

The controversy of jon stewart: an analysis of jon stewarts use of satire



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The Daily Show is a source of controversy when its affect on democracy is analyzed. Some critics, like Roderick P. Hart and E. Johanna Hartelius who wrote “ The Political Sins of Jon Stewart”, believe that Jon Stewart and his use of cynicism are harmful to Democracy. Conversely, Robert Harriman who wrote “ In Defense of Jon Stewart” concedes that Jon Stewart is a cynic “ for [the purpose] of coming to the key point of judgment” (274) although he considers Jon Stewart a helpful defender of democracy rather than a harmful offender.

Similarly, Lisa Colletta the author of “ Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart” feels that satire, rather than cynicism, which she believes is the form of rhetoric that Jon Stewart uses, is beneficial to democracy. In all, through an analysis of Roderick P. Hart and E. Johanna Hartelius’ “ The Political Sins of Jon Stewart”, Robert Harriman’s “ In Defense of Jon Stewart”, and Lisa Colletta’s “ Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart” I feel that Jon Stewart’s use of satire on The Daily Show is constructive for democracy.

The term satire suits Jon Stewart’s performance on The Daily Show more than cynicism. Hart and Hartelius who accuse Jon Stewarts act on The Daily Show as cynicism, which they define as something that “ promotes only itself, summoning followers to abandon conventional society. . . . Cynicism rarely fosters change” (267). By this depiction, cynicism has no purpose but that of self-interest, and exists to spread negativity and inaction, which does not properly portray Jon Stewart on The Daily Show.

Instead, satire provides a more exact description of The Daily Show because the term encompasses the critical viewpoints of the show and the purpose those critical viewpoints being to bring about change, or action. Much of what makes Jon Stewart statements on The Daily Show satire rather than cynicism is due to the reaction of the audience and the society they come from. Another criterion for satire to work is “ a stable society and . . . homogeneous moral standards . . . [Satire] is aimed at inconsistency and hypocrisy. It exposes polite cruelty and folly by exposing them. It seeks to produce shame. All this has no place . . . where vice no longer pays lip service to virtue” (Qtd. In Colletta 304). This means that, in a “ stable society”, a community upholds the same morals. This is necessary in satire because as it points out a flaw it needs something to compare to a better alternative, or both the humor and even more importantly, the chance of change is lost.

With a predefined set of moral standards to follow those who are on the receiving end of the satire will be able to understand the irony of the situation and take action because they have the alternative to follow. In contrast, if the moral standard does not exist or is different for every person the irony of the situation might be lost and the audience will not only misunderstand that the situation is not one to follow but if they do understand that it should not be followed they have no alternative to turn to and there will be no change.

Our moral standards are a large part of what makes The Daily Show satire rather than cynicism, because our morals are what bring to our attention the need for change. For example, in episode 24 season 15 when covering a <https://assignbuster.com/the-controversy-of-jon-stewart-an-analysis-of-jon-stewarts-use-of-satire/>

story about republicans thinking Obama's Health care meeting was a trap a clip was shown of republicans such as Bill O'Reilly, and Rush Limbaugh saying that the meeting was a trap the very last person they showed doing this was General Abubakar.

After this clip, another one is showed with the addition of Jon Stewart's commentary of a stick figure at a table whose head is decapitated by a flying disk and then attacked by a tiger. The irony of the segment comes from Jon Stewart's exaggeration of the republicans concerns. He makes the republicans insecurities of not being in control of the situation seem ridiculous by taking their words literally rather than how they were meant to be taken. The folly occurring in this situation is the republican's lack of faith in the good nature of others and their cynical attitude about the meeting.

In turn, our morals tell us that we should instead have faith that other people have good intentions, that bi-partisan is good, and that things are reconcilable. The irony of the situation catches our attention through its humor and points out the absurdity of the republican's concerns, and then through our morals we are given the alternative, the way the republicans should be acting. In conclusion, by pointing out the flaws in democracy, The Daily Show is aiding democracy by showing it where it could improve to become a better system.

Moreover, " Stewart's comic framing of great and small alike emphasizes a common fallibility" (Hariman 275) showing people the flaws of democracy, to set them into action and force democracy to change those flaws. In an age when the source of news for many comes from unreliable media The Daily

Show tries to make the general public aware of this flaw in the hopes that they will take action and demand a more reliable service. For this reason, The Daily Show is beneficial for democracy because Jon Stewart uses satire to bring about change through revealing flaws.