

Humour and Hatred: The racist jokes of the Ku Klux Klan

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## Abstract

The paper examines the links between humour and hatred - a topic that is often ignored by researchers of prejudice. The paper studies three websites that present racist humour and display sympathies with the Ku Klux Klan. The analysis emphasises the importance of examining the 'meta-discourse', which presents and justifies the humour, as much as studying the nature of the humour itself. The meta-discourse of the sites' disclaimers is studied in relation to the justification of a joke being 'just a joke'. It is shown that the extreme racist humour of the KKK is not just a joke, even in terms of its own meta-discourse of presentation. The meta-discourse also suggests that the extreme language of racist hatred is indicated a matter for enjoyment. The sites portray the imagining of extreme racist violence as a matter of humour and the ambivalence of their disclaimers is discussed. As such, it is suggested that there are integral links between extreme hatred and dehumanizing, violent humour.

Key Words: hatred, humour, Ku Klux Klan, racism, discourse, bigotry, violence

This paper principally has two theoretical aims that relate to understanding both the nature of hatred and the nature of humour. First, the paper stems from an investigation into bigotry and, in particular, into the possible ‘pleasures of hatred’ (Billig, in press). This exploration considers the possibility that hatred may not be the humourless activity that some social psychological theories have assumed it to be. Second, the paper represents an investigation into the nature of humour, and, as such, it explores the less innocent, more disturbing sides of humour that some theorists of humour have tended to downplay. These theoretical aims are pursued by the analysis of texts, which are presented as humorous within the context of extreme racist bigotry.

The idea that there might be intrinsic links between extreme prejudice and humour is not new. Sartre, in Portrait of the Anti-Semite suggested that bigots take pleasure in “the joy of hating” (1948, p. 21). He argued that anti-Semites find it “amusing” to be anti-Semitic (p. 38). Although their opponents treat the issues involved as serious, the anti-Semites “treat the matter as a joke”, knowing that their beliefs are at root absurd (p. 15). Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer, in Dialectic of Enlightenment, suggested that the rantings of anti-Semites at fascist political meetings are nothing but “organized laughter” (1997, p. 184). The reason for the enjoyment was, they argued, that fascism “permits what is usually forbidden” (p 184). Backed by the righteousness of ideology, the hater is freed from normal constraints and can mock their dehumanized victims without conscience.

These ideas point to an intrinsic link between extreme political hatred and the realm of jokes. Like the ideology of hatred, jokes are said to cut through the seriousness of

literal fact, often employing unambiguous stereotypes of gender or ethnicity to do so (Mulkey, 1988; Speier, 1998). The joke can demand a suspension of empathy, with the target being an object of ridicule not sympathy. Freud, in Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, suggested that this “economy of pity” can be “one of the most frequent sources of humorous pleasure” (p. 295). According to Freud, the joke format provides a socially accepted means of breaking taboos, particularly in relation to sex and aggression. Zillman (1983) has reworked Freud’s notions of aggressive humour. He argues that in ‘disparagement humour’ jokers derive pleasure from the expression of aggression against the target, but they do not admit to themselves that this is the source of their pleasure. They claim they are only laughing at the ‘cleverness’ of the joke, or what Freud called the ‘joke-work’. In this way, aggressive humour depends on a crucial element of self-deceit or what Sartre described as ‘bad-faith’.

The notion of a link between extreme hatred and humour is disturbing, for it is easier to assume that bigotry is essentially humourless. A sense of humour, it might be thought, indicates a love of life that is the very antithesis of extreme hatred. Adorno’s own work on authoritarianism contributed to the notion that the bigot might lack a sense of humour (Adorno et al, 1950). Altmeyer’s (1988) re-working of the notion of authoritarianism depicts the bigot as being ‘mean-spirited’ and envying others’ enjoyment of life. It would not be difficult to cite psychological evidence to suggest that mental health is related to an enjoyment of humour (for instance, Kelly and Osborne, 1999; Nezu et al, 1988). From this one might suppose that racial bigotry is associated with humourlessness and fragile psychological health. It is understandable that researchers would not wish to disturb such assumptions by seeking to show that bigots, after all, are fun-loving jokers.

Nor have discourse researchers tended to explore the links between humour and racism, whether they are investigating mainstream, ‘reasonable’ prejudice (van Dijk, 1987, 1992 and 1993; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) or ‘hate talk’ (Whillock and Slayden, 1995). One reason for the neglect could well be the danger of being misunderstood. As Essed (1991 and 1997) has demonstrated, racist slurs and name-calling remain a feature of black people’s lives in Europe and the United States. It would be wrong, both morally and politically, to give the impression that such phenomena are ‘just jokes’ and, moreover, that these jokes have the positive value of contributing to the psychological well-being of the joker.

When considering the topic of humour, there is a temptation to take a celebratory stance, praising the human capacity for laughter and joking. This can lead to researchers specifically downgrading the possible links between humour and prejudice, as if what is to be celebrated should be kept distinct from that which is to be criticised. The argument that jokes about ethnic groups are primarily jokes, and therefore very different from serious hatred, has been advocated by Davies (1990) in his impressively researched Ethnic Humour Around the World (see also Oshima, 2000). Davies argues that those who tell ethnic jokes do not necessarily believe the stereotypes that the jokes express (but see de Souza, 1987; Boskin, 1987 and Husband, 1988, for alternative views). When Davies discusses the relations between jokes about Jews and the history of anti-Semitism, he argues that “any contribution that jokes may have made to this vicious history has been an utterly trivial one” (p. 124). He distinguishes between the playfulness of jokes and the seriousness of anti-Semitism: “even today, when direct expression of anti-Semitism rightly provokes

criticism, anti-Semites have other preferred disguises than humour with which to cloak their animosity” (p. 125). It is as if ‘serious’ anti-Semites would not bother with jokes, or, perhaps, not even appreciate jokes because of the seriousness of their bigotry. More generally, according to Davies, Jewish jokes that use stereotypes about business and money “are not in and of themselves anti-Semitic, for the nature of the link between the serious and comic is a problematic one” (p. 119). He asserts: “let us not also forget that jokes are first and foremost jokes” (p. 119).

In arguing such a position, Davies comes close to using the conventional justification ‘it’s just a joke’. As Tannen has pointed out, when jokers are challenged, they have the capacity to retreat into the defensive excuse “I was only joking” (1992, p. 51).

This defence can be used to justify remarks that others might consider racist. Jaret (1999) reports survey evidence from the United States that blacks and whites differ in their evaluation of utterances about race. Whites are more likely to defend remarks as being ‘just a joke’ that blacks will be likely to criticise as racist and, therefore not as something to be found funny. Husband (1988), in criticising Davies’s position, mentions audience research on reactions to the British television comedy programme ‘Till Death Do Us Part’, which featured a fictional character of a bigot. Sixty percent of regular viewers thought the character Alf Garnett to be “so extreme in his views that he’s just a joke” (Husband, p. 164, emphasis added). Husband takes a critical stance to the ‘just-a-joke’ defence. He argues that it is dangerous to defend this type of humour as ‘just a joke’ for it can promote the social acceptability of negative ethnic stereotypes.

This points towards the need to look closely at the relations between humour and prejudice, especially in relation to the claim that a joke is just a joke. At the outset it should be emphasised that a joke is a form of social communication (Fine, 1983, LaFrance, 1983; Mulkay, 1988; Speier, 1998). This means examining jokes in relation to their communicative context, rather than collecting them in the manner of folklorists. In fact, folklorists, especially those who tend to celebrate the positive aspects of humour, have encountered problems when trying to analyse the meanings of ethnic jokes. Dundes (1987) has written of the criticisms provoked by his folklorist publications about sick 'Auschwitz jokes'. He suggested that Auschwitz jokes as told by Germans, "may provide some necessary catharsis" for the joke-teller (1987, p. 37). The problem is that merely collecting these jokes in no way provides evidence about the nature of their communication nor about any 'cathartic value' that they might possess for the tellers. By narrowing the focus, the social harm of such joke-telling can be overlooked, as well as the connections with the politics of racism.

Discourse and conversation analytic studies have paid attention to the ways that jokes are introduced and received in conversation (e.g., Drew, 1987; Kotthoff, 1999; Tannen, 1984; Mulkay, 1988; Sacks, 1992). Tellers can introduce the joke in various ways, indicating a transition from seriousness to joking. In return recipients can subtly indicate their acceptance or non-acceptance by the presentation of their laughter and by their comments following the telling. These studies emphasise that jokes are not merely told, but they are also reacted to and talked about. There is also what can be called a 'meta-discourse' or 'meta-talk' about jokes (see Simons, 1989, more generally for a discussion of 'going-meta' in conversation). All this needs to be

analysed, if the communicative meaning of racist jokes is to be understood. As will be shown, the meta-discourse of humour is not confined to the oral transmission of jokes.

With regard to racist jokes, the meta-discourse may be particularly revealing. Today, there are strong codes against the direct expression of racist views (Billig, 1991; van Dijk, 1992). In fact, there is a case for saying that Victorian taboos against sex have been replaced in the contemporary age by taboos against race (Billig, 1999). As Davies (1990) points out, Victorians bowdlerised the sexual content of joke-books but not the racist content, while joke-books today show the reverse pattern. Humour researchers have taken seriously Freud's argument that jokes permit the infringement of taboos and, hence, their enjoyment derives from the expression of desires that are normally inhibited (Apte, 1983; Mulkay, 1988; De Souza, 1987; Sullivan, 1999). Thus, one would expect racist jokes to become both a means for saying the unsayable and an object of criticism. That being so, the justifications for ethnic joking (particularly that the joke is just a joke) need to be studied in their own right. As discursive analysts stress, people do things rhetorically with their justifications (e.g., Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1999; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1993; Potter, 1996). If justifications are offered for potentially offensive joke-telling, then analysts can examine what the justifications are seeking to accomplish. In particular, one might point to the contrastive nature of such justifications. 'I was just joking' is both a claim to be doing something permissible (i.e. joking) and a denial of doing something criticisable, which is contrasted to the joking.

If jokes are a means of breaking social taboos, then careful attention should also be paid to the language of ethnic and racial jokes. This means analysing the categories

used to depict ethnic others. As will be seen, the choice of language may be crucial not merely for breaking the taboo, but for indicating how enjoyment is derived from the breaking of taboos. These are not issues hidden in the psyche of the teller. Indeed, if Freud is correct, the enjoyment from breaking a taboo is not derived from the wit of the joke-work. Thus, the actual structure of the jokes may be less important than the shared activity of the joking itself. This points to the need to examine the language of the joking as well as that of the meta-discourse used to indicate enjoyment and to justify the joking.

### Extreme Politics of Hatred

In order to understand the relations between hatred and humour, it is important not to consider ethnic or racial jokes in the abstract. Davies (1990) is correct in arguing that the structure and content of a joke should not be taken as necessarily reflecting the joke-teller's state of mind. The fact that someone might repeat a joke against a particular ethnic group, or laugh when hearing such a joke, is not in itself conclusive evidence that they hate, or even dislike, that particular group. It would be circular to explain the joke-telling in terms of hatred if the joke itself is the only evidence for that hatred. Other indications of hatred beyond the content of the joke are necessary if the link between hatred and humour is to be established. For this reason, the present study looks at jokes in the context of the extreme politics of racism, namely that of the Ku Klux Klan.

Any study that looks at the ideology of the racist right needs to be aware that the language of the extreme right is not straightforward. Denials and self-definitions

cannot be taken at their face value. Often extreme right-wing groups, seeking widespread support, operate according to a dual strategy. They take a high road in public, claiming to be respectably democratic, while in private a more extreme message is circulated. Analysts have demonstrated that contemporary fascist groups often conceal the full nature of their ideological extremism, while giving coded messages to hard-core supporters that the lower road has not been abandoned (Billig, 1978; Eatwell, 1992). In this way lip-service might be paid to wider norms against appearing too openly racist or anti-Semitic, whilst, at the same, these norms might be mocked in coded ways. This dual strategy of high and low roads can be detected in the politics of the FN in France and the FPÖ in Austria (Reisigl and Wodak, 1999; Wodak, 2000), as well as in the modern Ku Klux Klan (Wade, 1987).

In consequence, one should not expect that the propaganda of the extreme right will express a simple position in relation to contemporary constraints against racism. Racist groups might seek to destroy the social basis of such restraints while at the same time they may be operating partly within such restraints. In propaganda designed for a wider audience, such groups might wish to be seen to disavow uninhibitedly racist jokes. However, within the more private confines of the group, and in internally circulated material, the humour of hatred might be enjoyed. What this would indicate is that the presentation of racist humour - or its meta-language - might have a complex and dissembling rhetoric.

Some preliminary words about terminology are necessary. The terms 'joke' and 'humour' will be used, but no aesthetic judgement is implied by these terms. It is not suggested that any material so described is actually funny. A social constructionist

position is taken here. ‘Humour’ and ‘jokes’ are indicated by the claims of participants, not the preferences of the analyst. If someone is claiming to be telling a joke then this activity is treated as instance of joke-telling, irrespective of whether or not the analyst finds the joke amusing. It may the case that humour is found in all cultures (Apte, 1983), but not all cultures, sub-cultural groups or even individuals within sub-cultural groups find the same things funny. Indeed, humour is often used to draw boundaries between social groups (Fine, 1983; Speier, 1998). As Gundelach (2000) argues, jokes can form part of the banal nationalism of contemporary nation-states (Billig, 1995). In consequence, there will be social, political, cultural and moral reasons why the jokes that one group enjoys might not be shared by another group. In examining such phenomena, analysts should not restrict the labels ‘humour’ and ‘jokes’ to their own preferences in humour. Instead, they should treat the condemning and celebrating of particular forms of humour as topics for investigation.

The present study will be investigating and quoting from material that those outside the limited political circles of the extreme right are likely to find utterly distasteful. It is not expected that the readers of this report will consider anything funny in the jokes of the Ku Klux Klan supporters. Nor, it should be stressed, does the present analyst. It is not a terminological contradiction to claim that one can be disgusted, and certainly not amused, by particular types of jokes. Only by retaining the words ‘joke’ and ‘humour’ to describe such material is it possible to pursue the links between humour and hatred, rather than defining the topic off the agenda.

Another caveat is in order. The racist humour to be discussed is extreme and it includes the most racially insulting terms possible. The word described here as ‘the

ultimate hate word' will be quoted in full. As will be seen, this ultimate hate word is central to the type of humour that is being examined. When quoting the word, letters could have been omitted to indicate that the word is unacceptably offensive (e.g. Essed, 1995). There are good reasons for quoting the word in such a way, especially when analysts are presenting their own transcriptions of spoken material. On the other hand, there is a case for presenting written material as it appears. By mitigating the language, one would run the risk of conveying unwittingly that the material is less extreme, both politically and morally, than it actually is. For this reason the humour of hatred will be presented in its extreme hatefulness - its serious hatefulness - without modifying this hatefulness.

### Materials

The materials to be studied are three web-sites, which provide racist jokes and promote links with Ku Klux Klan groups. The sites are not official KKK sites. The Ku Klux Klan is not a single organization, but there are a number of KKK groups and networks in the United States with connections abroad (Cox, 1992; Wade, 1987).

Some of the KKK groups cooperate with each other; some are bitter rivals. Each site had to fulfil two criteria to be included in the study: (a) it should promote itself as a humour or joke site; (b) it should be openly identified as having KKK sympathies, even if it does not affiliate itself officially with a particular KKK group.

Consequently, this study does not include web sites that list racist jokes but do not have links with racist organizations. Nor does the study include official KKK sites and publications nor those of fascist parties. Despite including the occasional political cartoon or joke, these sites and publications promote themselves as being primarily 'serious'.

The three sites are:

1) “Nigger Jokes KKK” (NJKKK), provided by Whitesonly.net. The site, on its home page, declares itself to be “Humor jokes about nigger meant as a kkk comedy Ku Klux Klan” (here and elsewhere no attempt is made to correct spelling, grammar or phrasing when quoting from the sites - no ‘sic’ will be given following misspellings etc, for ‘sic’ would imply that the transgressions of language are occasional rather than continual). This was the largest of the three sites. Having entered the site, the viewer is presented with an index of one hundred and forty three pages that can be accessed. As will be seen, not all of these pages present themselves as humorous, despite being found on a site that defines itself as a comedy site. Some of the ostensibly humorous pages concern sexist and anti-Semitic jokes. Since the focus is on racism, these pages will not be specifically analysed here. Many of the pages have been designed for presentation on this site and are not compilations of previously circulating jokes. Some of the index titles provide links to ‘serious’ KKK sites, e.g., ‘Klan Rally Dates’, ‘Pic’s of KKK in Slovenia’, ‘Upcoming events and message Board’, ‘KKK song’ etc.

2) “Nigger Jokes” (NJ), also provided by Whitesonly.net. This home page does not have a formal title, but has the running head “Nigger Jokes”. The home page announces its humorous nature: “Not everything must be deadly serious. Nigger Jokes and more Politically InCorrect Fun”. This is the nearest the page comes to having a formal title. The page also includes its own self-recommendation: “I haven’t laughed so hard in years! I’d forgotten how much fun Political Correctness took out of the world”. The page does not provide the identity of the person making these claims.

Unlike Whitesonly's NJKKK, this home page does not contain outward KKK symbolism, although it does reproduce the confederate flag. It is much smaller than NJKKK. Its index only has eleven pages, which can be found on the bigger NJKKKK. One of the eleven links provides a direct entry into a distribution network for nazi and KKK products, including racist and anti-Semitic cd's, badges, books etc. This same item can be found on NJKKK.

3) "Nigger Joke Central" (NJC) provided by Whitepower.com. The index of this site provides links with fourteen pages, the majority of which are lengthy lists of short jokes. The site does not merely specialise in the type of jokes suggested by its own title. In addition to headings such as "Nigger Jokes" and "Tons of Nigger Jokes", there are also headings such as "Faggot Jokes" and "Hispanic Jokes" and "coming soon - Jewish Jokes!!" NJC invites its audience to "to feel free to submit your jokes or to request a new category". More than the other two sites, NJC is a compilation of extreme racist jokes that are currently circulating elsewhere. As such there is an overlap of content with other sites which collect racist jokes, but which do not directly link with racist organizations. NJC, by contrast, not only contains on its front page the White Power symbol but also has a connection with "My Brothers - the Klan". This connection provides a direct link to a Ku Klux Klan Webpage Index, which in its turn gives links to individual Klan organizations.

### Not Just Jokes

On their home pages all three sites declare themselves to be sites of humour. Connected to these declarations are disclaimers, whose nature and function need examination. NJ declares: "Please keep in mind that these links are here for humor

sake, all be they in bad taste. No one is condoning violence against anyone”. NJKKK contains a lengthy “Legal Disclaimer” on a separate page. On the index page and also at the end of many items, it says “please read our legal disclaimer”. This disclaimer contains statements such: “The site is meant as a Joke”; “And you agree by entering this site, that this type of joke is legal where you live, and you agree that you recognize this site is meant as a joke not to be taken seriously”; “And you agree that this site is a comedy site, not a real racist site”; “we ARE NOT real life racists”. NJC does not have a separate page acting as a disclaimer. It simply declares on its home page: “YOU MUST HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR. IF YOU ARE OFFENDED, THEN FUCK OFF!!!”

For present purposes one can note the absence of the small words ‘just’ or ‘only’ in the disclaimers. It is not asserted that the pages are only meant as a joke or are just for humour’s sake. Later, it will be shown that the conventional ‘just’ or ‘only’ is used on specific occasions in particular disclaimers. The omission in these general disclaimers is significant. ‘Only’ or ‘just’ are often used in rhetorical defence against an accusation (see Billig, 1999). Speakers can defend themselves by claiming to be only doing one thing and that one thing is presented as non-blameworthy. Thus, ‘I was only joking’ is a way of defending one’s remarks on the grounds that they were not seriously intended to give offence (Tannen, 1992). As has been mention, the ‘only joking’ defence is contrastive: joking as an acceptable activity is implicitly or explicitly contrasted with something else that had it been ‘serious’ might have been considered as unacceptable. In the context of ethnic joke making, the defence would be expected if the joke-teller is accused of racism or seeks to forestall such an

accusation. 'I was only joking' could be used to imply that 'I was not being seriously/really/actually racist' etc'.

NJKKK comes close in its legal disclaimer to this sort of defence. It claims not to be a "real" racist site, leaving open what a "real" racist site might be. As will be seen, it presents material that is openly racist and certainly not all its material is presented as comedy or "meant as a joke". NJC is not concerned about appearing racist. On its home page, it has both an 'enter' button and an 'exit' button. Next to the enter button is written: "ENTER ONLY IF YOU WANT TO SEE RACIST JOKES, QUEER JOKES, YO MAMMA JOKES AND SEE TOONS". Next to the 'exit' button is: "I CANNOT HANDLE RACISM - GET ME OUT OF HERE". The racism here is openly proclaimed. This is not the discourse of mitigated or denied racism that is such a feature of mainstream discourses on race (van Dijk, 1987, 1992 and 1993; Billig, 1991; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). 'We are joking' in this context is most certainly not a defence against the charge of giving racist offence.

The disclaimers, however, do not principally contrast comedy with 'real racism'. The force of the denial is primarily directed against the charge of inciting violent behaviour. Thus NJ, having declared that the site is for "humor sake" follows this with the sentence that "No one is condoning violence against anyone". Accepting the 'maxim of relevance' that the following sentence is generally presented as relevant to the preceding one (Grice, 1975), the defence, or disclaimer, 'this is humorous' implies the claim 'we are not advocating actual violence'. The "Legal Disclaimer" of NJKKK makes this plain when it declares:

“Any of the following pages, photo’s, or other material contained within this webpage is not, I REPEAT, is not to be taken as a THREAT to ANYTHING or ANYONE! \*\*\* The material supplied is not an instruction or a directive to use against anyone. However, if one does take the information provided and acts violently upon it, it is their responsibility and solely theirs.”

The capitals, the stars and the repetition emphasise that this is the serious point of the initial declaration that “the site is meant as a Joke”. Left unelaborated is the possibility that ‘real’ racism can be construed as violent racism. It can be noted that the denial qualifies the category racist: they do not deny that they are racists, merely that they are real racists. If they are not, as they state in the legal disclaimer, “real life racists” (emphasis added), then the ‘real life’ racist might possibly be understood as practising, rather than fantasising, racism. The practice of racism, according to this logic, would imply the practice of violence. Thus, the ‘real’ racism, which is disclaimed, can be understood as a narrow, extreme category.

Even without the disclaimers, this humour cannot be considered as ‘just joking’. It is displayed as humour with a surplus. As the NJC page declares: “this site contains racial jokes, slurs and an overall negative view to the black race”. The overall negative view is not claimed to be a joke. The jokes themselves are not presented as ‘just jokes’, but they are labelled as “nigger jokes”. The category labels the jokes and is not part of the jokes. It belongs, as such, to the meta-discourse of the joke. The appellation itself cannot be justified as ‘just a joke’: it is a serious label whose semantics are not neutral. The extra word, as the ultimate word of racist hate, comes with ideological, historical and emotional baggage

In the same vein, NJKKK calls itself “kkk comedy”. ‘kkk’ adds something to ‘comedy’ so that it cannot be ‘just comedy’. A defence ‘It’s just a KKK joke’ is not the same as ‘it’s just a joke’. The address of the site shows that in this humour more is at stake than just humour. The page is produced by ‘Whitesonly’, whose very name indicates the nature of the intended audience and politics. The home page plays a joke, as it addresses its audience. Beneath the title “Nigger Jokes” is a picture of a door. And beneath the door is the command: “Open Door for a surprise nigger or click here to enter”. If the cursor is pointed at the door, then the legend “Niggers not allowed” appears. When the door is clicked, a hooded Ku Klux Klan figure appears in the doorway. “Niggers” is not merely a label for jokes. It denotes persons, who are not welcome and who are to be frightened away. And that is part of the joke. The white recipients are meant to find it amusing to imagine a black person being insulted and frightened from the site. Thus, the white person is invited to enjoy being part of the whites only imagined audience on the ‘Whitesonly’ site, insulting and scaring blacks.

When the click-to-enter is made on this initial page, users find themselves on the Whitesonly index page. At the top of the page is a large W. From the central apex of the W can be seen the figure of a lynched black man hanging, with his head in a noose. This humour - this comedy site - defines its own nature simultaneously as both more than, and less than, humour. It cannot be just humour. And contrary to the “legal disclaimer”, it is real racism and presents itself as such. The disclaimer might make a contrast between humour and actual violence, but the basis of the humour is indicated by the hanging figure as violence.

## No Joke

On many of the pages of NJKKK and NJ the boundary between seriousness and joking is not clearly drawn (see Mulkay, 1988, for a discussion of the ambiguity of the boundaries of humour). In this respect, the pages present themselves as being more, or less, than jokes, despite what the legal disclaimers suggest. Thus, by the details of their presentation, not merely by their categorisation, these jokes are not just jokes.

“Definition of a Nigger”, which is to be found on both NJKKK and NJ, illustrates many of the features contained in these pages in which joking and serious claims are intermixed. Ostensibly the page parodies a dictionary entry. Thus, it starts as if humorously defining the ultimate word of racist hate:

“Nig-ger (nig’er)n. An African jungle anthropoid ape of the primate family pongidae (superfamily cercopithecoidea). Imported to the United States as slave labour in the late 1700’s-1800’s, these wild creatures now roam freely while destroying the economic and social infrastructures of American and various other nations. These flamboyant sub-human love to consume large quantities of greasy fried chicken.”

Below the entry is a picture of an African-American male with a speak-balloon: “I be heer to pik up da welfare check, sucka”. As de Sousa (1987) has argued, jokes, especially sexist and racist ones, express stereotyped assumptions. The person finding the joke funny is implicitly accepting these stereotyped assumptions about the nature

of the other. The imitation dictionary format, of course, spells out these assumptions and presents them as if facts. The use of the ultimate hate word as a technical dictionary entry, which is presented as if referring to biological, historical and anthropological ‘facts’, mocks the conventional tabooed nature of the word. For the joker, the so-called ‘facts’ are not the joke, but it is the incongruity of mixing the language of prejudiced stereotypes (i.e. the greasy fried chicken) with the sombre language of the apparently unprejudiced dictionary.

The message that there are serious ‘facts’ is underlined by the next part of the page. The dictionary parody ceases and the page then presents statistics comparing rates of black and white crime. The statistical tables are not presented as parodies in the way that the dictionary entry is. The figures are ostensibly taken from the FBI crime statistics. Interpretations are offered for the figures: “in every negative category niggers lead the way”. There is no attempt at humour here. Nor is there overt parody in the following section, which uses quasi-biological language. Again the ultimate word is retained long after the joking has stopped: “Its interesting to note that Niggers have the greatest variance in their DNA than any other group”. The joking definition of the dictionary entry is cashed in as ‘serious’ argument: “What a greater variance means is, they are less evolved...Just like the monkeys at the zoo, the more you feed them, the more accustomed they come to believing they deserve it”. It ends with the declaration: “Wake up America and Smell the Nigger!” Again, the joke is not even a joke.

The same combination of parody and serious intent can be found on other pages. For instance NJKKK lists “Nigger Job Application Form”. This is a mock employment

form that asks questions such as “Type of building in which you live: Shack\_\_Ghetto  
Slum\_\_Public Housing\_\_Homeless Shelter\_\_Cardboard Box” etc. The NJKKK lists  
“The Nigger Brain” (on NJ it is listed as “Diagram of the Negroid Brain”). The  
relevant page presents a diagram of a cross-sectioned brain, labelled “THE NIGGA  
BRAIN”. The joke consists of parodying the format of a biological textbook, while  
identifying brain areas conforming to the KKK stereotype of the black male. Large  
areas of the brain are labelled “SEX”. There is a medium sized area entitled “Crotch  
rubbing area”, a smaller chunk for “Attention span” and a mere dot entitled  
“Ambition”. The whole diagram on NJKKK bears the heading: “kkk. Not very  
politically correct, but definitely anatomically correct”.

Of course, the diagram is not anatomically correct and the page’s designer would  
know this: the locations of the supposed brain areas are chosen for humour and not to  
match actual brain functions. But the claim indicates that the writer does not want the  
joke to be taken just as a joke. The stereotype is being claimed as fact. The point is  
reinforced by yet another label below the diagram. This label acts like a joke-teller,  
who having told their joke in conversation, move into meta-mode to emphasise,  
explain and praise their own punchline:

“THE NIGGER BRAIN EXPOSED

And it’s not a joke”

The meta-discourse denies that the joke is a joke. ‘It’s no joke’ operate rhetorically as  
the counterpart to ‘it’s just a joke’. It claims that there is a serious point being made.  
The joke is not just to be laughed at. The stereotype is being asserted as factually

correct. It is definitely anatomically correct. Sartre argued that bigots free themselves from the demands of logic and reasonableness. The serious joke, that is not just a joke, or even a joke, illustrates this. Within a conventional ethnic joke, the stereotype is not justified factually (Davies, 1990). The ‘mean Scotsman’ or ‘efficient German’ does not have to be statistically grounded in order for the joke to be understood and laughed at. The KKK’s “nigger jokes” appear to operate in the same way; but then the joke teller informs the recipient that it’s not a joke. The facts, which are not facts, and can be seen to be parodies of facts, are to be treated as definitely correct. As Sartre suggested, the joke mocks the demands of reasonableness, for the excessive stereotype, which is claimed to be true, is also a joke.

### The Ultimate Hate Word

“Niggers not allowed”, declares NJKKK on its opening page but semantically that is not true. The word, far from not being allowed, is continually displayed. As can be seen, these pages constantly use the ultimate word of racist hate. Forty of the titles on NJKKK index contain the word in their title e.g., “Nigger Defendant”, “Nigger Cartoon”, “Niggers We Have Your Pictures” and so on. One can ask what the incessant use of this word is doing.

The parody of the dictionary entry indicates that the page-writers are conveying the specialness of the word, which in these contexts is used as an emblem. The joke depends on the fact that there is no such entry: this is not an ordinary word whose usage in these contexts can be understood by recourse to a dictionary. The key characteristic of the word is that it is the ultimate term in the racist lexicon. There is

no stronger term of hatred. No other category is being held in reserve. The word announces hatred without semantic constraint: this is real racism.

The ultimate word of hate not only expresses dehumanization but also, in the context of these joke pages, signifies dehumanization. The parodied dictionary entry, with its reference to “sub-human”, emphasises this message, as does the straight-faced use of biological terminology. This is a constant theme of these jokes and the serious stereotypes that they convey. Another page consists of listing “easy steps” for you to follow to become “a certified nigger”. The first is: “Slink around, shuffling your feet and bobbing your neck like the lazy bum you are”. Twenty-three such stereotyped descriptions are listed. The ultimate word is used throughout: “If your a nigger buck, fuck anything that moves, no matter how ugly she is” and so on. Throughout the page, there are pictures of apes, and these are labelled “NIGGERS”. This mixing of primate photographs with text is a common trope. Another page presents the “winner of the 1999 KKK Miss Africoon pageant”. It presents a picture of a black girl’s body with a gorilla’s face. “Nigger Demanding Welfare” turns out to be a picture of a gorilla declaring “I want my Welfare check now!”

Ethnic jokes, with their use of unflattering stereotypes, tend to dehumanize by mocking their targets (Boskin, 1987). It is abstract Scotsmen, Jews or Poles who are ridiculed. It makes no sense for the hearer of such jokes to ask which Scotsman, Jew or Pole is involved, nor to show pity for the mythic character, who is presented in order to be laughed at. The KKK jokes take this dehumanization further through the content of jokes that treat humans as non-human (or ‘sub-human’ to quote the mock dictionary). But then the joke becomes more than a joke, slipping into serious

language, as the joker uses statistics and non-parodied pseudo-biology to suggest that the human really is sub-human. The ultimate word reinforces the message: in this context the “nigger” is never a fellow human being. The word is used like a chemical formula to extract the humanity from the target, rendering the joke pitiless.

There is the possibility that pitilessness and humour are more generally linked. As Freud suggested the joke provides a setting in which one can be freed from the demands of pity. If the ultimate word is an emblem of extreme racism, then enjoyment might be gained through a lack of restraint, which permits the racist to treat humans as animals. However, it is not sufficient to speculate that bigots might enjoy using the ultimate word, as if one can read the state of mind of the jokes’ recipients from the wording of the jokes. Generally, the assumptions of discursive psychology warn against such an analytic step (Edwards, 1994; Edwards and Potter, 1993; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Thus, one cannot state unequivocally that KKK supporting web users enjoy reading statements such as “Wake up America and Smell the Nigger!”, as they share the vocabulary of hatred. More compelling evidence about the enjoyment of ultimate language would come from the way that users of the word themselves depict that usage. If such meta-usage implies an association with enjoyment, then the analytic links between hatred and enjoyment are strengthened.

As has been mentioned the joke sites have their direct links to KKK official web pages. On these pages, the ultimate word tends not to be used, at least quite so blatantly. The political high road is taken, as extreme racism and bigotry is officially disclaimed. No browser is told to “Fuck Off!!!” if they cannot handle racism. For

instance, the Official Page of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan declares “we want to state for the record that we do not endorse hatred”. The Bayou Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, whose site can also be accessed through NJKKK, has a question and answer section. “Does the Klan hate all Negroes?” it asks in order to provide its own answer: “No! This is one of the greatest misconceptions people have regarding the Klan”. The ultimate word is significant by its absence in these and other declarations of non-hatred. Its usage would undermine the protestation of non-hatred, for it signifies that very hatred. Despite the protestation, the site of the Bayou Knights contains a link with NJKKK. This link, however, is identified as ‘WhitesOnly’, in this avoiding any mention of jokes and the use of the ultimate hate word.

The semantic shift between the ultimate and non-ultimate words of hatred, and between the high and low political roads, can be seen with a particular link by NJKKK to the David Duke Press Center. David Duke is the former leader of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan who is now pursuing an entryist strategy in Louisiana Republican Party. He was an elected member of the Louisiana House of Representatives and currently holds elective office in a parish county in Louisiana. The NJKKK index page lists: “David Duke on nigger Woods”, linking to a long piece by Duke about the golfer Tiger Woods. Duke in his article does not use the ultimate word - he refers to “Blacks”. The title of his piece is “Tiger Woods, Race and Profession Sports”, not the title given by NJKKK. His language is pseudo-biological and the tone is stodgily ‘reasonable’ as he develops his racist philosophy of sport. The NJKKK, however, sets the frame by which it expects its browsers to understand the piece: the golfer is not Tiger Woods, but “nigger Woods”.

Such a semantic shift on its own does not indicate that those who engage in the shift see it as a change from seriousness to enjoyment and from restraint to hatred. Two further pages on NJKKK can be considered, neither of which is presented as humorous. The first is entitled “A Message From a Governor”. Ostensibly it is from a white governor who wishes to remain anonymous. The piece claims that it is not only poor whites who are drawn to extreme racism: “If anyone truly hates the niggers and has a right to do so, it’s the highly educated and affluent white”. But, says the writer, you don’t hear such whites talking out:

“And these folks are a gracious lot. They keep their “offensive” opinions to themselves and only share their choice nigger jokes amongst each other. But don’t be fooled Sambo, they hate your guts just as much as any Klansman, maybe more. Because the nigger has taken something dear from their children....the future”

Several points can be noted about the extract. (a) Throughout the page, the so-called governor uses the ultimate word as if it were a descriptor. When the writer comes to addressing an imaginary black, there is a switch to ‘Sambo’. It is as if the ultimate word is too strong even to use in a snatch of imagined dialogue, in which the white speaker is warning the black about third parties (as contrasted, for instance, with making a direct threat such as “niggers not allowed”). (b) There is the deployment of the term “nigger jokes”. Not only is this used as a category that needs no explanation, but such joking is presented as something that respectable people would enjoy in private. It is not put in distancing quotation marks like “offensive”. The lack of marks indicates that the term is one from which the author is not distancing himself. (c) The

jokes are used as a warrant to back up the argument that educated whites hate blacks as much, or even more, than any member of the Klan might. Thus, the sharing of such jokes is presented as a sign of hatred. This is, of course, on a site that specialises in such jokes and points readers towards political parties that outwardly disclaim such hatred.

The second quotation comes from a link listed by NJKKK as “Nigger Watch News”. This consists primarily of quotations from newspapers about “minority and immigrant crime” (the very phrase itself signifying a shift to the high road of racist politics). The start of the page contains the following bracketed statement: “(sorry no ‘nudes’, no jokes, no cartoons, no music, no ‘n-words’ - just news)”.

Here the ultimate word is not used, and attention is drawn to its non-use. It is designated euphemistically as the ‘n-word’, whose identity readers are presumed to recognise immediately. Most significantly the writer is constructing a contrast. On the one hand, there are items of fun, such as jokes, cartoon, music and even nudes. On the other there is the seriousness of news. The news will be just news, and, in consequence, no bits of the fun list will intrude. In this contrast, the ‘n-word’ belongs to the fun-category. The writer, moreover, is apologising to the readers that the page will be just seriousness. They cannot expect the fun of the ‘n-word’ here. This is implicit, in the same way that the nature of the jokes and cartoons are not specified. They are understood not to be any type of joke or cartoon, which might be found in a regular newspaper, but they are the type to be found along with the ‘n-word’ on other pages of the particular site, the “nigger jokes” site. The apology conveys that all this can be understood without being specified. In this way, the writer assumes that the

reader will understand why the ‘n-word’ is not to be used for the serious business to which the page aspires. By these contrasts and by the apology, the writer indicates the pleasure of the ultimate term of racist abuse.

### Just Joking Violently

If there is fun for the racist in the language of racism, then one can ask what kind of fun is at stake. It is insufficient merely to say that the fun is political or racist. That would merely mirror the racist’s own description of their jokes as ‘kkk jokes’ or ‘nigger jokes’. Again, if one wishes to avoid speculating about the inner psyche of the racist, then the approach should be indirect. This means looking at the contrastive nature of those disclaimers which assert that the pages are fun and not something else. The disclaimers cannot be accepted at face value, for they can be easily read as disingenuous devices to avoid prosecution or legal responsibility. Nevertheless the ways that the disclaimers are rhetorically constructed and the contrasts they evoke indicate what the fun is being contrasted with and, thereby, they offer indications about the nature of the bigot’s pleasure.

As has been mentioned, the general disclaimers, including NJKKK’s lengthy ‘legal disclaimer’ do not insert the modifier ‘only’ into the statement that the site or page is a joke or is presented as comedy. As such, the joke is more than a joke. But it is denied that the surplus is a direct exhortation to violence. However, on occasion, in specific contexts, the modifier, that appears to eliminate other possibilities, can be found. Two instances can be cited from pages on NJKKK. In both what is denied is not an exhortation to violence in general, but an exhortation to a specific form of

racist violence that the page appears to celebrate. Examples from pages that ostensibly joke about violence against women, such as ‘The Wife Beaters Home Page’, are not given in the present analysis, simply because here the focus is on racist, rather than sexist, themes. The analysis could, and indeed should, be extended to cover the KKK’s imagery of violent sexism.

1) “Gun Target”, sub-headed “Official RUNNIN’ NIGGER Target”. It contains a cartoon silhouette of a black man running. On his body are superimposed gun targets. The legend informs viewers how to print out the target to the correct size so that “it produces a nice gun target”. The legend ends:

“I guess you could say this is the most realistic gun target for police use today, since most felons are niggers.

We are strongly against violence, and do not support violent or illegal behavior. This page is for laughs only.”

2) “How to Teach your Dog to Eat niggers (just kidding)”. Beneath the heading is the statement: “we do not advocate or incite violence, this page is meant as a joke”. The page includes a very brief description of ‘Shutzhund’ or the training of dogs to attack. The web-site addresses of Shutzhund sites are given. The page ends with a small print disclaimer:

“none of the above sites promote feeding niggers to dogs and are listed for informational purposes only. None are associated with our website. This site is a parody, and meant only as a JOKE! Do not take it seriously”

The disclaimers on both pages share common features. In the first place there is the statement that the page (or site) is intended only or just as a joke or for laughs. This involves a contrast with something specific which it is claimed is not being seriously recommended. The second example claims that it is not seriously urging people to train violent dogs to eat black people. The first example - the gun-target page - also makes the contrast between actual violence and humour. It denies that the page actually advocates and aids its readers to treat black men as targets for gun practice.

Again, the laugh or the joke is more than just a joke, despite the claim that it is only a joke/laugh. In both cases, the pages contain material that is not presented for laughs. In (2) the information about dog training, together with the dog-training web-site addresses, is not a “paradody” or meant “only as a JOKE”. It is seriously presented with advice offered: “Money can be made training these dogs, and selling them to law enforcement also”. Similarly (1) has its serious statement: it claims that the target is “realist” for police because “most felons are niggers”. Again, that statement is not presented as a joke or a parody (or ‘paradody’). In the world of the KKK, it counts as a ‘factual/realistic’ statement.

In fact, the Gun Target page does not end with the quoted disclaimer. Like many of the pages on NJKKK it contains one of the Whitesonly’s logos and slogans. This particular one, which is used extensively on the site, declares Whitesonly to be “the proud sponsors of America’s Favorite Sport”. The declaration is accompanied by a small drawing of a pickup truck dragging a black man along the ground.

One does not have to judge whether the disclaimers against violence are genuine or merely devices to evade prosecution or liability, in order to note the nature of the humor that is being claimed. The disclaimer, by its contrast between humour and actual violence, portrays the idea of shooting, maiming and killing black people as only a joke. The apparent legal defence is that the very idea of such extreme racist violence is a matter for laughter. Perhaps even more shocking than any actual call to violence is the claim that imagining racist violence - whether firing a gun at a defenceless figure or training dog to savage a black man - is understood to be funny.

### Lynching as a Joke

However bad the target, the shutzhund and the truck logo might be as images of enjoyment in the racist imagination, there is worse. Lynching, which has played such a major part in the history of the Ku Klux Klan, is celebrated jokingly on these pages. In these celebrations the distinction between the imaginary and the historically real is blurred, as once again joking and seriousness are combined.

One of the other logos used by Whitesonly, besides the truck, is a rope, knotted into a noose. The accompanying legend reads "Bring your nigger...we got the rope". One page of NJKKK provides "The 'Noose Leroy' cyber hanging game". The game is set in a cotton-field and involves the player moving an image of a noose: "Pin the noose on the Nigger! Pick him up, close your eyes and Noose him!" The winner is the player "comes closest to putting the noose around the Nigger's neck."

Both the logo and the game involve imagining lynching as fun. NJKKK also includes pictures entitled “Lynching Tribute”, accessed under the headings “Origin of word ‘Lynch’” and “Hanging Pictures”. These pages consist largely of photographs of actual historic lynchings. For the most part they depict the corpses of dead black men hanging. Commentaries are provided. Some are jokey, indicating that the expected reaction is not shock or disgust, but enjoyment of the violent images of lynching. On ‘Lynching tribute Page II’, accessed by “Hanging Pictures”, can be found a photograph of a black man being burnt, which is accompanied by:

“Another one bites the dust. You know how bad they smell alive, can you imagine a nigger burning? Ewww (God made niggers stink, so even blind people could hate them)”

Regarding another burning, the commentary declares “I bet their greasy skin crackles when burning!”

The page finishes with a disclaimer that it is not inciting violence. But the disclaimer itself becomes part of the joke: “Remember don’t kill niggers, they are a protected species under affirmative action laws!”. The notion of ‘protected species’, of course, replays the joke of blacks being a separate and lower form of life. However, the disclaimer cannot totally parody itself, for the page still needs to claim legal protection. There follows a longer disclaimer that seems to disavow the violence of lynching:

“This page is meant as a joke! don’t do anything illegal. What has occurred in these pages is terrible. And if you even think about doing such an act, you are a moron. Hopefully after looking at these pictures, you’ll see how terrible such activity is. And this page will make you realize how terrible violence is. Now let’s work together to end the death penalty. It’s no different that what has occurred in the pictures above”.

The ‘tribute page’ accessed by ‘The origin of word ‘Lynch’” also finishes with a disclaimer that makes the connection between the photographed lynching and current executions: “Your hands are as bloody as the executioners in these pictures, if you don’t stand up today, against the death penalty.”

The levels of joking are complex. An overtly joking disclaimer has been provided. ‘The protected species’ disclaimer with its use of the ultimate hate word subverts by parody any notion of disclaiming. This parody, then, for legal reasons needs to be subverted by an apparently serious disclaimer. The claim is that the preceding content “is meant as a joke”. The claim directly precedes the command not to do anything illegal, thereby again showing the rhetorical function of the joke-claim: it is being used as a defence against any charge of incitement to actual violence. Joking is assumed to be the opposite of actual activity. In assuming the contrast, actual historical lynchings - the actual deaths of black men - are assumed to be jokes.

In this case, the writer does not leave matters there, but introduces a further claim that, in fact, subverts the joke-claim and does so by introducing a further joke. It is claimed that the pictures should have the effect of making the viewer realize how

terrible violence is and should motivate the viewer to campaign against the death penalty. At once, this further claim subverts the idea that the pictures on the page are meant as a joke. If they are meant as a joke, then they cannot have the serious purpose of attempting to make viewers realise the awfulness of violence and spur them to campaign against the death penalty. Of course, the claim is contradicted by the gloating commentaries beneath the pictures.

The idea of a liberal Ku Klux Klan offended by violence and capital punishment is, of course, an ironic joke. Mulkey (1988) has suggested that a speaker, who is being ironic, typically produces a counter-text, which undermines the overt text. Here no counter-text can be created without subverting the legal disclaimer, for the irony itself is the counter-text. As Attardo (2000), in his discussion of irony points out, context and background knowledge often provide clues that an utterance is ironic. In this case, there is one crucial piece of knowledge that enables the reader to recognize the irony. Ku Klux Klan groups most certainly are not against the death penalty; in fact the majority advocate extending executions to cover drug and sexual offences.

The claim that the page is a joke is self-referential: it includes the part of the page on which the claim is made, for that part includes the ostensible stand against capital punishment. The logic of humour comes into play. If the claim that the page is a joke is itself a joke, then, like the very nature of the 'KKK joke', the self-referential joke must be more than a joke. It cannot be 'just a joke' and still make a claim, even the claim that it is 'just a joke'. In this case, the KKK joke is an argument for lynching, but this is an argument that cannot be directly expressed. The pictures can pay tribute to lynching; the words can mock the dead victims, inviting the spectator to laugh with

enjoyment; but the words, for legal reasons, cannot argue for the desirability of lynching today. But they point in that direction, through the ironic device of invoking a liberal, anti-death penalty KKK.

If the KKK, in common with the majority of the American public, supports the death penalty as legitimate and necessary, and if lynching is to be compared with the death penalty, then lynching too is legitimate and necessary. The disclaimer at the end of the first Lynching Tribute Page takes up the logic. It tells readers that their hands are as bloody as those of lynchers if they do not oppose the death penalty. The page continues: “Your money has paid for the deaths of people”. The writer knows that his KKK readers are not about to stand up against the death penalty. But just as the premises are leading to their conclusion, the argument stops with an ironic: “Ahhh, im sure you’ll rationalize it somehow, if you don’t how could you live with yourself?”

Then separately below, in capital letters, comes the conclusion: “THE BLOOD IS ON YOUR HANDS”. This is no joke. The pictures of death have been presented for enjoyment. The joking commentary has encouraged the reader to laugh. Respectable morality, not to mention the legal system, has been mocked. The ironic argument for lynching has been made. The punch-line is not an opportunity for further fun. The laughter is over. The punch-line tells readers that they are part of the lynching party with blood on their hands. The jesting imagination has been binding them to the savage history of the Klan.

### Concluding Remarks

The major point of the present study has been to underline the connections between hatred and humour. These connections are strongly shown in the web sites that have been studied. The results support Sartre's general point that humour can provide a means for expressing hatred and, thus, bigotry can bring its own pleasures to the bigot (see also Billig, in press). Not only can the targets of hatred be savagely ridiculed but by using the discourse of humour the bigot can simultaneously mock the demands of reason.

The type of humour displayed in the KKK supporting web sites is extreme, as is the politics of which they are a part. As such, this extreme racist humour may have different characteristics than other types of humour. It is common among theorists of humour to follow Freud's point that jokes permit tabooed desires to be expressed. If today there are taboos against the outward expression of racism, then the racist joke becomes a way of saying the unsayable. Teller and recipient can deny that they are racist; they can protect their own sense of their non-racist selves by claiming that they are 'just joking'. Clearly, this type of explanation does not match the joke-telling of the extreme racist. The extreme racist has no crise de conscience about being racist. The joke sites, described above, openly parade their racism. The ultimate hate word is used again and again. The joking provides a context, not only for its use, but for opportunities to signal the enjoyment of its use.

The Freudian type of explanation depends upon the joker being able to believe that the joke is just a joke: it is not a 'real' expression of sexual or aggressive desire. The extreme racist jokes, as has been seen, are not presented as 'just jokes' - they are

always more than jokes. However, the Freudian explanation is not totally inappropriate. The joking still permits freedom from restraint.

First, as has been mentioned, there is the freedom from the demands of logical and factual argument. The jokers know that blacks are not gorillas or apes. They know that the stereotypes are exaggerations. It is this knowledge that permits the jokes to be enjoyed as jokes and the targets to be dehumanized. Constantly in these sites, ‘factual’ claims intrude on the jokes. Apparent statistics and pseudo-biology remind the reader that the joke is not just a joke. At the same time, the pictures of primates, the extreme exaggerations and the parodies knowingly mock the world of cautious fact and reasonable argument.

Then, there is the type of restraint that follows from denial. KKK groups might not deny that they are racist, but they publicly deny that they hate blacks. In these denials, the ultimate hate word is avoided. The jokes - the very label “nigger jokes” - not only throw off all such restraint with gusto but they mock the restraint. However, this cannot be done openly. The jokes do not, and cannot, take the KKK as their target, in order to mock openly the public restraint of the denial of hatred. The politics of the extreme right demands a limited discipline, which the jokes evade but cannot express directly. The joker cannot state openly: ‘Look, we are contradicting what our leaders tell us to say publicly - we do hate’. The jokes achieve this, especially as the political ideology overflows the context of joking. Thus, political loyalty is asserted through the joking: these are, to use the terminology of NJKKK, “KKK jokes”.

Most importantly, these jokes, that are not just jokes, mock restraints against racist violence. They celebrate such violence, encouraging that it should be imagined as enjoyment without pity for the dehumanized victims. The harm of such violent fantasy can be denied - it's not real after all. As with much humour, there is ambivalence, as assertion and denial both are present with no need to resolve contradiction. On these joke-pages, the KKK supporter can find fantasies of violence that are not to be found on the 'serious' pages of official KKK groups. There are games in which nooses can be placed around dehumanized figures of blacks; there are pictures of lynchings with gloating comments. The supporter can laugh at the death of blacks, who, seriously, are depicted as less than human. And this depiction calls for more laughter and violent fantasy.

On these pages, the extreme racist can be brave without acting. They can be murderers in their imagination. There is no need for conscience: these are jokes and the targets deserve their fate. The contradiction between the two justifications does not matter. Thus, racists are invited to join the fun of the lynch mob without moving from their computer. They can have blood on their hands, but the blood will not drip messily onto the key-boards. Far from saying to themselves that it is only a joke, they can assert that this is not just a joke. And if they do say this, then they will, at last, have said something that is accurate.

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