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Dreams of a Motley Graduation Cap: A Proposal for Stand-Up Comedy in Higher Education

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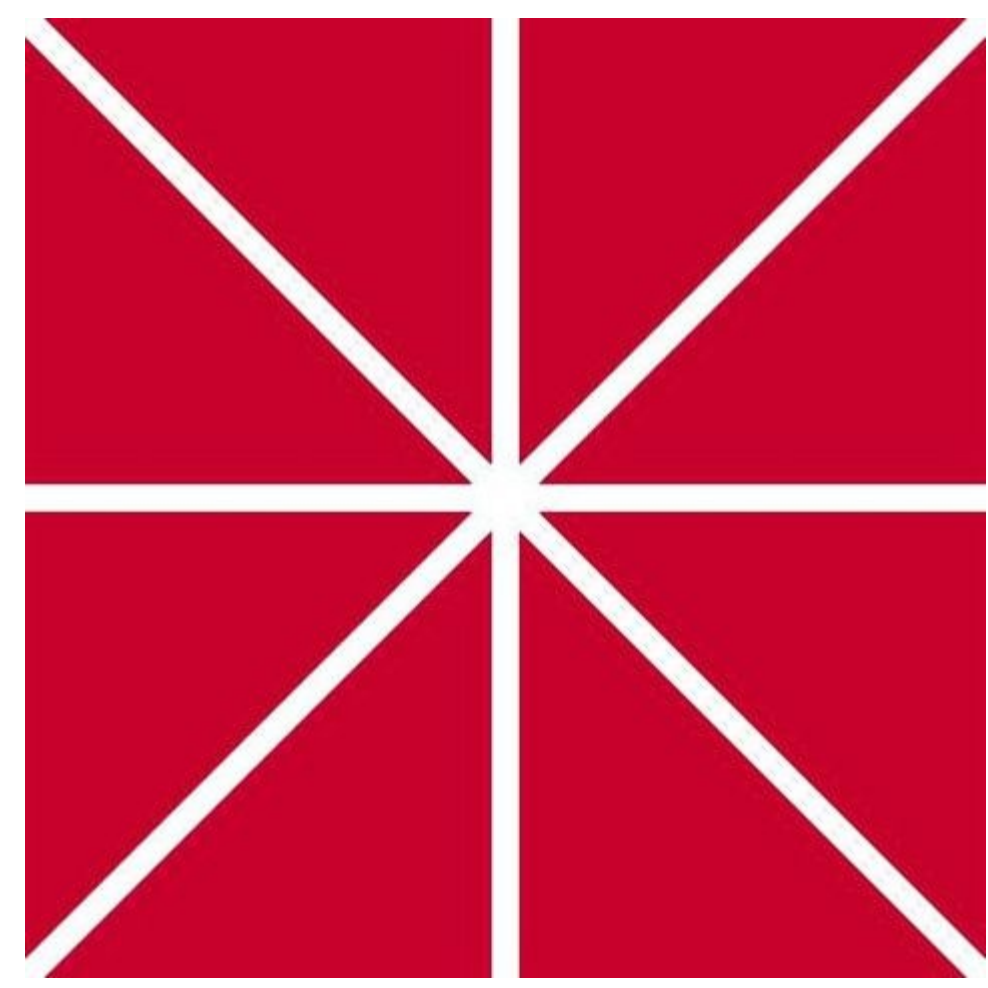


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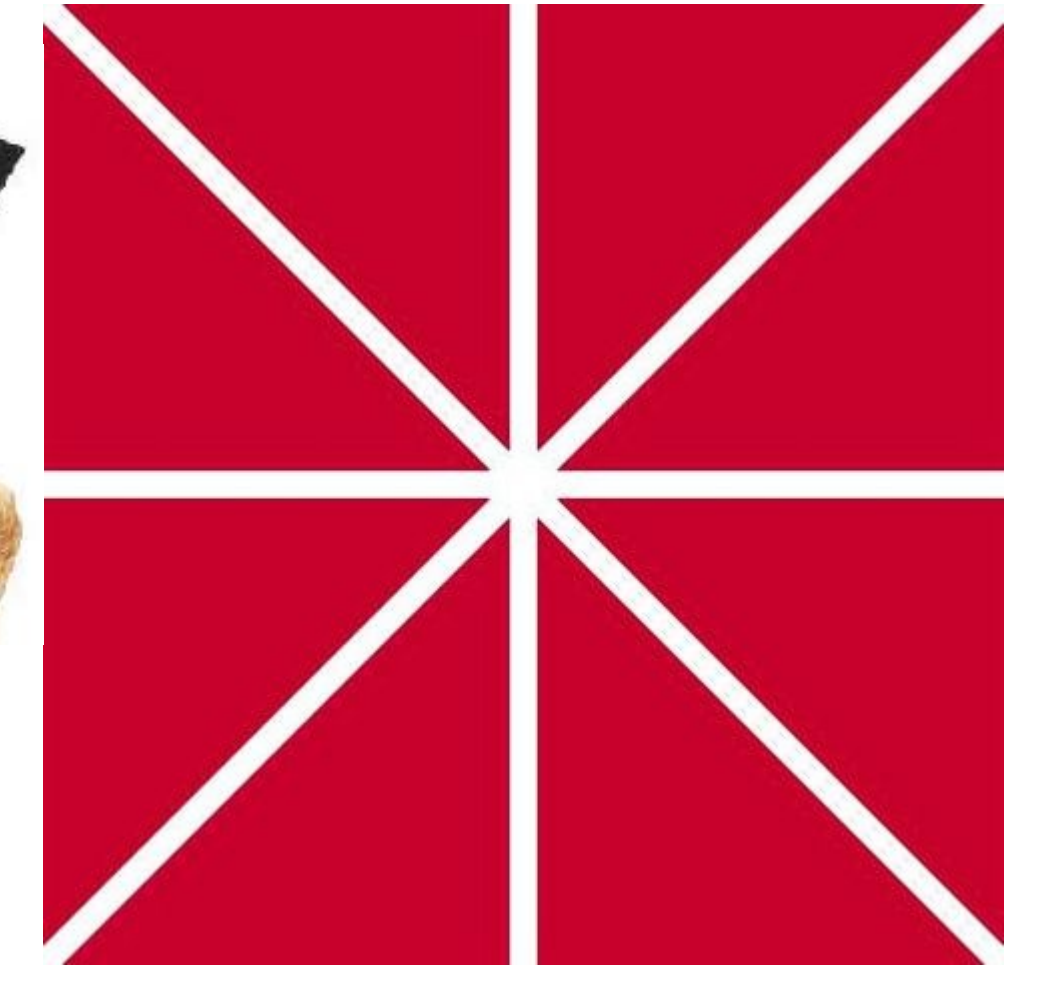
Dreams of a Motley Graduation Cap

A Proposal for Stand-Up Comedy in Higher Education

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Abstract

In my four years of attending Chapman University I have learned to analyze art find deeper significance in both its historical relevance and impact on society. However, an art I feel that has been neglected both within academic discourse is stand-up comedy. In my thesis, I propose that the art of stand-up comedy should be a medium taught within liberal arts universities and other academic institutions. I propose this primarily through the societal impacts made by the comedians Richard Pryor, George Carlin and Ellen DeGeneres; tying specific comedic routines with prevalent social activism. I then establish a hypothetical course featuring Stand Up Comedy to be taught within the university level.

Early Fools

The earliest instance of a comedic based role in society was the *nebulo*, a beggar class that would play off his stupidity to get spare coins. When one thinks of the fool this is by far the modern perspective, however, fools were developed into a worthwhile class. The *druth* within Celtic society and the *joculator* within the early Norman England period were both fools that would serve on a kings regiment during times of war, serving both as entertainment and as soldiers. They would receive honors and often had very personal relationships with the king and his court, however they were still considered to be the class of the aforementioned *nebulo*. However, during later wars in the Norman period, certain *joculator's* came like Taillefer and Beric whom came to be renown in battle and were given titles and land. Beric in particular was of note for owning three villages and given the frist recorded title of *joculaor regis*, the kings fool.



Syllabus

For my hypothetical class, I wanted to focus on three specific sections that would ultimately build to the students performing a ten minute set of their choosing.

- 1) A historical look at comedic carriers prior to 1950 that would showcase how exactly a career in comedic performance came to be accepted within society.
- 2) An in depth look at the careers of stand up comedians during the 1970's-modern day; highlighting specific routines they performed and how they affected American society.
- 3) And finally, an in depth performance workshop of what exactly goes into performing modern day stand up comedy.

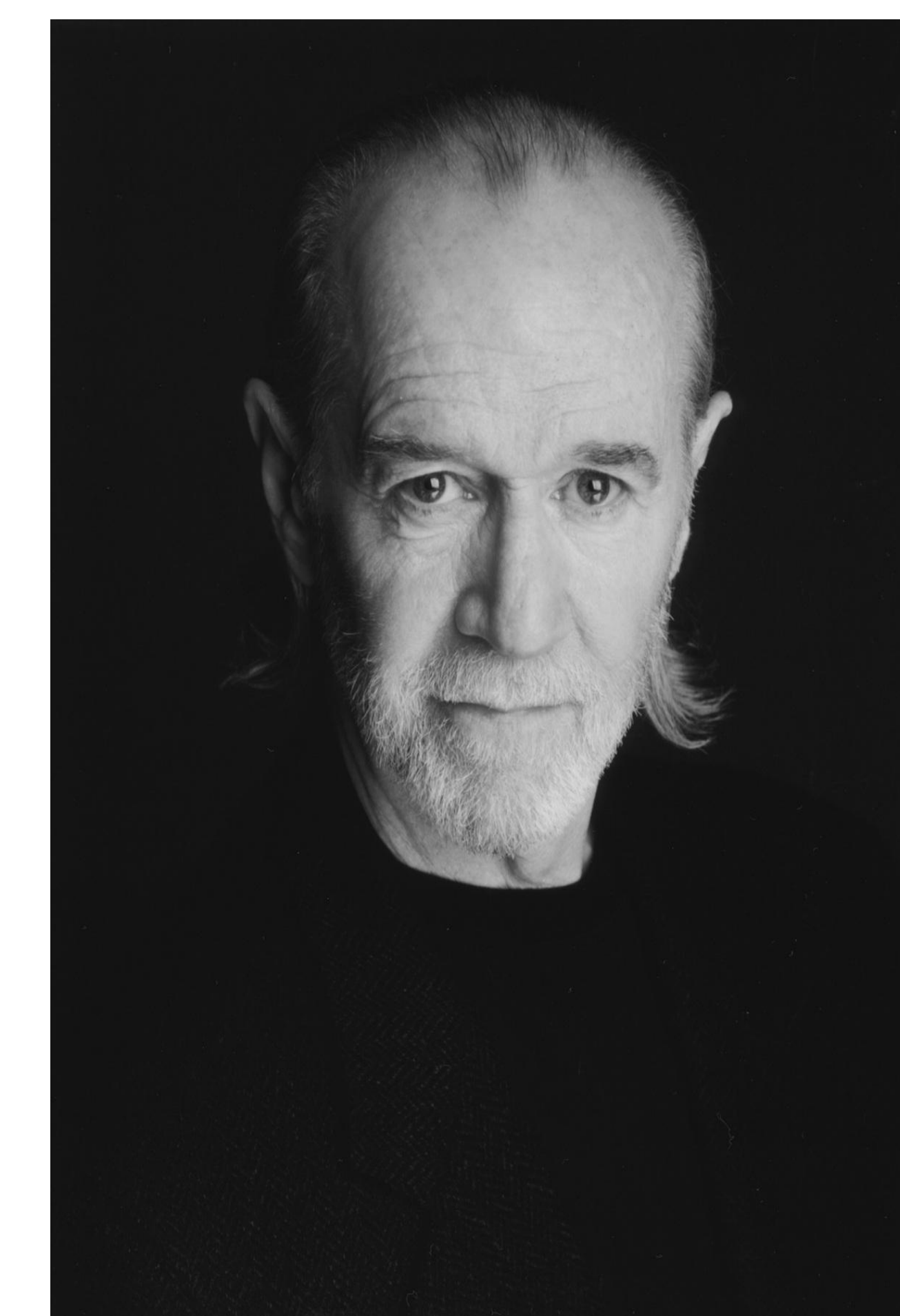
EXAMPLE

Week 7: This week would highlight George Carlin and specifically his routine "7 Words You Can't Say On Television." Using the previous material in *Comic Insights* by Franklyn Ajaye, the students would be tasked to evaluate the bit based off of Ajaye's Elements of Stand Up Comedy. Going joke by joke of what Carlin is saying and how effectively he is delivering the intended message. The homework would then be to look into the cases leading up to *Federal Communications Commission v Pacifica Foundation*, it's ultimate ruling that the FFC could restrict speech previously protected under the First Amendment could restrict broadcasting for indecency. The class would then be structured around Carlin's career after the ruling, cases in which 438 U.S 726 was used to restrict other broadcasting.

Conclusion

A recent study conducted by the Attenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania showed that those who watched the late night comedy program *The Colbert Report* were significantly more informed on the issues of Super PAC's and other means of political funding than those who were viewers of the major news networks including CNN, FOX, and MSNBC. Additionally stand up comedy has seen a dramatic rise within the global scene within the last decade, particularly in Thailand and South Africa.

Brining stand up comedy to modern academia would be an interesting course that would perfectly encompass the goals of a liberal arts education in it's utilization of artistic expression, creativity through writing, social awareness, and personal reflection.



"It's called the American Dream 'cause you'd have to be asleep to believe it"

—George Carlin