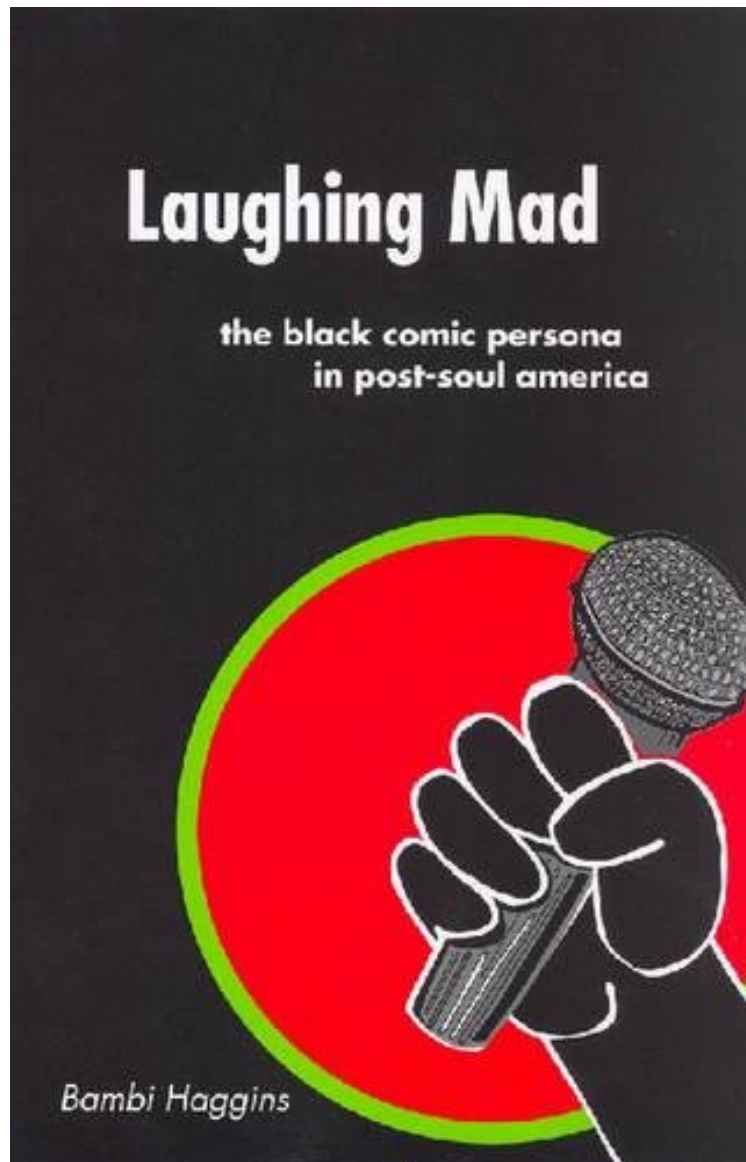


(Free download) Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America

## Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America

*Bambi Haggins*

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**Bambi Haggins : Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. BLACK COMICBy B. SimondsI GOT THE NAME FROM AN OPRAH SHOW ON MOMS MABLEY BUT THE BOOK I FOUND DIFFICULT TO HOLD MY ATTENTION

ALTHOUGH IT APPEARS TO BE WELL WRITTEN AND THOROUGH.6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Sent me to the video store with new understandingBy AfroAmericanHeritageBefore the modern Civil Rights era, black comedians primarily performed for black audiences, and white comedians performed for whites. But over the last 45 years - the "Post-Soul" era -black comedians have moved into the mainstream culture, and this book explores this integration process by examining the comic televisual and cinematic personae of Dick Gregory, Bill Cosby, Flip Wilson, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Chris Rock, Whoopi Goldberg and Dave Chappelle. The chapter on Goldberg, which explores her persona through the lens of gender and crossover, also touches briefly upon the careers of Moms Mabley, Pearl Bailey and Wanda Sykes.Black comedians are in an untenable position. Unlike white performers, who can play a buffoon without fear of being criticized for perpetuating minstrelsy, black performers "represent" so every joke, every career choice, even personal relationships are scrutinized by both supporters and detractors and usually found wanting: too black or not black enough, Keepin' It Real or not. As Chris Rock stated in a New York Times interview, "... journalists start analyzing it and talking to me like I'm Kwesi Mfume. I don't need that gig. All I care about is being funny."And a problem arises when attempting to mainstream material developed for black audiences, material which is often self deprecating and which, when removed from the privacy and security of the black enclave and put on display for the entertainment of whites, can be received and enjoyed in a racist way, or criticized as "airing dirty laundry." When discussing why he terminated his show, Dave Chappelle's summed up to Oprah as discomfort over "the white guy laughing" a little too loudly at, rather than with, humorous aspects of black culture.Such struggles are at the heart of this study; in fact, the author says the question which inspired it arose at the late show of "Dave Chappelle's Block Party" when she contemplated some frat boys in the audience and wondered " I know what I'm laughing at, but what are you laughing at?"As the author states, "Comedy is a powerful discursive tool" and this study provides many thought provoking insights and raises even more questions. The book is written primarily for academics, and lay readers might find the jargon challenging at times but I still recommend it to them. It prompted me to make several trips to the video store in order to view some unfamiliar material but more importantly, to view some familiar material again in a new light. Recommended for anyone interested in media, African American or American Studies.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating guide to the evolution of black comedyBy StudioCityBookLadyBambi Haggins traces how black comedy has evolved from performances for "the folks" to an integral part of the American experience. Her exhaustive research shows how pioneers Dick Gregory, Bill Cosby, Flip Wilson and Richard Pryor set the stage for later breakouts by Chris Rock and Eddie Murphy; Dave Chappelle gets his own, fascinating chapter. She also discusses the difficult issues of race and gender, plotting a trajectory from Moms Mabley to Whoopi Goldberg. A reader of any race will come away with a new understanding of comedy in "post-soul America."

Prior to the civil rights movement, comedians performed for audiences that were clearly delineated by race. Black comedians performed for black audiences and white comedians performed for whites. Yet during the past forty-five years, black comics have become progressively more central to mainstream culture.In *Laughing Mad*, Bambi Haggins looks at how this transition occurred in a variety of media and shows how this integration has paved the way for black comedians and their audiences to affect each other. Historically, African American performers have been able to use comedy as a pedagogic tool, interjecting astute observations about race relations while the audience is laughing. And yet, Haggins makes the convincing argument that the potential of African American comedy remains fundamentally unfulfilled as the performance of blackness continues to be made culturally digestible for mass consumption.Rather than presenting biographies of individual performers, Haggins focuses on the ways in which the comic persona is constructed and changes across media, from stand-up, to the small screen, to film. She examines the comic televisual and cinematic personae of Dick Gregory, Bill Cosby, Flip Wilson, and Richard Pryor and considers how these figures set the stage for black comedy in the next four decades. She reads Eddie Murphy and Chris Rock as emblematic of the first and second waves of post-civil rights era African American comedy, and she looks at the socio-cultural politics of Whoopi Goldberg's comic persona through the lens of gender and crossover. *Laughing Mad* also explores how the comedy of Dave Chappelle speaks to and for the post-soul generation.A rigorous analytic analysis, this book interrogates notions of identity, within both the African American community and mainstream popular culture. Written in engaging and accessible prose, it is also a book that will travel from the seminar room, to the barbershop, to the kitchen table, allowing readers to experience the sketches, stand-up, and film comedies with all the laughter they deserve.

"In *Laughing Mad*, Bambi Haggins deftly uses comedy to complicate the construction, performance, and masquerade of blackness especially as it relates to racial politics, white supremacy, and black critique." -- Herman Gray, author of *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*"This enormously valuable book will have a major impact on the ways in which scholars and general readers alike think about race, gender, and comic performance." -- Valerie Smith, Princeton UniversityAbout the AuthorBambi Haggins is an assistant professor in

Screen Arts and Cultures at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.