

# Cliff says 'Relax'

*Jokes are just jokes, even (especially) when you're the butt of them*

**CLIFF HICKS is a senior news-editorial and English major.**

America, your sense of humor is being stripped away and soon nothing but a gutted, rotting carcass will remain.

Is such a hollow, unfulfilling existence really what we as a people want? Or is it time to grow some skin, a backbone and some guts so we can move on with our lives?

A few days ago, I was making a few smart-ass remarks and one of my male friends said that I was being "sexist."

The discussion was about a Japanese videogame he was playing at the time. One of the characters was female, and another friend of ours in the room said he couldn't believe the way the women were portrayed. "Look at that, man!" said the neutral friend.

"You should see a couple of the other characters," I remarked.

Then, out of nowhere, "you know, [girlfriend] is right about you guys — you can be so sexist."

Bam. There it was. Out of deep left field.

While he didn't press the point, an awkward silence hung in the air for a few moments — enough to punctuate the point and support my theory that this was not some failed attempt at a jest and, in fact, a serious accusation. Sure enough, he meant it, it seemed.

This isn't a rail against my friend. I expect the comment wasn't made for my benefit but for the show of his girl-

**"Humor always has a victim, a target. Comedy, good comedy, also has a point."**

friend, who was also in the room at the time. My friend isn't the problem, see — like an annoying rash, he was merely a symptom of the malady, a mark of the greater illness that society as a whole has contracted.

Humor has always been a dangerous sword. Its defining characteristic is to embed itself in the subconscious of those it is exposed to, then spread like a disease. Jokes take on a life of their own once they leave the teller. Truly great lines garner a form of immortality, forever ingrained in our culture, the author lost to the ravages of time, but the sly wit remaining.

Today, comedy is once again becoming a forbidden art. Professional comedians, and even we amateurs, are discouraged from any form of general commentary. To be sensitive to the differences of others, remarks illustrating those differences are frowned upon. Very soon, comedians will only be able to talk about themselves, as jokes about politics, authorities, women, minorities, children and in fact society in general are rapidly becoming "hotspots" that

comedians are encouraged to avoid at all costs.

Common sense dictates that when a comedian talks about a group of people, any group of people, they are not intending the commentary to be all-inclusive, or even representative of the majority. It wouldn't be funny like that.

Humor always has a victim, a target.

Comedy, good comedy, also has a point.

For every decade, there are one or two comedians who define the period as a whole. 1950: Lenny Bruce. 1960: George Carlin. 1970: Richard Pryor. 1980: Eddie Murphy/Robin Williams. 1990: Bill Hicks/Chris Rock. Notice any similarities about these comedians? That's right, all of them were dissidents in some form or another. Some of them were arrested. Others were banned from TV. Why? All of them dared to push the edge.

Starting with Lenny Bruce in the 1950s (and, I'm sure, before that), comedy has been dangerous stuff. Part of the problem was the constant profanity. Another part was the fact that many of the ideas these comedians were espousing were not the high ideals of that day any age. When Robin Williams talked about drugs in the 1980s, he knew what he was talking about, because he, like so many of that time, was an addict. Bill Hicks was cynical of the common person, because they seemed like idiots to him. Many people, albeit silently, echo that same sentiment.

Comedians say these things so that we don't have to. They're the social

propagandists of each generation of radicals. What Carlin said in the 1960s may not sound too controversial by today's standards, he was arrested in his own day for his routine "Seven Dirty Words."

When the 1980s were in full swing, it seemed like comedy was curving back into the mainstream again. Despite their abrasive material, Murphy and Williams made solid livings off stand-up. But now the 1990s are coming to an end, Bill Hicks has passed away and Chris Rock is getting more concerned with his production than what he's saying. Censors are frowning and blaming entertainment as violence rises. Soon, very soon, there will be a hard backlash that we'll be reeling from for a few years.

I feel like Madame DeFarge is watching me, knitting my name into a sweater each time I make a joke about women any more. The battle of the sexes never ends, nor will it. But without the ability to laugh about it, what have you? A bunch of uptight, paranoid people who never want to talk to one another.

Don't misinterpret this message — sexism does exist — but in the race to stamp it out, we can't stamp out the differences between the sexes and our ability to get a few laughs at the deal.

This is the modern age. Everyone has the right to make fun of everyone else.

Welcome to the price you didn't want to pay that comes with freedom. Enjoy it.



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## JFK-related documents released

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just days after President Kennedy was assassinated, his wife Jacqueline appealed to Soviet leaders to continue peaceful relations with the United States, Soviet documents show.

In conversations with Soviet officials at her husband's funeral and in a handwritten note to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev a week after the shooting, Mrs. Kennedy asked the Soviets for "continuation of self-control and restraint" in Cold War relations and to pursue peace with the United States, the documents state.

KGB and Soviet diplomatic documents about the Kennedy assassination, which Russian President Boris Yeltsin gave to President Clinton a few months ago, were described to The Associated Press by a senior Clinton administration official familiar with them.

About 80 pages in Russian and their translation will be released Thursday by the National Archives and Records Administration, which collects, maintains and makes public Kennedy assassination records.

The documents are just a fraction of the six volumes of Soviet records on presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald that a federal panel had tried, but failed, to obtain in 1996.

Members of the now-defunct Assassination Records Review Board

said that the 80 pages, as described by the White House official, were interesting but there are still hundreds of documents — including surveillance records of Oswald and reports from KGB operatives in the United States — that have yet to be turned over.

"It sounds like a carefully selected group of records that doesn't contain a lot of what is there," said John Tunheim, a former chairman of the review board who saw some of the documents when he was part of a delegation that traveled to Russia in 1996.

The volumes of Oswald records stood 4 to 5 feet high, said Tunheim.

The review board was set up locate, gather and eventually make public all known assassination records. It went out of business last year.

U.S. experts who translated and reviewed the documents have informed Clinton they shed little light on the November 1963 assassination of Kennedy, but provide new details about the reactions of the Soviets and Kennedy's widow, the administration official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The documents show that the Soviets were chagrined by news reports linking Oswald to "leftist" elements and Soviet agencies.

Oswald, a former Marine, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 and renounced his American citizenship.

That attracted the attention of the KGB, which bugged his apartment in the Belarus capital city of Minsk, paid neighbors to inform on him and kept Oswald and his Russian wife Marina under constant surveillance.

Oswald returned to the United States in 1962, settling in Dallas with his wife and baby.

The KGB denounced as "slander" American media reports suggesting Soviet complicity in Kennedy's death and suggested they served only to hide "who is really behind the assassination," the official quoted the documents as saying.

Diplomatic memos and notes also show that the Soviets — media reports aside — were pleased by high-level U.S. contacts immediately after the assassination that left them confident the shooting in Dallas wouldn't harm their relations with the United States, the official said.

The documents indicate that then-Secretary of State Dean Rusk quickly engaged in conversations with Soviet diplomats, talking about a wide range of issues that included nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, possible arms deals and a proposed U.S.-Moscow air route, the official said.

The Soviets described the contacts as a sign that it would be "business as usual" with the United States, the official said.



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