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Race, identity and politics in America through Key &
Peele: comedy and discourse

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ABSTRACT

America's political landscape is fragmented over the issues of identity expression, particularly related to African-American identity, and culture. With the rise of new media, activist groups such as #BlackLivesMatter fight against the oppression of minorities by the dominant cultural forces, who they accuse of laying the foundations to an unequal society due to their racist views. However, not all visions on disparities are the same. To some, the explanation does not always lie in racism, but the causes that produce disparities may be more complex than activist claim. Thus, it is of extreme necessity that dialogue, not censorship, be the means to address these issues to avoid simplistic explanations. Comedy, especially the sketch series known as *Key & Peele*, may be an effective approach to spark conversation about sensitive topics in a so-called "post-racial era", such as the intricacies of race, police brutality or income disparities.

Keywords: African-American, identity, culture, media, discourse, humor.

RESUMEN

El panorama político americano se encuentra dividido en torno a los temas de identidad, especialmente la identidad Afroamericana, y la cultura. Gracias a las redes sociales, el movimiento activista #BlackLivesMatter lucha en defensa de las minorías y en contra de la opresión ejercida por los grupos sociales dominantes, a quienes acusan de la construcción de una sociedad desigual y racista. Para otros, las causas que provocan tales disparidades no están asociadas necesariamente con el racismo, sino que son más complejas que los argumentos que presentan los grupos activistas. Así pues, es crucial que el diálogo, no la censura, sea el método con el que se aborden estos temas para evitar caer en explicaciones simplistas. La comedia, en particular la serie *Key & Peele*, puede ser un enfoque efectivo para iniciar una conversación sobre asuntos sensibles en un contexto "post-racial", como pueden ser la raza, abusos policiales o desigualdades económicas.

Palabras clave: Afroamericano, identidad, cultura, medios de comunicación, discurso, humor.

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

> Would you make fun of a burn victim? Well, we did. Sort of...We're comics. In the most recent season of our TV show, in a sketch titled "Insult Comic," a traditional stand-up comedian professes that he is "going to get everybody" in his set (the guy toward the front with big ears, the fat guy, the woman with comically large breasts). That's the phrase, isn't it, when a critic wants to praise a comedian for the fearless nature of his or her comedy That he or she "gets everybody"? That "nobody is safe"? (*Time Magazine*)

Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele, a pair of American comedians, are the creators of *Key & Peele*, a comedy sketch series which aired on Comedy Central on 2012. For 5 straight seasons they dealt with a variety of topics, ranging from parodies of existing TV shows such as "America's Got Talent" to allegories of deeper social issues, receiving critical acclaim from the media and even winning two *Primetime Emmy Awards*.

Back in 2014, both actors were invited to participate in an interview for *Time magazine*, "Make Fun of Everything", an opportunity they used to discuss the state of comedy in the country: "Internet trolls [are] looking for opportunities to dole out cruelty with impunity", but it seems as if mainstream society has become too politically correct, they told the reporter. To choose not to make fun of a certain topic is a form of "bullying" and maybe we are losing sight of the role comedy plays: "to help people cope with the fears and horrors of the world."

Slaves that get offended when white plantation owners refuse to buy them? Black characters that adjust their "blackness"? Juxtaposition, they say, is the key to their humor. A humor inspired by figures like Richard Pryor and Steve Martin, two of the fathers of modern stand-up comedy, who sought to redefine the limits of what is socially acceptable.

Race issues, for instance, are one of the main recurring themes in the series, particularly related to the concept of identity; an identity about which both comedians have been questioned due to the fact that they come from biracial families. However, thanks to their biracial nature they find themselves in a position from where they are able to play and explore such complex concepts.

Now, their goal of tackling race through humor is certainly not new, but their comedy is contextualized in a different frame compared to previous generations: their debut on Comedy Central, matching the second campaign of Barack Obama for the presidency in

2012, was defined by the cultural wars between those who claimed the election of a black president had marked the beginning of a post-racial America, and those who argued that institutional racism had not effectively disappeared.

At one end of the spectrum, this change in political discourse can be exemplified in the portrayal of a black president. Whereas Dave Chappelle[1] had imagined the first African-American president like a thug in office, a swearing politician who mirrored the stereotypical notions of the inner cities in the 90s in his skit "Black Bush"; *Key & Peele* had a real-life referent who they had to recontextualize in their sketch "Obama's Anger Translator", a comedy bit that seeks to give a voice to the "blackness" hiding behind Obama's speech, which he is forced to hide under rigid social norms. (Guerrero 269-273). To culturalists scholars, blackness in a post-modern world is reduced merely to a partial representation, a symbol more than a reality, fixed by how African-Americans are often presented in various forms of media; and carries with itself a constant struggle to find one's identity. Activism then, becomes the means to combat oppression, asymmetries of power, police brutality and rampant inequalities.

At the other end, figures such as Thomas Sowell and Jordan Peterson fiercely criticize post-modern ideas. While acknowledging the fact that discrimination exists and is always a factor to consider, simplistic explanations about inequalities do not help fix the problem but twist it. Freedom of speech, they argue, is the foundation for a solid discussion that aims at actually solving the most recurrent issues in present-day Western societies. One cannot fall in the trap of political correctness, because rather than confronting the obstacles, it avoids them.

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to, first, define in more detail the cultural context of American politics and connect it to the concept of identity, particularly black identity; second, explore the relationship between identity and the media and lay the counter-arguments against a post-modern point of view; and finally, argue in favor of humor and freedom of speech as a solution to reflect on controversial issues and against the politically correct movement, which when taken to the extreme, acts as censorship. The

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[1] Dave Chappelle is an African-American comedian who created the Comedy Central's hit *Chappelle Show* in 2003, a sketch series considered by many the precursor of *Key & Peele*.

latter part of the dissertation will then, focus on analyzing *Key & Peele's* sketches and how they reflect on black cultural matters through comedy, dealing with topics such as racism, history or politics.

1. IDENTITY AND CULTURE

1.1 GENERAL NOTIONS

Identity has been placed at the very center of Western culture. In the words of Lauren Leve "being in the sense of belonging [to a socially recognizable group] … is among the most compelling contemporary concerns." However, she states "as the space between culture (as a taken-for-granted order of symbols, institutions, structures, values, and/or beliefs) and identity (as a reflexive construct or experiential modality through which one knows oneself and claims recognition) has seemed to shrink, identity has become, in effect, a kind of metaculture" (513). So first and foremost, what is culture?

For Stuart Hall, one of the most visible representatives of the so-called Cultural Studies, the concept is very problematic, since its definition has changed over time and it means different things to different people. Explained in very brief terms, Hall defines culture as "shared meanings" (2): A bat can be an animal, but it can also be the symbol of a superhero; or maybe a sound, rather than a group of notes on a scale, can be associated with the score of a film. For instance, what does a term such as "black culture" mean? Essentially, it speaks of a common value system among a number of individuals, who in this case share the same ethnicity, and the way they decide to interpret a certain symbol. This interpretation happens at the core of the group and depends ultimately on the relationships of power between the individuals that conform it. Because no individual is the same, variations in the value hierarchy are the result of the power struggles among the participants.[2]

Yet to speak of a group is to speak of an abstraction. Within one group, according to Hall, there can be found more differences than similarities. And, at the same time, if those differences cause internal power struggles, it is a logical conclusion that such behavior should also manifest in-between groups, as Wahneema Lubiano (68-70) argues. This is the key to understanding how Cultural Studies relates to the question of the African-American identity. Both disciplines were born outside the "dominant culture" and at the heart of both

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[2] In this context, "power" is understood in a Foucaltian sense, that is, power is the essential element to understand human relationships; it is everywhere, and comes from everywhere. The relationships of power and discourse will be analyzed more in depth in the next section.

branches lies a political activism which seeks to study relationships of power and socio-economic history, whose main intention is to transform the world and be able to control their own history. A history that has shaped African-American identity.

1.2. AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

What is then, understood as African-American identity? Professor Du Bois provided an account in the early twentieth century from an autobiographical perspective of what it meant to live as a man of color; a definition that still holds true today for many: "An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of his strive" (4). Two perspectives which cannot find reconciliation due to the asymmetrical historical conditions present at that time in American society. An identity torn in two; an image inevitably shaped by the white folk, who transforms the concept of identity by reducing its evasiveness into a mere stereotype, much like seeing oneself through the eyes of another human being. By trying to achieve certain identity values others have to be sacrificed. Thus, the black man can never live at peace with himself, due to the fact that he never feels either completely American or completely black.

From a sociological point of view, this clash of values can be subdivided into three categories: traditional African values, which focus on obedience, spirituality and collective sharing; American values, which emphasize individualism, independence and the future; and victim values, centered around working together to combat powerlessness and channeling of feelings into arts or sports (Pinderhughes 91-92) (Lyles). The environment – neighborhood, friends, school, religion or job, among other factors – is one of the main drives behind behavioral attitudes and, essentially, the context which determines how the black person comes to understand and develop such blend of values. The black family, these authors argue, must be flexible so as to survive the integration of different identities slavery has eroded for centuries.

However, this does not mean that Africa's role in shaping today's African-American identity has been minor. According to Brian W. Thomas, archeologists, who usually deal

with the past, have found themselves involved in the middle of a present cultural issue, due to the discovery of slave burial grounds and cemeteries. Whereas figures such as Frederick Douglass moved away from their African past and blended their identity with "white culture" (adoption of Christian religion and English language, for example), due to political and economic reasons, some members of the African-American community are claiming such grounds as the symbol that links their group identity with past African slaves. Furthermore, archeological findings and the evolution of the slave, in terms of racial mixture, have opened a new discussion about identity. Should one refer to black people as African, African-American, Afro-American, blacks or just American?

1.3. DISCOURSE AND IDENTITY

Post-modern philosophers have attempted to throw some light into the argument through the study of semantics, a field that gained renewed popularity in the second half of the twentieth century. Jacques Derrida, one of the foundations for Stuart Hall's work, dealt in his book *Of Grammatology* with the issue of "deconstruction", a framework through which he exposes the ideology and asymmetric power relations inherent in any text. Language, thus, became the study of the Western mythos and grand-narratives, which were crafted with the intention of maintaining a rigid cultural system of oppression. Language defines the "self", the identity, it bears power, and to control what others say of you or your group can shape hierarchies.

   Coming back to the previous question, Michael Hecht and Sidney Ribeau asked in a study carried out in the early 90s 69 undergraduates who self-identified as black about their perceptions on some of these labels. Their results suggest that for instance, "African-American" was most related to cultural superiority, "Black-American" to a blend of patriotism and ethnic pride, whereas "Black" emerged as the clearer preference among the students, maybe due to influence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.[3] However, the debate is not yet closed. For these researchers, language has real-life implications, and

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[3] For the purposes of this dissertation, the terms "black" and "African-American" will be used interchangeably for they are contextualized in a similar culture and time period.

argue that along with economic, historical and political reasons, the linguistic point of view grounds social interaction and determines one's world view.

On this note, Ta-Nehisi Coates notes in his book *Between the World and Me* how, from his perspective as an African-American, race is nothing more than social construct aimed at keeping blacks at the very bottom of social structures "race is the child of racism, not the father" (7). And researcher Barbara J. Fields argues that race cannot be thought of as the main factor that influences one's identity and, at the same time, a man should not be classified in a group because of his racial identity. The mixture between ethnicities, especially in a country like the United States, blurs any concrete lines that may have separated two individuals based on this criterion alone and, ultimately, race becomes a cultural label through which one group tries to take an advantage over the other. "The names that the African-American community has given itself are an attempt to … create a sense of peoplehood in opposition to the prevailing racial assignment" (49). Language is therefore linked to the production of meaning (see Stuart Hall's Circuit of Culture),[4] to being able to control one self's public image and, according to Davis and Oscar H. Gandy, to identity changes related to self-esteem.

This suggests that the role the media play is of extreme importance, given that language does not necessarily have to be verbal, but it can also refer to images and sounds and ultimately comprises communication as a whole. The media guide many social functions such as socialization, entertainment or even surveillance, and it is the lens through which one understand many issues that happen around the globe.

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[4] A theoretical framework that studies how meanings circulate in a society and in-between cultures. It involves representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation.

2. MEDIA PRODUCTION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

2.1. TRADTIONAL MEDIA

In African-American history the media have been extremely important for their development as an ethnic group. Sometimes, this tool has helped promote a certain agenda or it has been used to showcase nationwide the struggle of the community. For instance, *Selma* (2014) a film which tells the story of the activists that marched in Alabama to fight for their right to vote in 1965, discusses the impact the spread of televisions in American homes had, as the Civil Rights Movement shifted the frame from a Southern issue to a national emergency. The scene which takes places on Edmund Pettus bridge reminds the viewer how the presence of the cameras and reporters changed politics and helped promote their agenda against systemic racism. Similarly, the "Blaxploitation" film era in the 1970s, a movement which sought to change the portrayal of black people on screen from criminals to protagonists and heroes, shed a more positive and diverse light on black characters. Or *Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People*, a documentary which summarizes the evolution of black photography through a family album, reminds the spectator about past struggles and the flourishment of black culture in the 1920s (Harlem Renaissance).[5]

However, the media do not necessarily act as impartial arbiters on all the issues they cover. The fallacy that media help democracies by making citizens more participative was refuted in the book which Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman co-wrote in 1988, *Manufacturing Consent*, by analyzing a series of "filters" through which the original information passes, which inevitably corrupts the final product. Through this lens, one of the main criticisms traditional media receive from the black community has to do with the filter of ownership: the fact that there are predominantly white directives, along with the problem of the concentration of the media business in an ever-smaller oligopoly makes it difficult to tell certain stories.

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[5] The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement that is considered by many critics a rebirth in the American arts: a new chapter in black history whose aim was to use culture – music or literature, for instance – to promote a new black identity and racial integration. It spanned from around 1920 to 1930 and had also influence overseas, especially in Paris.

For Kulaszewicz this means that discrimination in the media may have enduring consequences in one's perception of reality. It portrays stereotypes and affects negatively how blacks are seen in society, as it happens, for example in the film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915),[6] where she argues that the "Negroes" were mainly portrayed as brutes. Her research suggests that blacks tend to be worse represented than their counterparts, especially when associated with crime.

As Princeton University professor Melissa Harris-Lacewell notes on her interview for "Big Think", while academics know a great deal about a few topics, journalists know very little about a many topics. By consistently repeating the same information, be it true or false, they may create social truths, statements that are socially accepted as true, though never checked. On this note, the *New York Times* wrote in 1993 an issue about "Black Life on TV: Realism or Stereotypes?" where they provided a balanced view on the issue of TV representation in the 90s: on the one hand, some Africa-American artists demanded a more accurate portrayal of blacks, which moved away from the colorful sidekick, the black athlete, the slave or the magical negro; a view that did away with suburban life, drugs, guns and rapper gangsters. On the other hand, media owners defended themselves by saying that television has never been realistic as it focuses on the extremes, on what sells "for years, blacks said that they wanted to see serious dramas about their lives, but dramas have a price. Dramas don't get told about people whose lives are perfect". But at the same time, that is not to say that there are no positive portrayals of black characters to be found, some even directed by black directors themselves, as it happened with the film *Selma*. The problem with stereotypes is that they are a way to simplify the world, a means to reduce complexity. As Mr. Riggs, a documentary filmmaker featured in the NYT article, states "it is only when people look back that they can see them for what they are and wonder, how could they have been amused by this [stereotype(s)]?"

Nevertheless, the issue of analyzing representation is not only limited to the media themselves, but also to the viewer. Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter along with Jessica L. Davis and Oscar H. Gandy Jr. provide an account of past studies that, depending on the

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[6] *The Birth of a Nation* is a motion picture from 1915 with tells the story of two families during the Civil War Era with relevant cultural significance due to the historical events which surround the story, like the assassination of A. Lincoln and the birth of the KuKluxKlan.

data, shed a more positive or negative light upon African-Americans. The viewer is not a powerless victim that absorbs everything that is shown on a TV. "When first-hand knowledge is not present, television images have a huge effect on viewers' perceptions" (Davis and Gandy 244), but according to cultivation and selective exposure theory, the viewer has the ability to choose what to watch, and what information to believe. For example, Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter's study suggests that for undergraduate students, the media they consume is more or less realistic in its depiction of black portrayals, due to the fact that with the turn of the century there have been more diverse representations and less stereotypical roles. However, is this the only reason behind the change in the perception of "blackness"?

2.2. NEW MEDIA

Maybe another interpretation has to do with the turning point in content consumption over these last two decades: Whereas during the second half of the twentieth century TV was the main medium through which Americans received information – American households have amassed an ever-growing number of TVs, even though the average size of people per household has been steadily declining since the 1960s – (*Statistica* 2018) the development of the smartphone has allowed each individual to potentially become a "content creator", and share videos, images and sounds through social media, which exponentially increases the quantity and speed of information users receive on a daily-basis. It is not just traditional media who dictate the rules, but everyone can be a participant in a newsworthy event. Thus, it is also the algorithms, whose task is to personalize information, who are probably in part responsible for the changing image of the black man.

In fact, this has been the bedrock foundation on which new forms of activism have rooted their protests: Black Lives Matter (BLM), a movement which originated within the African-American community following the death of Trayvon Martin,[7] takes advantage of

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[7] Travyon Martin was a black teenager who died in 2012 at the hands of George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch. One evening he saw the 17-year-old walking alone and thought it was suspicious. After a discussion he shot him in the chest.

social media to spread awareness and push for campaigns against police brutality, the prison industrial complex, housing inequalities and systemic racism, among other issues.

On this note, Adamson describes the potentiality these new media have by following similar protests in Ferguson[8]: traditional media, he argues, restricts the conversation by controlling the situation. After the event, the media brought their own experts who came from institutions such as the legal or law enforcement systems and, according to the author, polarized the issue by identifying protestors and Mr. Brown as thugs (192-193). He suggests this might have influenced the jury's decision not to prosecute the policemen involved in the killing and that it perpetuates a stereotypical image of black as a crook. Instead, thanks to social networks, users were able to share their own images of the riots, post their comments and objections, and present an alternative view to that of the main TV channels. The video of the killing, "I can't breathe", went viral and functioned as the spark that ignited the rebellion on the streets.

Their discourse, primarily echoed within the younger generation, most familiarized with technology and more willing to criticize society's failures, has spread into newspapers, TV and even films: for example, *Vox Media*, an online left news organization, released a video – "American segregation, mapped at day and night" – where they mapped the disparities in American cities between whites and blacks, and provided data to show how neighborhoods are still segregated, hinting at racial discrimination as the main cause behind the issue. *Black Lives and Police Tactics Matter*, by researchers Kramer, Remster and Charles, presents data on police brutality and argues that even though the arrest of black youngsters has decreased in recent years, there is still a big gap between black and white teenagers, where the former are much more likely to be thought of as criminal by the police. In her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, professor and lawyer Michelle Alexander, for her part, has argued that the private prison system promotes the mass incarceration of blacks. Or recent motion pictures like *12 Years of Slavery*, *Moonlight* and *Greenbook* are an attempt in the arts field to recognize minorities marginalized within the hegemonial culture, show their struggle and change social attitudes

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[8] The Ferguson riots, Missouri, were a series of protests, both pacific and violent which took place on the 9th August 2014 as a response to the killing of Michael Brown. The conflict sparked a debate on police brutality and the relationship between African-Americans and State violence.

not only towards the black man, but also towards minorities discriminated due to their religion or sexual orientation.

2.3. POST-RACIAL AMERICA

The election of Barack Obama was accepted by some as a change in politics: the beginning of a post-racial America.[9] Needless to say, he embodied the "American Dream" because he lived it, and symbolized the blend between the black myth started by Martin Luther King (he was the man to take the black folk out of the biblical land of oppression, like Moses) and the white myth (the descendants of the pilgrims who also sought freedom). "Yes, We Can!", "Yes, We Can!" His rhetoric integrated all ethnicities alike and his symbolism pointed towards the future, towards progress, like the turning of a page (Charteris-Black 280-286, 288-289, 291-292).

However, the dream lived short. "The term *post-racial* seems an errant phrase. In order for there to be a *post-racial* America, there must previously have been a *racial America*", writes Amina Gautier (4), and argues with the example: "A poster for the College Republicans depicted President Obama as the Joker … The poster was – and is – as undoubtedly "racial" as any picture of a black man in whiteface must be … a man who disguises his face while he commits acts of robbery, burglary and murder." Or for instance, Alison Landsberg, who provides an analysis of the TV series *Westworld*, still finds racism deeply rooted in the mind of America: "Most important, for the black woman, the issue of consciousness has never been on the table. It is only the characters played by white people who are imaged to have limitless potential. Under the guise of being race neutral, or multicultural, the show tacitly affirms white supremacist ideologies" (202). For both of these authors, post-racial is a term thrown by conservatives to disguise their true ideology, to forget their discriminatory past.

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[9] According to David A. Hollinger, post-racial can be defined as "a possible future in which the ethnoracial categories central to identity politics would be more matters of choice than ascription ; in which mobilization by ethnoracial groups would be more a strategic option than a presumed destiny attendant upon mere membership in a group; and in which economic inequalities would be confronted head-on, instead of through the medium of ethnorace" (175).

It is only through activism that representation of minorities can change, as Landsberg argues by giving an account of the new Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture: "The museum thus creates the occasion for white people to confront the violence that white, and white supremacy, have inflicted on Blacks" (206), and that Dana A. Williams reaffirms, "We must see the black body as a metaphor for the larger body politic … But just as the body politic is perpetually under assault … we must be in a perpetual state of awareness of ongoing structural oppression" (842).

Hence, BLM becomes the platform from which those who feel silenced by the system can fight both, censorship and socially constructed values imposed by the dominant culture, with the scope of working towards a more open and diverse society that moves away from prejudice, hate and racism. In the words of Bell Hooks "those of us who are progressive, who are more critically conscious and aware, not construct hierarchies wherein we separate ourselves from those who are still held in bondage by dominator thinking. For we will not convert or change folks without extending the forgiveness and compassion that is essential for the building of communities of solidarity." (123)

3. DISCUSIONS ON IDENTITY

3.1. IDEOLOGICAL CONFRONTATION IN THE ACADEMIA

Discussions on identity, culture and politics are rather complex. While new media has become the privileged medium through which activists fight against traditional media malpractices and inequalities, the discourse that revolves around these issues is not one-sided. In the first place, Valentina Martino alerts about the unintended consequences social networks can cause: on the one hand, users develop their identity not just in the real world, but also online, which has become the source from which they extract meaning and symbols; on the other, it may transform said identity into narcissism, because of the close relationship one develops with social networks. The media brings us closer to situations that are not common in everyday life: wars, poverty, disasters… They recontextualize an event by taking away certain elements of the narrative, which might be dangerous due to fact that the mediated world also plays a part in building our identity, not just the face-to-face interactions Goffman described. The user must become responsible for the content he or she consumes due to the puzzle of symbols one is exposed to.

Secondly, to some, the ideology that guides culturalist scholars and the movement BLM, for instance, seems preposterous. Recently, one team of researchers has made headlines (Melchior, "Fake News Comes to Academia"; Egginton,"What the 'Grievance Studies' Hoax Really Shows") for seeking to criticize the bedrock foundation on which these social movements are rooted: scholarly journals. In a video behind the scenes ("Academics Expose Corruption in Grievance Studies"), James A. Lindsay, Helen Pluckrose and Peter Boghossian, the authors of the project, explained how their intention is to critically analyze the ideas that run through post-modern ideology and expose them for corrupting academia by writing fake papers which subtly mock of disciplines such as Gender Studies or Post-Colonial Studies to verify whether they would be accepted into respected journals. As they explain in several interviews ("Joe Rogan Experience #1191 - Peter Boghossian & James Lindsay"; "Interview with the Grievance Studies Hoaxers") the problem with the ideology becomes apparent when "guilt" is the original sin and new morals of "openness" and "diversity" are sacred. Post-modernism questions everything and believes in nothing. But

unlike religious groups whose reasoning comes down to faith, these disciplines believe in the knowledge acquired through journals and academic papers, researchers and activists. Knowledge that, rather than coming from a hypothesis that builds towards an informed conclusion, begins from an already planned idea around which the paper is crafted. Intersectionality, argues Haidt ("The Perilous State of the University: Jonathan Haidt & Jordan B Peterson."), has become a religious-like symbol that, when taken to the extreme, constrains discourse, as seen in the university riots promoted against figures such as professors Jordan Peterson or Bret Weinstein, whose origins can be traced to social media posts from student activists.

And thirdly, Thomas Sowell[10] attempts to provide a balanced view on disparities and their causes, particularly income, education and employment inequalities regarding the African-American community: is racism the only factor that causes social disparities?

> At the end of a spectrum of explanations offered is the belief that those who have been less fortunate in their outcomes are genetically less capable. At the other end is the belief that those less fortunate are victims of other people who are more fortunate. But whatever the particular explanation offered, there seems to be general agreement that the disparities found in the real world differ greatly from what might be expected by random chance (5)

However, there is a vast range of explanations that fall in-between these extremes. which can be analyzed through the lens of probability. To think that by eliminating all cultural biases all people will become equal is foolish, but oversimplifying statistical data is even more so.

According to the author, the most common type of discrimination is not the one in which people are solely based on preconceived notions, but rather, a type of discrimination in which the person is judged as an individual except when the cost is too high. Would someone hire a teenager if he/she belongs to a demographic that is usually the most violent in society? That is not to say that the discriminator does not pay a price, further from the truth, actually: in competitive markets employers cannot afford to discriminate a person just on subjective opinions if his or her skills are above average, for he risks losing the edge in the market. To give an example, in Apartheid South Africa – arguably one of the most

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[10] Thomas Sowell is a liberal economist and contributor at the Hoover Institution, Standford University, and one of the main figures who fights against political correctness through a rational analysis of economics

segregated and racist societies of the twentieth century – where laws were enforced to prevent hiring more than a certain number of blacks in the housing sector, employers would prefer to be fined for breaking the law and employing more black people than allowed so as to keep being competitive.

However, biases do not equal discrimination. For example, when racial segregation in neighborhoods is interpreted as racism one must turn to data: when people are allowed to choose their residence without external factors forcing a certain distribution, they sort themselves out quite regularly, it turns out. When Italian immigrants moved to the US from Genova, Naples and Sicily they did not blend with the existing community; instead, they chose to live with those who came from their own city. Or, for instance, Germans who settled in the nineteenth century New York divided themselves between Hessians and Prussians. Then, why should black and white disparities in residential areas be considered discrimination?

Moreover, if turning to data has opened the discourse to more possibilities when dealing with housing issues, what does it have to say about police brutality, one of the recurrent demands for justice heard on the streets of say, Ferguson? On this note Larry Elder, a radio commentator and conservative thinker has expressed in his many books that there is a tendency to associate with race certain issues that have little to do with it. In a recent interview ("Real Racism and "Bogus" Black Lives Matter (Larry Elder Interview)"), he spoke about the fact that one of the reasons why African-Americans are more frequently targeted by the police is because they commit the majority of the crimes in the country. In fact, according to his statements, police officers are more afraid to target black people because they do not want to be associated with racial profiling, according to the Elder. How come some activists speak of systemic racism when Baltimore, one of the cities in which protestors took the streets to fight the police in 2015, has a black major elected with 85% of the vote? When the top two officials running the police department were black? When the command staff was majority black? When all city council is democrat and majority black? And when the state attorney is a black woman? (10.10 – 12.54)

Racism has played a role in history. Still does, unfortunately. But when seeking to prove a hypothesis, it should be just one more factor to consider, not the sole explanation it can be

given of why African-Americans lack behind in some regards in comparison with the rest of races that constitute the American society. As Thomas Sowell argues, one must not twist the relationship between cause and effect if the policies which are supposed to target and solve the problem do the opposite: after the Civil Rights Movement, subsequent presidents have attempted to target different social issues, like poverty or drugs.[11] In 2002, president Bush signed into law the "No Child Left Behind" Act, which gave more power to the central government to hold schools accountable for the proficiency of their students, especially black ones, who tended to score lower on average. The intentions were good, and the idea was to help those who lagged behind, but the results have been counterproductive and not significant. Liberal intervention into social affairs, suggests Sowell, has caused more harm than positive outcomes, because such policies help the leaders of minority groups, instead of the people they claim to support. "Being understanding or non-judgmental toward a young person from a culturally limited background may seem humane, but it can be the kiss of death, as far as the individual's future is concerned" (118).

3.2. POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Thus, if it is true that there are different reasons to prove why blacks are targeted more often by the police or why they live in separated neighborhoods, it is of extreme necessity that dialogue be the means to discuss controversial issues so as not to fall on simplistic analysis. However, Purves argues that while new media has promoted the positive ideas of protecting and respecting minority groups, when taken rather seriously, it actually achieves the opposite, that is, it shuts discourse by imposing a moral code, to which critics refer to as political correctness (PC).

But PC was not invented by the media. Instead, it was amplified by it. According to Larry Scanlon, in his debate with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, PC in itself does not exist, since the term, which quickly became a satire of Stalin's regime in the 1960s, was a caricature used by those who criticized the "party line". Nevertheless, even if it was disavowed by the

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[11] The "War on Poverty", for example, was an initiative promoted by president Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 to combat economic inequalities through the increased involvement of the federal government in health and education.

left in the 1990s, its legacy is still felt in the public sphere when dealing with sensitive topics such as identity or race.

Political correctness may be used a tool to move the discussion away from certain issues instead of facing them, as George Carlin famously mocked in his stand-up comedy bits "7 words you can't say on TV" and "Euphemisms and Political Correctness" –"smug, greedy, well-fed white people have invented a language to conceal these sins" – (6.39 – 6.44), he mentioned in the latter. And instead of believing in each person to be responsible enough for their own actions, PC taken to the extreme imposes a preliminary set of norms to prevent a potential incident with a victim; the only problem is that "this a kafkaesque world in which more often than not you do not know the rules until you have violated them" (Fox-Genovese and Larry 10). "The strong must not bully the weak, but if we set up structures to protect the weak, those structures must not turn into bullies themselves." (Purves 50)

But at the same time, this does not mean that one should disregard the impact language may have on people. Hate speech does exist, but it is about how it is defined, how it is regulated and who regulates it, because even if said regulation comes from the best intentions, it may produce an unintended effect (Nelson). As philosopher Slavoj Žižek notes, in order for democracies to work they have to be open to criticism. Humor and satire are necessary to prevent political correctness from becoming a form of totalitarianism.

3.3. THE ROLE OF HUMOR IN IDEOLOGICALLY-CHARGED DISCOURSES

Now, visions on humor are diverse. From psychology or sociology to philosophy and medicine humor is understood as a social and culturally contextualized phenomenon that allows people to play with reality. Comedians' job consists, in the most basic sense, on shaping the perspective of a situation that is familiar to the audience (Robinson and Lynn). However, opinions vary when studies seek to analyze how audiences react to a joke. On the one hand, humor may be understood as a social and cultural phenomenon that determines social worth and, ultimately, identity, for it is a means to include or exclude someone of a group. By joking about sensitive topics, the comedian perpetuates hierarchies and prevents disempowered groups of ever achieving the same social status as the dominant group

(Mauldin). On the other, as Key and Peele discuss, to choose not to make fun of someone is equivalent to discrimination.

I argue that if the ideology that guides one's thoughts forbids oneself, or even worse, other people to make certain jokes it is essentially a form of censorship. Comedy is a means to deal with harsh problems, with difficult situations; comedy functions as a stress-relief and helps us cope with life. The boundaries of free speech are very thin and distinguishing between hate speech and a joke is difficult. But the solution can never be to restrict the conversation on certain issues such as race just because someone can be offended. We must believe in each person to be responsible for their actions, since imposing a set of preliminary norms of conduct seems rather undemocratic. Thanks to the work of stand-up comedians like Louis CK, Bill Burr or Doug Stanhope there is a constant fight to redefine what is socially acceptable and what is not, and I believe Key and Peele continue exploring this conflict through their humor.

4. KEY AND PEELE: HUMOR AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele are a pair of experienced comedians. From their beginnings in Mad TV, a comedy TV network, to their most recent projects, which involve film and theatre, both actors have become aware of the kind of response they generate. Their job involves finding humor in issues that might affect someone at a personal level, including racial identity for instance, but even though they realize that sometimes it is difficult to bring some topics on the table, they believe it is their duty to talk about them. In an interview Peele gave to CBS Sunday Morning ("”Get Out” writer-director Jordan Peele on race”) he stated: “my art is exploring what African-American is and means. You know, not having my father around to guide me in what that means I think left me with a lot to question and explore.” A question that has taken both comedians on a journey to explore identity, culture and race relations in present-day America's political landscape through their hit sketch series *Key & Peele*.

In their 4-year run, Key and Peele have impersonated many ethnicities such as native Americans or Indians, or characters whose stereotypes are associated with the black community, be it thugs, athletes or jazz musicians, to name a few. Thus, they are crossing the boundaries of what is socially acceptable and opening the door for a discussion about race and the power of the media to challenge ideas:

> In *Key & Peele*, [I realized] (J. Peele) the power of sketch to help start and inform conversation. I'm a true believer in story. I think when you just tell people to think, people tend to get resistant and defensive, and feel like you're accusing them of not thinking. But when you tell a story, and you draw them in through allowing them to see through the eyes of a different person. (Bishop, “Get Out Director Jordan Peele Wants to Change People's Minds with Horror Movies”)

One of the most effective ways the show starts delineating their notion of African-American identity is through the topic of slavery. In the few sketches that deal with the past, the show seems to draw from the body of work known as “slave narratives”, a type of genre written by former slaves from the British colonies who sought to raise awareness about the brutality of slavery through their biographies. In particular, the biographical writings of Frederick Douglass can be connected with two sketches, “Confederate Reenactors” and “Ancestry.com”, for each one presents a different argument against the wrong doings of slavery.

20

In the former skit, the viewer is introduced to a group of reenactors giving a speech about "the Southern way of life" which they define as beautiful and free from tyranny. Suddenly, Key and Peele appear in the background dressed as slaves, singing songs and acting as if they are picking cotton. The reenactors stop and get angry at them for not letting them remember their past "we're just here to preserve the pure and beautiful slice of Southern history". However, the spectator is aware of the troublesome nature which characterizes the "Southern way of life". As with many historical events, it is as beautiful or gruesome as the narrator of the story wants it to be, and depending on the side of the narrative, the fight against freedom has different protagonists: either the Confederate army against the Union Army, or the African-American slaves against their Southern masters. The ironic way in which Key and Peele behave begs the question, how can it be that a country founded on the value of liberty negated for so many centuries the most basic rights to a part of its population? How could it be so hypocrite it blinded itself from obvious wrong doings? As Douglass himself said in his speech of the Fourth of July:

What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men … to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? … To him [the slave], your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity … mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy.

Whereas the latter case, "Ancestry Website" takes the concept of analyzing DNA as an opportunity to denounce slavery as an institution, but more specifically, slave owners. In the sketch, in the format of an advertisement, every participant mentions a famous person they are related to. Ironic and coincidentally, all black people happen to be related to Thomas Jefferson. The comedy lies in a tragic practice in which owners would maintain sexual intercourse with their slaves, the result of which were illegitimate biracial children. In such cases the mother and the son would often be separated and sent to different plantations as described in Frederick Douglass' narrative, where he mentions to have never met his father, although he suspects he might have been his mother's master. The sketch also intends to show through humor the dark side, judging by today's standards, of one of

the most representative figures of America's democracy, who even though stood for the right to be free from tyranny, did not apply the same ethics to black slaves.

Now, the show seems to draw a connection between slavery and contemporary African-American issues. As columnist Rochelle Riley writes for *USA Today*, slavery is still rooted at the very bottom of American politics and it is an issue of great shame. Many do not even want to address it, while others may be tempted to think that the scar is healing. However, according to the journalist "slavery's long legal existence created the American caste system that endures today, one that maintains a false white superiority and black inferiority built on an unfair education system, unfair employment system and social institutions that support this notion while appropriating black language, music and fashion". So how does *Key & Peele* reflect on present-day African American identity?

At the individual level, probably one of the better examples and the sketch that lays the foundation to better understand their political humor might be "Obama's anger translator". In the skit, Key, who plays the interpreter of the former president, is charged with the task of translating to the audience his underlying frustration. He wears exuberant rings in both hands, exaggerates his gestures and talks with a thick African-American accent ("hey, all y'all dictators out there, keep messin' around and see what happens"). The sketch became so popular, in fact, that the real Barack Obama featured Key during the White House Correspondents' Dinner event in 2015, where both reenacted their parts as a running joke. Now, the comedy lies in the fact that Obama never "gets angry" as it is explained during the first seconds of the short, so that Luther, Key's character, can provide a provocative insight into the mind of the president. According to Guerrero, the deeper social commentary is found in the explicit representation of the "twoness" which characterizes the African-American soul – the concept put forward by professor Du Bois – which separates the body and mind of black man into two unreconciled spheres: "performative black anger is funny and acceptable, but real black anger is crazy and threatening" (271).

But at the same time, *Key & Peele* introduces the notion of a strong African-American community as a push back to a dominant culture that seeks to divide the individual. Identity is hence, not only understood in isolation, but mainly, as a relationship with other races and cultures. For instance, the character of Obama is used with versatility in the sketch "Obama

meet and greet", where Obama, played by Peele, is utilized as a means to develop the idea of brotherhood among black people. In the first scene, the president finishes a press conference by greeting his supporters. Those who are white receive a standard handshake, while those who are black hug him emotionally: "started from the bottom, now we're here! shouts Obama himself making a reference to class struggle and hierarchies in society. However, one key moment that subtly reveals the intricacies of talking about race, and which may be discuss the notion of race understood as a cultural construct, is when Peele meets Key in the line, but he is unsure of his blackness due to the color of his skin, which happens to be lighter. One security guard whispers "1/8th black", his facial expression relaxes and finally hugs Key much like he has done with the rest of the African-Americans.

Connecting onto the notion of community "Soul Food" presents a pair of friends that meet in a traditional African-American restaurant because they find it reminiscent of their old neighborhoods. However, instead of sticking to the menu, they engage in a competition to order the most "traditional" dish they can think of, to the point where they are served a human foot. Now, the jokes poke fun at how Southern food, particularly Soul Food, is usually considered unhealthy and sometimes made from food scraps (some staple dishes are fried chicken or grilled ribs), but it also shows the cultural bonding through traditional food:

> Contemporary memories of soul food or black southern cuisine are linked to notions of family, love, and community— to the idea that black people, struggling under the yoke of slavery and the post-slavery experiences of sharecropping, Jim Crow racism, migration north, and discrimination could at least rely on the comforts of the traditional foods that solidified their relationships with one another in the face of adversity (Nettles 108).

Moreover, the geographical origins of the cuisine also draw parallels with the Great Migration, a period between 1916 and 1970 where six million of African-Americans left the "Deep South" – former Confederate States" – into the rest of the country hoping for a better life. The journey brought several cultural practices to all parts of the country which still resonate very dearly with many black families no matter where they live, for they symbolize a response against a system of systematic abuse towards the black man. These practices range from a strong sentiment towards religion and the black Church as a platform for celebration and activism, particularly during the Civil Rights Era (depicted in the

sketch "Georgina and Esther and Satan"); to a particular characteristics in their speech, also known as "African-American dialect"; to the very example portrayed in "Soul Food", cuisine.

And also, music particular to the African American community is featured throughout the show. Even if they are not as insightful as other sketches, "Scat Duel" and "Mc Mom" are worth mentioning for they present black characters singing melodies from two different time periods, the 1920s jazz, and the 1990s hip hop. And the fact that the latter derives from the former paints an arch that shows the evolution of the genres and how they responded to the needs of each era, being rap the more significative of the two because of its social commentary (N.W.A., for instance, a rap group from the 1990s, became famous for songs such as "Fuck da Police", which protested against what they defined as a rigged system).

Yet the show does not only depict the flourishment of a culture, but at the same time, race tensions and inequalities. In *Key & Peele*, the specter of racism seems to be very much alive and it still conditions how ethnic groups interact with one another. For instance, making use of Obama once again, the show intends to start a conversation about police abuses towards blacks, alluding at recent events such as the death of Trayvon Martin, whose case is directly linked to BLM. In the sketch "Obama teaches Malia to drive", the show places the character of Obama inside of the presidential car with her daughter. When she drives past a stop sign, a police car stops them, but the moment the policeman realizes that it is the president and her daughter, he is willing to let them go. Obama argues back and, intending to give a lesson to her daughter, asks the officer to treat him the way he would if he were not the president. Cut to the next shot and Obama is handcuffed with his face against the vehicle ("not exactly what I had in mind").

Similarly, "NegroTown" introduces Key as a young black man in a dark alley at night. Suddenly, a police car approaches and confronts him, and even though he follows the officer's instructions he is arrested. When he is about to be put into the car, he hits his head with the vehicle and starts hallucinating. Then, a homeless, Peele, who happened to be sleeping in the alley, comes to the rescue, talks to the officer and gets him released. Still confused, Key is taken to a parallel world, Negrotown, where blacks are able to roam free of discrimination as if it were a utopia set in the 1930s Hollywood. In the form of a

musical, the sketch parodies the only white society portrayed in classical films by singing about the benefits of an only black society: they are not attacked for wearing their "hoodies" and can apply for loans without fear of being rejected for the color of their skin. However, when he wakes up, he realizes that it was just a dream and the policeman puts him again in the car, making a commentary about the improbability of ever achieving a truly post-racial society.

The skit mainly proposes two arguments. On the one side, the parody of the Hollywood set is a clear allusion to a pre-Civil Rights Era where the industry purposely discriminated on blacks. A clearer example might be the sketch "Dad's Hollywood Secret", in which Key shows an old film reel of his recently deceased father of when he worked as an actor in Hollywood. To his horror, the film shows Peele, who interprets the father, in a variety of degrading jobs from the 20s and 30s era like a shoe cleaner, or even just role-playing as a savage in the jungle or a pie-thief. Low-skilled and unable to speak proper English, he embodied the distorted idea white society at the time had of blacks ("I'll shine your shoe blacker than my mamma's booty"). And on the other, the funniest joke of the sketch, but also the saddest commentary comes in the punchline, which alludes to the protests against the mass incarceration of blacks: "wait I thought I was going to NegroTown", "Oh, you are".

And for its part, "Pegasus Sighting" provides another interesting perspective on race tensions by looking into the "ghetto", i.e. inner cities, to denounce the worse conditions in which lower-income citizens, a majority of them black, are deprived of basic services. Much like Dave Chappelle had done before in his stand up "Killing them Softly" by joking about rough suburbs and the crack epidemic – which hit especially hard to black people in the suburbs –, *Key & Peele* offers comedy, although less provocative, about people living in the worst conditions. In this skit, a news team approaches a group of black people asking them whether they have seen a flying horse, Pegasus, with the scope of creating a false story by taking advantage of less-educated people. As expected, the neighbors follow the story along and start fabricating a tale for the news team just because they want to get featured on national television. They sell merchandise, organize a hunter team to shoot it down and even try to blame the creature for the poor conditions the neighborhood is in. At

the end, conflicts of interest arise among the participants and start fighting each other, an opportunity the news team takes to report on the violent behavior of blacks.

However, "Pegasus sighting" is not the only sketch that criticizes the practices of the media. Whereas this skit raises concerns about how the media may disrupt communities by framing the blacks in the narrative as violent, others fight for a more positive portrayal of African-Americans by denouncing misrepresentations both, in the big and the small screen. Thus, Key and Peele present themselves as an alternative black voice in an overwhelmingly white media industry:

In "Magical Negro Fight", Key and Peele play with the stereotype of a black sidekick character that has secret magic powers. Spike Lee, a famous American director that has also fought for better black representation, coined the term "magical negro" when referring to films such as *The Green Mile* or *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, which became so famous that the title alone is enough to understand the main theme of the skit.. These motion pictures follow a tradition in American cinema of writing black characters only as company to the white protagonist, alluding at how race has an impact in the building of social hierarchies. Their powers are never explained but serve as a device to aid the main lead progress in the story. In this specific example, we see the boss of a company in his office crying alone. When Key and Peele appear in the frame, they show empathy towards the man by giving him advice in the form of a proverb. Both dressed in working clothes, they have a smooth voice and talk with an anachronistic accent from the 1930s. However, once both realize they are "magical negroes" they engage in a battle to determine who should become the only one. The fight ends and the office is destroyed. A black cleaning lady walks into the room. Astonished, she turns towards the boss and tries to calm him down: "sometimes things have to come apart before we can put them back together again", she says repeating the speech pattern established previously. The boss, relieved exclaims, "oh, you're a magical negro too." Suddenly, her expression changes, she leans back and replies angrily: "who you callin' negro bitch?", thus, changing her accent and making the viewer aware on the shift of perspective towards race relations and language – since "negro" is understood as term related to slavery – over the last six decades.

Yet it is probably "Black Ice" the most representative sketch regarding mainstream media: whereas the previous short focused around stereotypes produced by the film industry, this one aims at deconstructing the news channels and how they deal with stories when black people are involved. In the first scene, two white anchors in a news set ask Key, the weatherman, to report on a cold front. They warn: "keep your loved ones safe and warn them to stay off the streets tonight because of menacing, life-robbing black ice", while showing a dark-colored picture of an ice cube wearing a cap backwards. Peele, the field reporter, immediately looks confused. The audience has already understood the joke: the way "black ice" is pronounced by the anchor team sounds like "black guys" and the association of adjectives (menacing, life-robbing) with "black ice" makes it easy to mentally associate the word with black thugs and neighborhood attacks. Moreover, the news team seems to parody Fox News, a traditionally conservative network, and the funniest, and also harsher criticism of the media might come from the fact that the anchormen do not even seem to notice that the report has an underlying racist tone, as if it was such a common practice to distort events to resemble racial issues to the point that they do not realize the image they are conveying. "A perfectly safe neighborhood can be suddenly terrorized by the appearance of black ice", reports the anchorman.

However, even though the media tries to make the connection between "black" and trouble-maker teen, Key and Peele make a powerful argument against some of the malpractices that characterize the media: "the city is being controlled by lots of oppressive white snow, making it hard for all people to advance. And we don't hear much news about that." The misinformation, the censorship, the use of stereotypes that fit the current narrative and the tendency to lean the stories towards the violent and dramatic side are all confronted through the comments they make against the anchormen. And at the same time, the way black identity is conveyed by both reporters, that is, Key and Peele, counters the simplistic analysis made by the news team: first, one of the ways they give more depth to the concept is through an allusion to the black Church (Key screams "hallelujah" while debating the anchormen); second, to slavery ("for the record, black ice never asked to be here"), alluding directly at the transportation of slaves in the Atlantic; and thirdly, to how a minority group can be silenced and destroyed by the dominant culture ("also one must

remember how hard it is for black ice to survive with what the authorities trying to destroy it … but black ice perseveres).

Now, even though critics and fans do not always share the same opinion with regards to the show, it is evident that *Key & Peele* sparked conversation in an ever-more divided society. In fact, once the TV series ended and both comedians parted ways to pursue their personal projects, it would be Jordan Peele out of the two actors the one who would become famous for continuing the work both had started back in 2012 through his recent films, *Get Out* and *Us*, which offered new perspectives on race tensions in a post-Obama era. The cleverness of the show lies in the way it presents its black characters: *Key & Peele* does not limit black experience to just a few roles, but by placing them in a variety of situations it offers a dynamic, ever changing view of the concept of identity (Cook 27-30), which is not only understood in isolation, but mainly, as a relationship with other races and cultures.

5. CONCLUSION

With this dissertation I have tried to provide insight into several relevant contemporary matters. First, identity, particularly related to the concept of "African-American", and culture have become so intertwined that sometimes identity is defined by the social group one belongs to. The notions of hierarchies, the relevance of history and the language one uses to describe the world have opened a debate about the very foundations of the Western mythos. Second, the media has become the battlefield from which these issues are discussed, and particularly new media, i.e. social networks, have gained relevance, due to the fact that everyone has the ability to become a content creator. This has opened the possibility to new forms of activism, such as BLM, that represents a decentralized movement which fights for the protection of minorities, whose lesser success is mostly blamed on racism. However, not all perspectives reflect the same ideology. To figures such as Thomas Sowell, even though racism may be the cause of said disparities, there are more factors that may affect an outcome, so one must be careful when analyzing the root causes of an issue so as not to jump on rushed conclusions. Moreover, one of the dangers these forms of activism may bring is a "mob mentality" which rather than solving the problem may censor it through political correctness. In this context, I have shown how comedy is used as a tool to engage in discourse about topics that are confrontational and unpleasant and, at the same time, show in which ways *Key & Peele* make an effective use of it, by refuting the notion that the language perpetuates hierarchies. The show, contextualized in a so-called "post-racial era", is more aligned with an activist point of view, but without falling into the trap of censorship. Identity, race relations, culture and the media are addressed by finding humor in the very arguments that cause controversy: an identity torn in two, police brutality, income disparities, media manipulation or slavery are at the very core of the show's spirit. These have become prevalent themes in the twenty-first century and the only way to properly resolve any issue that arise in society is through dialogue and reasoning.

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