THE COMEDY OF
DAVE CHAPPELLE
CRITICAL ESSAYS
***EDITED BY***
K.A. WISNIEWSKI
Ambiguity ... is a fundamental attribute of power.
— Georges Baladier

There can never be enough said of the virtues, dangers, the power of a shared laugh.
— Françoise Sagan
loyal friendship and enduring support. She has given the best pep talks, shared the longest laughs, and wiped the occasional tear. The book might not have been started without her faith and encouragement.

Lastly, my family has supported my career decisions in too many ways to list, and I appreciate everyone's support and understanding. Derek Boyd and Stacey Wisniewski Boyd listened to me talk about this project much longer than was really necessary. I thank them for listening and for getting me out of the office, and, especially to Stacey, for reminding me there was more to life than school. This project would have been impossible without the help of my parents. This certainly isn't the book they intended to read, but I am sure part of my interest in the topic is from my mother's fondness of Motown and Soul Train and my father's companionship during Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder movie nights as a child and his own interest in the Wayans Brothers' In Living Color. For your encouragement, love, and generosity, I am truly grateful.

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Introduction

K.A. Wisniewski

It is rare that only two years after the original airing of its final episode, a television series may already be named a milestone to our culture. But Chappelle’s Show is just that. In its two complete seasons, the sketch comedy has given its viewers more than a few short-lived laughs, though catch phrases such as “I’m Rick James, bitch” and “I smoke rocks” and sketches like the “Black White Supremacist” and “The Racial Draft” are hardly out of the public’s memory. One of the best-selling TV series DVD sets of all time, the show has provided us with some framework regarding who we are, what we have achieved, and what issues are still challenging us and not only reflects its own time’s mores but also serves as a rung on which future generations may climb.¹ This is only part of the legacy comedian Dave Chappelle offers us. Chappelle’s canon of work, stretching beyond television and into film, stand-up, and even music, is truly an archetypical model for postmodern America, both in its successes and in its struggles. His comedy lives in the ecstasy of communication, for good and for bad, and Chappelle is quick to celebrate the hyper-reality in which we live, to expose its tensions and absurdities, and to question and reject its meanings.² Although the show ended on such a controversial and anti-climactic note, today Chappelle is stronger than ever as demonstrated most recently in his early December 2007 record-setting stand-up performance at Hollywood’s Laugh Factory, which lasted over six hours.

Like his comedy, Chappelle has enthusiasm, endurance. So it was quite a shock to this fans when in April 2005 rumors circulated throughout the media that not only had the comedian abandoned the set of the show during the taping of the third season but that he had also apparently left for Africa. Why would such a budding young star with a successful show walk out on a $50 million deal? The public could not understand, and gossip quickly turned into new reports that claimed drug abuse and mental instability as possible answers. It was a media circus that only Chappelle himself could quell, and,
a joke, an off-the-cuff improvisation, which presents and subverts evidence through humorous slight-of-hand. The result is that Block Party visualizes the effort of ethnographic research; it demonstrates the irreducible excess in studying culture and acknowledges the moments of “thick” and “thin” description.

At the level of content, Block Party encourages ethnographers to embrace the constructedness of the social worlds we create by flaunting personal politics while also striving to create something that is bigger than one individual story, perspective or moment. Rather than mining for data, Dave Chappelle provides a model similar to participation action research as he works with musicians to construct an event, which perhaps above all, reminds them why they perform at all. And for the folks he encounters in Brooklyn and Dayton, he provides incentives reminiscent of the discourse on the practice of gift-giving as a means to address the power differential between informants and researchers. For ethnographers, Chappelle reminds us that part of the story we tell about a particular phenomena is about the interaction between researcher and informant. As the scene with the couple from the Broken Angel house suggests, it is from the disparate elements of living, through the exploration of the polyphonic and even cacaphonic voices of life, that we might perform diligently and sincerely the task of rendering the messiness of social interaction ethnographically accessible.

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Gramsci, Selling Out, and the Politics of Race Loyalty
Exploring Chappelle’s No-Show

AMARNATH AMARASINGAM

In late April 2005, with Chappelle’s Show at the height of its popularity and success, Dave Chappelle simply walked away. Rumors abounded about why he had left; some stated that he experienced a mental breakdown due to overwork while others in the media “reported” that he had checked himself into a drug rehabilitation facility. To the surprise of many, however, Chappelle resurfaced a few weeks later in Durban, South Africa, stating that he was on a spiritual retreat. By early June, he was back in the United States performing stand up. He started his sold-out Caesar’s Palace gig by sarcastically saying, “Thank you very much for welcoming me back to America.... In case you haven’t heard about me, I’m insane.” A darker theory, which thankfully has not gained much traction, also surfaced insisting that the public was being deceived. According to a popular conspiracy website supposedly created by a retired public relations executive, a secret cabal of African American “dark crusaders,” ranging from Oprah Winfrey and Bill Cosby to Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, schemed to ensure that the third season of the Chappelle’s Show would never happen. As the website notes, “Collectively, they felt Chappelle’s Show reinforced negative stereotypes about African Americans, and that its content was, in the words of group leader Bill Cosby ‘setting race relations back 50 years.’” The dark crusaders made threatening phone calls to his house and apparently had the power to ensure that all of his credit card transactions were declined. The theory goes on to point out that in March 2004, Chappelle was awaken in the middle of the night by a man sitting on his stomach holding a gun to his head. Oprah, standing bedside, leaned in and told Chappelle that he better “watch his step” because the dark crusaders have “more money than God” and can keep the harassment up forever. The the-
ory has been disproven as a viral marketing campaign but is still making the rounds through email and various message boards. The speculations began to die down as Chappelle returned to the United States and began granting interviews to explain in his own words what caused him to abandon his show so abruptly. It turned out that his reasons were less extraordinary and much more human. This chapter attempts to contextualize some of these reasons. Specifically, I argue that Chappelle is a Gramscian “organic intellectual” who left his wildly popular show because he was trapped in an environment that he felt was leading him to betray members of his community, and the obligations he had towards them. In other words, he feared that he was becoming a sellout and was shirking his responsibilities to the black community. As Randall Kennedy has argued, “the specter of the ‘sellout’ haunts the African American imagination.” However, a theoretical exploration of what it means to be a sellout and the process by which an individual becomes one has yet to be adequately explored. In this chapter, I use Antonio Gramsci’s writings on hegemony and the intellectual to reconceptualize the notion of the sellout. It is argued that as organic intellectuals gain popularity and become mainstream, they face the danger of being incorporated into the ruling class and are left with a decision to make. Chappelle’s decision was step back from the brink. After providing an overview of Gramsci’s writings on hegemony and the intellectual, I show how the notion of the sellout can be better understood in light of them. Finally, using interviews that Chappelle gave upon his return, as well as a scene from the Lost Tapes, I argue that Chappelle left his show predominantly to reassert his role as an organic intellectual who, through comedy, can negotiate with the hegemonic power structure on behalf of the black community.

Gramsci and Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci’s (1891–1937) writings on hegemony and organic intellectuals are based on earlier Marxist thought. Marxist notions of base/superstructure as well as ideology underwent a highly original and nuanced elaboration in Gramsci’s hands, which provided a particularly illuminating discussion of the importance of culture. In putting Hegel and Idealism “right side up,” Marx argued that ideas are not what drive human history; they are “nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.” He argues that the arena in which economic activity takes place, which he terms the “base” or “structure,” determines and influences everything that happens in the “superstructure” (the law, education, politics, etc.). As Jones notes, for Marx the “economic base is the most powerful and crucial level of social life. It is the base that brings the superstructure into being and which gives it its character.” The superstructure, in turn, maintains the workings of the base and conceals its true exploitative nature. For Marx, if society is to change, it must begin at the structural level, which for him amounts to a worker’s revolution. Changes in the superstructure, although they may be signs of progress, do not affect the exploitation of the working class and thus cannot be truly revolutionary.

Gramsci developed a more nuanced interpretation of the relationship between the base and the superstructure. He expanded the linear relationship of the two in Marxist thought and proposed that the base and superstructure have a dialectical relationship, constantly impacting “upon each other with no level assumed to be the primary level of determinacy.” Additionally, Gramsci divided the superstructure into two further categories: the state and the civil society. The state consists of coercive and state-funded bureaucratic enterprises such as the police force, the army, the civil service, educational institutions, etc. The civil society, for Gramsci, consists of other organizations, which are not part of the base (economic production) or the state, “but which are relatively long-lasting institutions supported and run by people outside of the other two major spheres.” These organizations range from religious institutions, women’s groups, and media organizations to youth groups, sports clubs, and environmental protection groups. It is important to keep in mind that any particular collective may shift the category to which it belongs or may, in some way, belong to more than one at any given period. The interrelationship between these three categories has been widely debated. As Bocock has noted, “Either the economic element does operate in some determining and specifiable way to affect the activities of the state and the organizations of civil society, or the state, and/or the components of civil society, can produce changes in the economic area.”

For Gramsci, then, society is made up of three elements: the base, which is the arena of economic production; the state, consisting of coercive groups like the police and armed forces; and the civil society. Marxist thought was a form of “economism” in that it was believed that “the economic base determines the ideological superstructures of religion, politics, the arts, law or education.” It is Gramsci’s emphasis on the other two aspects of society that distinguishes him from traditional Marxist thinkers. Traditional Marxism, according to Gramsci, over-emphasized the economic sphere and assumed that once “a change in the ownership of the main economic means of production, distribution and exchange has been accomplished there will be no major obstacles to a truly democratic, and free, society.” This contention, from Gramsci’s point of view, was flawed because it ignored the influence of other elements in society. Gramsci did not argue that the economic sphere
was now irrelevant; instead, he extended the analysis to explore the ways in which power was exercised in the state and the civil society. This exploration of the interaction between the three elements of society forms the basis for his writings on hegemony. Although an adequate definition of the term is elusive, Renate Holub provides a superb attempt:

Hegemony is a concept that helps to explain, on the one hand, how state apparatuses, or political society — supported by and supporting a specific economic group — can coerce, via its institutions of law, police, army and prisons, the various strata of society into consenting to the status quo. On the other hand, and more importantly, hegemony is a concept that helps us to understand ... how and where political society and, above all, civil society, with its institutions ranging from education, religion and the family to the microstructures of the practices of everyday life, contribute to the production of meaning and values which in turn produce, direct and maintain the "spontaneous" consent of the various strata of society to that same status quo. This is an important aspect of Gramsci's notion of hegemony — it is not maintained solely through institutions, beliefs and ideologies but through the "common sense" functioning of everyday life. As Raymond Williams has noted, "Hegemony is a lived system of meanings and values, not simply an ideology, a sense of reality beyond which it is, for most people, difficult to move, a lived dominance and subordination, internalized." Thus, hegemony is diffused throughout society in a system of values, morals, and attitudes. As the maintenance of the status quo becomes intimately tied to the mere functioning of everyday life, the ruling values take on a "natural" or "common sense" quality and become more difficult to challenge. For Gramsci, common sense is not a unified set of values instituted by every new group that comes to power. As he noted, common sense consists of "stratified deposits" left from previous philosophies containing "Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over."

One of the ways in which the fragmentary, yet powerful, nature of common sense can be challenged is by introducing counter-hegemonic ideas as "new sedimentations." For example, a potential revolutionary in the United States would not have much success if he or she suggested outright that voting should be done away with, the constitution should be scrapped, and a totalitarian way of government should be embraced. However, if such ideas were siphoned into society's "common sense," the revolutionary may have greater success. For Gramsci, this logic would function even for issues such as race, abortion, stem-cell research and environmentalism. As Landy states, "New meanings and new attitudes are in the process of being created alongside the old: change is constantly in the state of becoming just as dominant and traditional practices are constantly exerting their power." If a group wishes to challenge the prevailing common sense, in other words, they need to form a counter-hegemony. Since the majority of society accepts the current hegemony as common sense and as "the way things are done," counter-hegemonic struggle is difficult. This leads us into the discussion of intellectuals, who, for Gramsci, were crucial for the creation of a counter-hegemony.

The Organic Intellectual

As Giuseppe Vacca and others have argued, the notion of the intellectual is fundamental to understanding Gramsci's project. Gramsci's thoughts on the intellectual, however, are not uniform as they were developed throughout his life. He begins by noting that "all men are intellectuals" but "not all men have in society the function of intellectuals." He humorously states in a footnote that just because "everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or a tailor." What is considered to be an intellectual venture also changes throughout history. For example, cooking was not historically seen as an intellectual endeavor. In today's society, however, cooking is at some level mediated through "collective intellectuals" such as TV chefs and nutritionists who express "expert" opinions about how ingredients ought to be used, and how to make something healthy and aesthetically appealing. The seemingly mundane act of eating has also come to be largely mediated by intellectuals of etiquette, who convey "knowledge" about which forks ought to be used for particular dishes and how to place a napkin on one's lap. Such intellectual mediation eventually becomes part of society's "common sense" and dictates how things "ought to be done."

For Gramsci, there are two types of intellectuals: traditional and organic. Traditional intellectuals are those who are withdrawn from the mundane complexity of social life. They consider themselves to be independent of the dominant social group and believe themselves to be functioning outside of its influence. The clergy, professors and painters are good examples of traditional intellectuals. For Gramsci, although they wish to think of themselves as working outside of the dominant social group, traditional intellectuals are in fact always perpetuating their values. As Gramsci states, "The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government." Thus, for Gramsci, traditional intellectuals are not as independent from the ruling group as they would like...
to believe. It is important to note that traditional intellectuals were once organic to a particular group but "now appear to be autonomous of that class" and they may again become organic "to a class or cause if conditions threaten its autonomy."25 In other words, new issues may arise in society with which traditional intellectuals may choose to become involved. In fact, Gramsci argues that one of the first tasks of a counter-hegemonic initiative should be to "win over" the traditional intellectuals.

Organic intellectuals, on the other hand, arise within a new group and provide this new class of individuals with "homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but in the social and political fields."26 They must be equipped to convey the needs and desires of the community they represent and must recognize that they are products of this community, which has a vested interest in their representative ability. The modus operandi of these intellectuals must be to voice the interests of the group they stand for and "to inspire its self-confidence as an historical actor and to provide it with social, cultural, and political leadership."27 The education of a new "human mass" depends on the ability and leadership of organic intellectuals. As the group begins to organize itself, it depends on its intellectuals for "conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas."28 These individuals could be scholars and writers but, in contemporary society, could, as Adamson notes, be "journalists, publishers, television personnel, and everyone else associated with what is now sometimes called the 'culture industry'".29 Popular culture may at times be dismissed as "low culture" but the discourse that takes place within it often contributes to the marketplace of ideas. For example, as the American war in Iraq declines in popularity, antiwar groups do depend on scholars to articulate their viewpoints, but also turn to elements of popular television. In other words, Richard Clarke's Against All Enemies (2004) and Your Government Failed You (2008) may be important but equally significant are The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, and Real Time with Bill Maher for providing an "elaboration of ideas" with which to criticize the United States government.30

The comedian is particularly well positioned to serve as an organic intellectual, capable of satirically challenging the hegemonic common sense that exists around issues of race, gender, religion, etc.31 Comedians like Chris Rock, Paul Mooney, Russell Peters, Margaret Cho, and Dean Obeidallah are a few examples of organic intellectuals who challenge the stereotypes and common sense beliefs held about their respective ethnic groups. At the same time, they communicate to their own communities the worldviews expressed by the ruling class in order to achieve, through parody and satire, a relational equilibrium between both sectors of influence.

For example, Chappelle in his controversial skit "Reparations 2003" (Season One; Episode 4) pokes fun at members of the black community who are "trying to get paid for the work of [their] forefathers." He states that if African Americans ever do receive reparations, they will need to get together and "come up with a plan for the money." The sketch explores what some members of the black community may do with the money if they receive it without understanding the historical and political context in which it is given. After Congress approves over a trillion dollars in reparations, the sketch reports that there are enormous line-ups in front of liquor stores, that Sprint stock has "skyrocketed after the news that 2 million delinquent phone bills have been paid just this morning," the price of chicken has risen to six hundred dollars a bucket, eight thousand record labels have been started in the last hour, and 3 million Cadillac Escalades were sold in one afternoon. These reports are quickly followed by a sharp critique when the white reporter states: "It's incredible, Chuck, these people just seem to be breaking their necks to get this money right back to us." In the sketch, Chappelle criticizes what he perceives to be the materialism of some members of the black community who would do little of substance with the reparations money. Aside from record labels, black businesses would not be formed and most of the money would be given right back to white-owned corporations.

Comedians like Chappelle can offer such powerful commentary particularly because they reside in a separate cultural sphere in which certain kinds of expression are expected and permitted. This does not mean, however, that these "jokes" lack social consequence. One would only need to watch the guerrilla attacks of comedians like Bill Hicks to understand their social significance. In fact, it is particularly because comedians communicate through what Mintz calls a "publically protected" mode of expression that they have the potential to say what the politician cannot.32 The comedian, as organic intellectual, can use humor "to expose chauvinism, to expose ineptitude, to expose oppression, and to expose pretentiousness."33 Majken Sorensen has even gone so far as to argue that comedy could be a "powerful strategy of nonviolent resistance to oppression... in a different way than traditional resistance."34

An example of such nonviolent resistance can be seen in Chappelle's spoof of Law & Order (Season 2; Episode 5). Chappelle criticizes the "two legal systems" that exist in America, which allows CEOs of "major corporations [that] rip everybody off" to receive very little jail time. The sketch switches the situation around: a police officer phones a cocaine dealer, Tron, at home and informs him that a warrant is out for his arrest. Wanting to avoid being "embarrassed in front of his family," Tron offers to turn himself in "around Thursday" between 2 and 6 p.m. He testifies in front of the Senate committee and is given one month at "Club Fed." The CEO, on the other
hand, is violently arrested after police break down his door and shoot his dog. He is then granted an overworked legal aid lawyer who states, "your like my fourteenth case this week" and is given life in prison by a jury of "his peers" consisting of seven African Americans wearing baggy jeans, jewelry, and sweat suits. This sketch keenly highlights the manner in which organic intellectuals like Chappelle challenge the hegemonic structure at work, pointing out that societal values like "everyone is equal before the law" and "justice is blind" are at times nothing more than facile self-congratulation masking the deep institutional racism that exists below the radar.

Having explored Gramsci’s writings on hegemony and the intellectual, we may now examine the notion of the sellout in light of these theories. I argue that in their role as representatives of a particular community, organic intellectuals inevitably experience the specter of being branded a sellout. In effectively communicating the needs of their community to the ruling class, organic intellectuals like Chappelle must often times become part of the power structure. As Holub has noted, "Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it." For example, Viacom, whose board of directors is mostly a "bunch of rich white guys," owns all of the television networks that are commonly seen to be challenging the mainstream — Comedy Central, Music Television (MTV), and Black Entertainment Television (BET). Organic intellectuals must work within the mainstream but still maintain enough creative control to be effective and relevant. In other words, the avenues that an organic intellectual like Chappelle must follow are owned by the very forces that make the organic intellectual necessary. As some of the interviews with Chappelle discussed below make clear, such a balancing act can become very difficult and emotionally taxing.

The Sellout: Feared and Detested

The fear of the sellout is rampant among many ethnic groups in the United States. When members of these communities enter positions of privilege, they indeed become objects of pride and admiration, but these feelings are often accompanied by a nervous uncertainty as to whether they will eventually "forget where they came from." The sellout has been branded with several epithets in the majority-white North American context. Most of the derogatory terms have referred to being or "acting white," which has been one of the constant characteristics of the sellout. Black sellouts have been called "Uncle Toms" or "Oreos," while South Asians have been called "coconuts" and Asians have been labeled "twinkies" or "bananas." These epithets point to a deep-seated animosity towards "race betrayers" who the host community regards as a traitor and an ungrateful free rider. In studying the

fear of the sellout among black Americans, Randall Kennedy notes that a sellout is "a person who betrays something to which she is said to owe allegiance" and can refer to individuals whose actions "retard African American advancement." A sellout is much worse than a generic enemy of the group. Since the community had invested in him/her and placed a certain amount of trust in their loyalty, the betrayal stings exponentially and produces equally virulent scorn and dismissal.

Some of the earliest members of the black community labeled as sellouts were those individuals who recaptured runaway slaves or forewarned white authorities of impending slave revolts. Many black authors who wrote treatises against the community were also roundly hated. One example is William Hannibal Thomas, who throughout his early life championed the African American cause. Later in life, however, he underwent a radical about-face and published The American Negro in 1901. The black individual, he wrote, "has a mind that never thinks in complex terms; Negro intelligence is both superficial and delusive ... [and] represents an illiterate race, in which ignorance, cowardice, folly, and idleness are rife." The African American response was swift and seething. Some threatened him with physical assault and told him to "go off and hang thyself," while others, like Booker T. Washington, remarked that, "It is sad to think of a man without a country. It is sadder to think of a man without a race." Both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke with derision against racial betrayal. Malcolm X called sellouts "house Negroes" and King stated that there are many blacks in America "who will seek profit for themselves alone from the struggle." Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were, of course, powerful organic intellectuals who squarely challenged the hegemonic power structures of the ruling class. Others branded as sellouts were those individuals who, working as spies for the American government, infiltrated civil rights organizations and kept an eye on groups like the Black Panther Party.

The fear of the sellout is not confined to the past. It seems that almost without exception, every successful African American public figure in the United States—Oprah, Sean "Puffy" Combs, Clarence Thomas, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell—has, at one time or another, faced the question of whether they were selling out. During Barack Obama’s run for President, the "problem" of whether he was "black enough" was repeatedly discussed. As journalist Peter Beinart pointed out, it seems that "the more whites love you, the more you must reassure your own community that you are still one of them." In a sketch called "The Racial Draft" (Season 2; Episode 1), Chappelle himself accuses Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice of having abandoned the black community. In a draft that will "state the racial standing of these Americans once and for all," the black delegation chooses Tiger Woods,
who although of mixed ethnic heritage (Black, Caucasian, American-Indian, and Asian) is now "officially Black." The white delegation chooses Colin Powell and ignites much controversy. Since Colin Powell "is not even an eighth white," the decision must be accepted by the black representative, who states, "We the black delegation accept the white delegation's offer to draft Colin Powell on the condition that they also accept Condoleezza Rice as part of the deal." Rice is then shown on screen as having been "given away by blacks.

In the sketch, Chappelle accuses Powell and Rice, who have attained positions of power, of working against the interests of the black community simply due to their collusion with the Bush administration. This early sketch provides some evidence that Chappelle's fear of being branded a sellout was only heightened by his increasing popularity.

Why Did Chappelle Leave?

Like the "Racial Draft" discussed above, the first episode of the Lost Tapes as well as some interviews he gave upon his return, highlight the fact that Chappelle walked away from his show predominantly because he felt he was shirking his responsibilities as an organic intellectual. As discussed, the organic intellectual must be capable of voicing the needs and concerns of the community he or she represents. The community has invested much into these individuals and should be confident that they will not violate their obligations. If, on the other hand, these individuals not only shirk their responsibilities but also begin to cast the community in a negative light, this is doubly insulting. For Chappelle, the comedic venue was allowing him to break down stereotypes, to challenge other misconception, and to ensure that discussions of race were never far from the earshot of the ruling class, who often reassured themselves that the problem of race was over.

The first episode of the Lost Tapes depicts Chappelle at a barbershop getting a trim. The television announces that Chappelle has just received $50 million dollars for the third season of his show. Everyone in the barbershop turns to stare, and the barber tells Chappelle that he owes him eleven thousand dollars for the haircut. The fact that this scene takes place in a barbershop is significant. As Alexander notes, the black barbershop creates an "imagined community" where African American strangers can meet under conditions of cooperation, equality and kinship. It is a cultural space where black men are "engaged in friendly exchanges" and where they go to "find sustenance." It is a "black man's way station, point of contact, and universal home. Here he always finds a welcome." Drawing on personal experience, Alexander recalls that as he traveled from state to state throughout his life, "the test of establishing community for me has often been grounded in locating a barbershop."

As seen in this sketch, Chappelle suspects that members of the black community will begin to see him differently and take advantage of him. He fears that his role as an organic representative will dissolve, and he will be seen as an outsider, even in the quintessential space of black kinship: the barbershop.

During the shooting of the third season, it seems that Chappelle was becoming increasingly aware of his role as an organic intellectual. He grew more careful about what sketches he wrote and which ones he allowed to be shown. As his former writing partner Neal Brennan told Time, Chappelle would rethink and rework his sketches so much that, if he had his way, the show would constantly miss deadlines. He recalls that either Chappelle or him would think of an idea for a sketch and eagerly start the writing process. However, Chappelle's enthusiasm would soon subside: "We'd shoot it, and then at some point he'd start saying, 'This sketch is racist, and I don't want this on the air.' And I was like, 'you like this sketch. What do you mean?' There was this confusing contradictory thing: he was calling his own writing racist."

In his interview with Oprah, Chappelle recalls that he was getting so caught up in the process that he often did not stop and reflect about whether the sketches he was producing were positive. As he states, "I was doing sketches that were funny but socially irresponsible ... it's like you're getting flooded with things and you don't pay attention to things like your ethics." Chappelle cited the sketch about "racial pixies" (which was aired against his wishes in Episode 2 of the Lost Tapes) as the one that led him to suspect that he "had gone from sending up stereotypes to merely reinforcing them." As he tells Oprah, "the premise of the sketch was that every race had this pixie, this racial complex. But, the pixie was in blackface. Now, blackface is a very difficult image, but the reason I had chosen blackface at the time was because this was going to be the visual personification of the N-word." He states that during the taping of the sketch, a white member of the crew laughed in such a way that made him uneasy. He tells Oprah: "I know the difference between people laughing with me and people laughing at me. And it was the first time I'd ever gotten a laugh that I was uncomfortable with."

Chappelle believes that his sketches have a positive role to play and will be properly received and interpreted by most Americans. Others, however, may not truly understand the nuanced critique of racism that he puts forth. He notes that the kinds of people that scream "I'm Rick James, Bitch!" at my concerts ... are going to get something completely different." In other words, Chappelle's sketches are presented in such a way that if one misses the nuance, they actually have the potential to be offensive and hurtful to the African American community. As he tells Oprah, "I don't want black people to be dis-
appointed in me for putting that out there."\textsuperscript{52} As Kevin Powell notes in his *Esquire* article on Chappelle, black entertainers appropriately feel that they have the right to creatively express themselves as they choose, but many also feel a deep sense of responsibility to the black community. Black organic intellectuals must "think about the sights and sounds you put out there on television because you are not interested in being merely a source of enjoyment for white America at the expense of black America."\textsuperscript{53} According to some black critics, part of this "enjoyment" has been Chappelle's frequent use of the N-word. In a 2004 interview with Bob Simon of *60 Minutes*, Chappelle responded to his critics by pointing out that his use of the N-word was "an act of freedom."\textsuperscript{54} Two years later, however, he told James Lipton of *Inside the Actor's Studio* that he may use the word again in the future "but right now I just feel like people aren't responsible enough."\textsuperscript{55} Once again, we see that Chappelle, over the years, was becoming more aware of his role as an organic intellectual and was more cautious about the type of sketches that he produced and the type of language that he used.

*Chappelle's Show*, it seems, not only provided viewers with a candid discussion of race in America but also provided Chappelle himself with a deeper understanding of his role within that discourse. In interviews given after his return, he notes that the economic interests of the culture industry largely mediate artistic endeavors as well as the agenda of organic intellectuals who practice their craft with a larger purpose in mind. He tells the student audience at *Inside the Actor's Studio*: "You guys are students now, so you're idealists but you don't know about where art and corporate interests meet yet ... get your Africa tickets ready, because it's coming."\textsuperscript{56} For Chappelle, intellectuals from the ruling class do not have to experience such difficulties. Organic intellectuals, on the other hand, have "this greater struggle that we at least have to keep in mind somewhere."\textsuperscript{57} In encouraging America to examine itself, to take an honest look at the systemic racism that exists in the country, organic intellectuals like Chappelle must intimately interact with the ruling class. From such a vantage point, critiques will be more incisive and will reach a wider audience. The balancing act continues, however, between being fully incorporated into the hegemonic structure and remaining a significant organic voice for the counter-hegemonic community. And, sometimes, you have to go to Africa to regain your footing.
tool or practice. Using the term "semi-ethno-
graphic" as a label for Black Power highlights two
aspects of production: 1) the major intent was to
reach a wide audience and make profit, and 2) neither cast nor crew is trained as ethnog-
Therapy is not to suggest that the genre of ethnographic film has escaped the trappings of commodification, far less fre-
quently they give release wide.
The term "native ethnography" was coined by anthropologist Russ Bernard to de-
scribe his work with the author Jesús Salvador Fe-
drez in producing their book, Native Ethno-

2. Ibid.
4. Citing Ingraham, D. Soyini Madison defines politics as the "social materials prac-
tices in which the distribution of power is at

5. Black Power also helps us to distinguish theories of difference through its investment in addressing the issues of culture and repre-
sentation. As Madison explains, "theories of
difference are concerned with the histories,
consequences, and contexts of what it means to
be unlike the norm, the majority, the compre-
hended, or to be outside certain registers of power...[they] confront the complexities of iden-

6. George Kameka, "Is It Right to Be Black?"
13. "The Theory, March 2004," The Chap-

16. Karl Marx, Karl Marx: Selected Writ-

ings, ed. T. D. McLellan (Oxford: Oxford Univer-
18. Antonio Gramsci, 34.
22. The line-up includes Kanye West, Mos Def, Erykah Badu, the Fugees, Talib Kweli, Common, Dead Prez, The Roots, Jill Scott, and
23. Ibid.
26. John L. Jackson, Jr., Real Black Adven-
28. Ibid., 9.
29. Michael Eric Dyson, Holler If You Hear
30. Ibid., 15.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 194.
34. Ibid., 210.
35. Ibid., 214.
36. S. Craig Watkins, "A Nation of Mil-
38. Giovanni Bruno, Public Intimacy: Archi-

40. Ibid.
41. See, for example, Greg Dimitriadis, "In the Clinic: Popular Culture, Constructions of Place and the Everyday Lives of Urban Youth," Anthropology & Education Quarterly 32, no. 1 (2001), 29-51, and Oneka LaBennett, "Reading Buffy and 'Looking Proper': Race, Gender, and Consumption among West Indian Girls in Brooklyn," in Globalization and Race Transform-

ations in the Cultural Production of Black-
36. Holub, Antonio Gramsci, 104.
37. Respectively, black, brown, yellow on the outside, and white on the inside.
39. Kennedy, Sellout, 34.
40. Thomas quoted in Kennedy, Sellout, 40.
41. Washington quoted in Kennedy, Sellout, 42.
42. King quoted in Kennedy, Sellout, 49-50.
44. Beinart quoted in Kennedy, Sellout, 7.
50. Chappelle, The Oprah Winfrey Show.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
56. Powell, "Heaven Hell Dave Chappelle."