a "devaluation of humanity" and remove people of color from the "pseudospiritual circle of psychic and civic communion."<sup>44</sup> As long as whiteness remains the privileged center, which negates and devalues other positions, these forms of racial oppression will persist.

In addition to challenging neutrality and the injury of erasure, Colbert's commentary advocates for marginalized voices. Taken in isolation, the editorial conclusion seems to validate continued marginalization and silencing, but in the context of the full comic text, Colbert's advocacy for race-consciousness emerges. He indirectly affirms CRT's appeal to "look to the bottom" for silenced voices to enrich our political judgments.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the comic editorial destabilizes the hegemonic orientation of

colorblindness and creates room for race-consciousness. Colbert advocates for the significance of racialized experience in establishing new modes of truth and public discourse. His comic commentary also supplements critical race scholarship's efforts to "create conditions for the maintenance of a distinct political thought" informed by the perspectives and experiences of people of color and marginalized communities.<sup>46</sup>

In short, this comic text can be more accurately understood via the shared aims of rhetorical and CRT scholarship. Colbert directs attention to the racially coded surfaces of society and implicit racial attitudes. He undermines both strategic rhetorics of white invisibility and whiteness' privileged position of presumed neutrality. Through racial comedy, Colbert exaggerates many of the unexamined racialized ideologies informing our actions and judgments. He also foregrounds material realities of racialized experience including the psychological and spiritual consequences of silencing marginalized discourses. Highlighting these oppressive habits and realities that appear to be natural and fixed, Colbert provokes consciousness of their construction. In other words, this comic commentary "bring[s] to the surface the taken-for-granted assumptions that are embedded in both judicial and public spheres."<sup>47</sup> This destabilization opens space for counter-narratives and invites both the audience and communication scholars to create possibilities for new understandings of race and racism.

### Conclusion

Communication scholars committed to racial justice must continue to engage CRT and simultaneously take seriously the transformative criticism emerging from comic discourses on race. Moreover, careful affiliation with CRT enhances communication scholars' ability to amplify the comic discourses that deconstruct dominant, oppressive racial ideologies. Stephen Colbert's commentary on now-Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor illustrates possibilities for extending ongoing, interdisciplinary communication scholarship on race. The task for critics is to join forces with such discourses and build upon the small victories won by comics who disrupt the hegemonic labor of whiteness. As demonstrated here, critical rhetorical scholarship bolstered by insights from CRT strengthens possibilities for progressive social transformation through sophisticated comic critiques.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, I offer another brief example from *The Boondocks* by cartoonist Aaron McGruder. Eight-year-old Riley Freeman sits at a school desk. He appears bored and disinterested, his chin resting on crossed arms, a scowl on his face. Riley pays no attention to Phil, the student seated beside him. In contrast, an anxious and wary Phil glances nervously at Riley out of the corner of his eyes. In this first frame of this comic strip, McGruder portrays tenuous, racialized relationships. Phil, a white student, outwardly displays anxiety toward Riley, the black student beside him. Phil seems paralyzed by ingrained

fear and distrust. The second frame zooms in on the boys' faces, highlighting Phil's distress over Riley's presence. Riley returns Phil's gaze with a cocked eyebrow. In frame three Riley confronts Phil: "Is there a problem?" Phil's mistrust reaches the tipping point. He cries out with tears in his eyes, "OOOOHHHH PLEASE DON'T HURT ME I DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY OK MAYBE A QUARTER BUT I'M TOO YOUNG TO DIE!!!!" The outburst confirms the message of Phil's subtle performances: he perceives Riley as a menace, and he negatively judges Riley's character and value. In the final frame, the teacher responds to Phil's terrified outburst, "PHIL?! Phil, what's wrong?! Riley, what have you done to Phil?!!!" Phil stutters, "M-Mrs. Peterson, can I go to the bathroom ... please?" Riley begrudgingly rests his head back on the desk and stares away. His frustrated sigh suggests familiarity with incidents like this one.

Like Colbert, McGruder's critique of racialized experience complements the work of rhetorical scholars and critical race theorists. This scene demonstrates the consequences of internalized beliefs, attitudes, and values informed by a history of racial constructions. Phil reacts with fear and distrust to his perception of Riley's black male identity. Mrs. Peterson, the authority figure, reveals her conditioned attitudes with a snap judgment of Riley's guilt. This comic strip shows a young, black man devalued and rendered invisible through everyday interactions in what should be a safe space for learning and collaboration. Extending the story beyond these frames, critical race scholars might imagine Riley's encounters with essentializing racial attitudes outside the classroom. The audience might also recognize a pattern of blaming people of color for educational and social disengagement. Multiple readings of this comedic text could yield even richer lessons. The point to be made, however, is that merging critical efforts can advance progressive critiques of racialized culture and generate opportunities to promote social transformation.

To be sure, the uncertainty of humor carries a unique set of problems. In the case of Colbert's satire, we cannot be certain that the audience will recognize the satire and some may simply accept his defense of white neutrality at face value. In the case of McGruder's *Boondocks*, (white) readers with limited consciousness of the complexities of racial experience may identify strongly with Phil's fear and the teacher's dismissal. But all communication runs the risk of misappropriation and unpredictable outcomes. Thus, scholars committed to racial justice and social transformation have an even greater responsibility to direct the progressive potential of comic discourses on race. More directly asserted, communication scholars must take advantage of comic discourses in order to expand the scope of our critical projects and forge new pathways to justice.

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- <sup>1</sup> Today race continues to impact hiring decisions, educational settings, health care disparities, social relationships, and so on. See: Howard Winant, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Mica Pollock, *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Hernán Vera and Joe R. Feagin, eds., *Handbook of the Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations* (New York: Springer, 2007); Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Can We Talk about Race? And Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 74–75.
- <sup>3</sup> See Robert E. Terrill, “Unity and Duality in Barack Obama’s ‘A More Perfect Union,’” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, no. 4 (2009): 363–86.
- <sup>4</sup> Lisa A. Flores and Dreama G. Moon, “Rethinking Race, Revealing Dilemmas: Imagining a New Racial Subject in *Race Traitor*,” *Western Journal of Communication* 66, no. 2 (2002): 181–207.
- <sup>5</sup> See Michael Calvin McGee, “A Materialist’s Conception of Rhetoric,” in *Explorations in Rhetoric: Studies in Honor of Douglas Ehringer*, ed. Raymie McKerrow, (Glenville, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982), 23–48.
- <sup>6</sup> Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, “Commitment to *Telos*—A Sustained Critical Rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 59, no. 1 (1992): 51.
- <sup>7</sup> Marouf Hasian Jr. and Fernando Delgado, “The Trials and Tribulations of Racialized Critical Rhetorical Theory: Understanding the Rhetorical Ambiguities of Proposition 187,” *Communication Theory* 8, no. 3 (1998): 245–70. For example: Dreama Moon and Lisa A. Flores, “Antiracism and the Abolition of Whiteness: Rhetorical Strategies of Domination among ‘Race Traitors,’” *Communication Studies* 51, no. 2 (2000): 97–115; Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California’s Proposition 187* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Lisa A. Flores, Dreama G. Moon, and Thomas K. Nakayama, “Dynamic Rhetorics of Race: California’s Racial Privacy Initiative and the Shifting Grounds of Racial Politics,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 3 (2006): 181–210.
- <sup>8</sup> Comedy Central, “The Word: Neutral Man’s Burden,” *The Colbert Report*, episode #05095, July 16, 2009, <http://www.colbernation.com/>; Neil A. Lewis, “Debate on Whether Female Judges Decide Differently Arises Anew,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2009; Peter Baker and Jo Becker, “Speeches Show Judge’s Steady Focus on Diversity and Struggle,” *New York Times*, June 5, 2009; Peter Baker and Neil A. Lewis, “Republicans Press Judge about Bias and Activism,” *New York Times*, July 15, 2009.
- <sup>9</sup> Hasian and Delgado, “Trials and Tribulations,” 262, 257.
- <sup>10</sup> Influences on and definitional statements for critical rhetoric include: Philip Wander and Steven Jenkins, “Rhetoric, Society, and the Critical Response,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58, no. 4 (1972): 441–50; Michael Calvin McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 1–16; Philip Wander, “The Ideological Turn in Modern Criticism,” *Central States Speech Journal* 34, no. 1 (1983): 1–18; James F. Klumpp and Thomas A. Hollihan, “Rhetorical Criticism as Moral Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75, no. 1 (1989): 84–97; Raymie E. McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” *Communication Monographs* 56, no. 2 (1989): 91–111; Michael Calvin McGee, “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3 (1990): 274–89; Maurice Charland, “Finding a Horizon and *Telos*: The Challenge to Critical Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, no. 1 (1991): 71–74; Robert Hariman, “Critical Rhetoric and Postmodern Theory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, no. 1 (1991): 67–70; Raymie E. McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric in a Postmodern World,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, no. 1 (1991): 75–78; Norman Clark, “The Critical Servant: An Isocratean Contribution to Critical Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82, no. 2 (1996): 111–24.
- <sup>11</sup> See: Derrick A. Bell, *Race, Racism, and American Law*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Aspen Publishers, 2004); Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law,” *Harvard Law Review* 101, no. 7 (1988): 1331–87; Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda,

- Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography," *Virginia Law Review* 79, no. 2 (1993): 461–516; Mari J. Matsuda, Charles R. Lawrence III, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).
- <sup>12</sup> John O. Calmore, "Critical Race Theory, Archie Shepp, and Fire Music: Securing an Authentic Intellectual Life in a Multicultural World," *Southern California Law Review* 65, no. 5 (1992): 2160.
- <sup>13</sup> Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, *Critical Race Theory*, xiv. See also: Richard Delgado, "When a Story Is Just a Story: Does Voice Really Matter?" *Virginia Law Review* 76, no. 1 (1990): 95–111; Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment." In communication studies, see Clay Calvert, "Hate Speech and Its Harms: A Communication Theory Perspective," *Journal of Communication* 47, no. 1 (1997): 4–19; Marouf Hasian Jr., "Judicial Rhetoric in a Fragmentary World: 'Character' and Storytelling in the Leo Frank Case," *Communication Monographs* 64, no. 3 (1997): 250–69.
- <sup>14</sup> McGee, "'Ideograph,'" 6. Also: McGee, "Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," 30–34.
- <sup>15</sup> See: Robin D. Barnes, "Race Consciousness: The Thematic Content of Racial Distinctiveness in Critical Race Scholarship," *Harvard Law Review* 103, no. 8 (1990): 1864–71; Neil Gotanda, "A Critique of 'Our Constitution Is Color-Blind'," *Stanford Law Review* 44, no. 1 (1991): 1–68; Gary Peller, "Race Consciousness," *Duke Law Journal* 1990, no. 4 (1990): 758–847.
- <sup>16</sup> Michael Calvin McGee, "Fragments of Winter: Racial Discontents in America, 1992," in *Rhetoric in Postmodern America: Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee*, ed. Carol Corbin (New York: Guilford, 1998), 164–65, 174–75. See also: Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (1987): 137.
- <sup>17</sup> Flores, Moon, and Nakayama, "Dynamic Rhetorics of Race," 184. For example: Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): 291–309; Raka Shome, "Race and Popular Cinema: The Rhetorical Strategies of Whiteness in *City of Joy*," *Communication Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1996): 502–518; Tara J. Yosso, "Critical Race Media Literacy: Challenging Deficit Discourse about Chicanas/os," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 30, no. 1 (2002): 52–62; Phil Chidester, "May the Circle Stay Unbroken: *Friends*, the Presence of Absence, and the Rhetorical Reinforcement of Whiteness," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 2 (2008): 157–74; Ralina L. Joseph, "'Tyra Banks Is Fat': Reading (Post-)Racism and (Post-)Feminism in the New Millennium," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 3 (2009): 237–54.
- <sup>18</sup> See: Mari J. Matsuda, "Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 22, no. 2 (1987): 323–99; Richard Delgado, *The Rodrigo Chronicles: Conversations about America and Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Anthony E. Cook, "Beyond Critical Legal Studies: The Reconstructive Theology of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Harvard Law Review* 103, no. 5 (1990): 988.
- <sup>19</sup> T. Alexander Aleinikoff, "A Case for Race-Consciousness," *Columbia Law Review* 91, no. 5 (1991): 1122–25.
- <sup>20</sup> Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, *Words That Wound*, 14–15.
- <sup>21</sup> McGee, "'Ideograph,'" 7, 13. Also: Celeste M. Condit and John L. Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- <sup>22</sup> Charland, "Finding a Horizon and Telos," 74.
- <sup>23</sup> Maurice Charland, "Rehabilitating Rhetoric: Confronting Blindspots in Discourse and Social Theory," *Communication* 11 (1990): 255. See also: McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric," McGee, "Fragments of Winter."
- <sup>24</sup> Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996). In addition, see Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins" for another example that attends to the racial paradox addressed here and that highlights the post-modern theoretical grounds that critical rhetoric also shares.

- Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.
- <sup>25</sup> James P. McDaniel and John M. Sloop, "Hope's Finitude: An Introduction," in *Judgment Calls: Rhetoric, Politics, and Indeterminacy*, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 4. See also: Ono and Sloop, "Commitment to *Telos*."
- <sup>26</sup> John M. Sloop and Kent A. Ono, "Out-law Discourse: The Critical Politics of Material Judgment," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 30, no. 1 (1997): 65, 66. See also: Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, "Critical Rhetorics of Controversy," *Western Journal of Communication* 63, no. 4 (1999): 526–38.
- <sup>27</sup> This project joins recent arguments for the vital role of comedy in democratic societies. See: D. Diane Davis, *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Stephen Gencarella Olbrys, "Seinfeld's Democratic Vistas," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 5 (2005): 390–408; Geoffrey Baym, "The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism," *Political Communication* 22, no. 3 (2005): 259–76; Robert Hariman, "Political Parody and Public Culture," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94, no. 3 (2008): 247–72; Paul Achter, "Comedy in Unfunny Times: News Parody and Carnival after 9/11," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 3 (2008): 274–303.
- <sup>28</sup> A comprehensive list and extensive discussion of the range and consequences of racial comedy—from stand-up comedians to movies, situation comedies, news satires, comic strips, and YouTube videos—is beyond the scope of this essay. On the history of racial comedy see variously: Redd Foxx and Norma Miller, *The Redd Foxx Encyclopedia of Black Humor* (Pasadena, CA: Ward Ritchie Press, 1977); Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: African Americans in Television since 1948*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: Nelson–Hall Publishers, 1992); J. Jerome Zolten, "Black Comedians: Forging an Ethnic Image," *Journal of American Culture* 16, no. 2(1993): 65–75; Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: A History of African American Comedy from Slavery to Chris Rock* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994); Lauri Stone, *Laughing in the Dark: A Decade of Subversive Comedy* (New York: Ecco, 1997); Carol Allen, "'Shaking That Thing' and All Its Wonder: African American Female Comedy," *Studies in American Humor* 3, no. 12 (2005): 97–120. On the tension between the different social effects of comedy, see: Joseph Boskin, *Rebellious Laughter: People's Humor in American Culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Simon Dentith, *Parody* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Michael Mulkay, *On Humor: Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Stephen E. Kercher, *Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- <sup>29</sup> Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4, 10, 11. On comedy as reflective and constitutive of cultural values, see also: Louis D. Rubin, "The Great American Joke," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1973): 82–94; M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981); Mulkay, *On Humor*; Ron Jenkins, *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); Joseph Boskin, ed., *The Humor Prism in 20<sup>th</sup>–Century America* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997).
- <sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Henderson, "The Demos and the Comic Competition," in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 312–13, 271–72.
- <sup>31</sup> On popular culture as democratic art and education, see: LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006); Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); John S. Nelson, "Prudence as Republican Politics in American Popular Culture," in *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice*, ed. Robert Hariman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 229–257; Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- <sup>32</sup> I acknowledge the implications of a gay, white, male scholar committed to social justice upholding the racial commentary of a straight, white, male comedian. To be sure, CRT calls attention to the incompleteness and

positionality of both Colbert's and my perspective. I am keenly aware that the messy "intersectionality" of my race, gender, sexual orientation, education, and socio-economic identities influence my perspectives and analysis. (See Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins"). My intent is not to ignore the long history of marginalized comic voices nor diminish the important comic critiques of racial injustice and white privilege from people of color. I choose this text not to shun these comic voices, but because the voices and performances of allies must also participate in any movement toward social justice. Eleanor Brown argues that whites must be able to recognize themselves in the narratives and struggles of critical race work, and critical race scholars must incorporate perspectives from white supporters as well. In this text, and many more of his episodes, Stephen Colbert challenges white race-consciousness, white privilege, and racial injustice, and foregrounds the realities of racial oppression and marginalization. Importantly, these critiques originate from a white subject position, engage key ideas from critical race scholarship, and address a primarily white audience. Eleanor Marie Brown, "The Tower of Babel: Bridging the Divide between Critical Race Theory and 'Mainstream' Civil Rights Scholarship," *Yale Law Journal* 105, no. 2 (1995): 513–47.

- <sup>33</sup> See: Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," *McClure's Magazine* 12 (February 1899). The meaning of Kipling's "White Man's Burden" has been debated by critical, literary scholars and read as both a progressive critique and a celebration of imperialism. For example, see: Hugh Brogan, "Rudyard Kipling on America," *Journal of American Studies* 7, no. 1 (1973): 31–46; "Kipling, the 'White Man's Burden,' and U.S. Imperialism," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 55 (2003): 1–11; Dana L. Cloud, "'To Veil the Threat of Terror': Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations> in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (2004): 285–306; Patrick Brantlinger, "Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden' and Its Afterlives," *Kipling Journal* 82 (2008): 39–58; Mark W. Driscoll, "White Dude's Burden," *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009): 100–28. While these discussions of "White Man's Burden" might illuminate different readings of Colbert's satire, they are not directly relevant to my argument concerning the ways CRT-inflected rhetorical scholarship will enhance a reading of this text.
- <sup>34</sup> See: Richard Delgado, "The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 132, no. 3 (1984): 561–78; Harlon L. Dalton, "The Clouded Prism: Minority Critique of the Legal Studies Movement," *Harvard Civil Rights–Civil Liberties Law Review* 22, no. 2 (1987): 435; Richard Delgado, "The Imperial Scholar Revisited: How to Marginalize Outsider Writing Ten Years Later," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 140, no. 4 (1992): 1349–72.
- <sup>35</sup> Richard Lanham makes the point persuasively in *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976) and *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Although not a "critical rhetorician" according to disciplinary lines, Lanham's orientation toward rhetoric aligns closely with the rhetorical perspectives I employ here.
- <sup>36</sup> See for example: Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, *Words That Wound*; Audrey P. Olmsted, "Words Are Acts: Critical Race Theory as a Rhetorical Construct," *The Howard Journal of Communications* 9, no. 4 (1998): 323–31.
- <sup>37</sup> See Nakayama and Krizek, "Whiteness," 291.
- <sup>38</sup> Flores, Moon, and Nakayama, "Dynamic Rhetorics of Race," 187.
- <sup>39</sup> Mari J. Matsuda, "Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory Out of Coalition," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1189–90. See also: Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins."
- <sup>40</sup> Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1713, 1761.
- <sup>41</sup> Nakayama and Krizek, "Whiteness," 297, 294. See also: Shome, "Race and Popular Cinema;" Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Terrance MacMullan, *Habits of Whiteness: A Pragmatist Reconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

- <sup>42</sup> Carrie Crenshaw, “Resisting Whiteness’ Rhetorical Silence,” *Western Journal of Communication* 61, no. 3 (1997): 253–78.
- <sup>43</sup> Philip Wander, “The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory,” *Communication Studies* 35, no. 4 (1984): 209.
- <sup>44</sup> Patricia Williams, “Spirit-Murdering the Messenger: The Discourse of Fingerpointing as the Law’s Response to Racism,” *University of Miami Law Review* 42 (1987): 127–57. See also: Mari J. Matsuda, “Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim’s Story,” *Michigan Law Review* 87, no. 8 (1989): 2320–81; Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- <sup>45</sup> See: Mari J. Matsuda, “Looking to the Bottom;” Richard Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative,” *Michigan Law Review* 87, no. 8 (1989): 2411–41; Delgado, “When a Story Is Just a Story;” Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
- <sup>46</sup> Crenshaw, “Race, Reform, and Retrenchment,” 1387.
- <sup>47</sup> Hasian and Delgado, “Trials and Tribulations,” 252.
- <sup>48</sup> I do not mean to suggest that a brief satirical commentary accurately portrays every nuance of racialized culture, the complexity of racialized power-relationships, and the richness of racialized experience. Neither Colbert’s satirical commentary nor racial comedy broadly considered will produce racial justice in isolation, just as isolated knowledge communities fall short of their full potential.