

PUNCHING UP IN STAND-UP COMEDY

Speaking Truth to Power

Edited by Rashi Bhargava and Richa Chilana

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Designed cover image: Getty Images

First published 2023

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-15640-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-26725-8 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-35280-8 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003352808

Typeset in Bembo

by codeMantra

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WHICH DIRECTION DO WE PUNCH?

The Powers and Perils of Humour against the New Conspiracism

Chris A. Kramer

I Laugh Because It Is Absurd

There is irony, and perhaps some disappointment, in the possibility that it was a well-placed bit of humour that played a role in getting us to the miserable situation we are in today—there was a violent insurrection against the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021, with threats of more to come, and as of this writing there are nearly one million dead in the United States alone due to COVID. Both of these debacles have been exacerbated, and one largely caused, by consistent propaganda peddled by the most powerful person in the world. A case can be made that Donald Trump decided to run for president shortly after being comedically humiliated by Seth Meyers and President Obama (who *was* born in the United States) at the White House Correspondents Dinner in 2011: “Donald Trump has been saying he will run for president as a Republican, which is surprising, since I just assumed he was running as a joke.”¹ It was, and still is, an absurd thought that such a man would ever run for president, and it invoked much laughter.

The quip was written by comedian Jon Rineman who now deeply regrets what might be called a comedic backfire. Even if Trump is officially out of power, and even if he is severely sanctioned or imprisoned as a result of one of the multitude of current lawsuits against him,² Trumpism in all of its absurdity will remain. As of this moment, there is still a regrettably large proportion³ of Trump supporters who think he won the 2020 election and over 140 representatives who voted to overturn Biden’s manifestly fair victory, and they did this the very night of the Capitol coup in which they experienced first-hand the whipped up rage of their own followers.⁴ In addition, the CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) not only had Trump as the headliner, less than two months after the attack, but consisted of multiple panels on how the 2020 election was stolen, and *zero* on how to avoid another violent attack on the Capitol. Indeed,