

the Rice Thresher

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Friday, September 29, 2006

Your comments seemed unnecessarily cruel, and like all good comedy, we found ourselves waiting for the punch line but it never came. We have no intention to squelch your right to free speech, because it would limit our ability to respond to your views; however, we need you to understand the responsibility that comes with your position. Make us think! Make us question our ideals! Do not belittle or isolate in an already isolating world. Your piece was divisive and proved that Rice does not deserve the ranking given by the Princeton Review, so thank you! There's no place like Rice!

Nichole Payne
Anthropology graduate student

Adrianna Bond
Vocal Performance graduate student

Chappelle's Show defense not valid

To the editor:

After reading some of last week's letters to the editor, I have noticed a somewhat disturbing trend of people using what I call the "Dave Chappelle defense" to justify the Sept. 15 Backpage: If it was Dave Chappelle, Carlos Mencia, Russell Peters or Chris Rock instead of Evan Mintz using that same type of humor, there would not have been an issue. I do not want to get into the bigger debate of whether the Backpage was right or not, or if those comedians are right in their actions, but I do believe that the problem results from a lack of perspective.

As college students, I think we sometimes forget that we are not representative of the population as a whole. The implications of the Sept. 15 Backpage affect more than just the Rice undergraduate student population. As was evidenced in some of the letters to the editor last week, staff and faculty took issue with the Backpage and may not necessarily share the view that this Dave Chappelle type of humor is justified. Many people — including some of our peers — do not believe that Dave Chappelle's humor on *Chappelle's Show* was appropriate. We also have to remember that Dave Chappelle left a \$50 million contract and a third season

for the next century, it would be more constructive presenting views that open minds rather than presenting material that inhibit them.

2. The word "nigga" should never be sanctioned, nor should any word that has been used to degrade people. The simple fact that the editors need to be reminded of this speaks to the growing lack of cultural sensitivity that is pervasive in today's society. There is nothing funny about any of the terms that people use to make other people feel small. It is no real surprise to me how easily this small truth is forgotten when your personal experience may not come from that sense of victimization others often face.

3. While the pervading thought on our campus might be that the *Thresher* is a paper for Rice by Rice, there is life beyond the hedges. What you print is important. There are incognizant people in society who believe what you have printed, and they will use the Backpage to support their continued intolerance.

Mary Aycock
Rice Counseling Center
administrative secretary

Historically exploited should not be mocked

To the editor:

The Backpage article of the Sept. 15 *Thresher* has caused pain and insult to some in the Rice community. However, we find it disturbing that many in the community do not understand why the article, even though it was meant as satire, was so damaging and believe that the resentment born of the article is an overreaction.

Let us explain why that article was inappropriate. While laughing at oneself is a healthy way of alleviating frustration, making fun of someone else at their expense is inappropriate. When a representation of power, like the student newspaper of Rice University, makes fun of historically disadvantaged groups, this derisive behavior becomes indefensible. By disadvantaged peoples, we speak of those whose acceptance as full citizens, with all the due rights, privileges and respect, has been and is being hindered by discriminatory

newspaper that expects to uphold a respectable and inclusive position in the community must impose high moral and ethical standards on itself. A commitment to truth, the pursuit of knowledge and a desire to be part of the community are the hallmarks of a first-rate newspaper. On Sept. 15, the *Thresher* failed to command the respect of the community. This incident should be taken as an opportunity to start a dialogue so that we can learn from this mistake.

Cin-Ty Lee
Assistant professor, Earth Sciences

Mark G. Little
Earth Sciences graduate student
Black Graduate Student
Association member

CONTACTING THE THRESHER

Letters

- Letters to the editor should be sent to the *Thresher* by e-mail to thresher@rice.edu. Letters must be received by 5 p.m. on the Monday prior to a Friday publication date.
- All letters to the editor must be signed and include college and year if the writer is a Rice student.
- Letters should be no longer than 250 words in length. The *Thresher* reserves the right to edit letters for both content and length.

Subscribing

- Annual subscriptions are available for \$50 domestic and \$125 international via first class mail.

Advertising

- We accept display and classified advertisements. Advertisements must be received by 5 p.m. on the Monday prior to a Friday publication date. Please contact our advertising manager at (713)348-3967 or thresher-ads@rice.edu for more information.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Backpage apology column insincere

To the editor:

In an institution of intellectuals, free exchange of ideas is encouraged, but one never plans to face ignorance. In our first month of graduate school, we were faced with the unthinkable: the ignorant. Mr. Mintz, your defunct apology in the *Thresher* last Friday proved that there are dumb smart people ("Backpage was wrong, despite intended humor," Sept. 22).

Subtle nuances within your apology indicated to us that being offended by your article meant that the reader was somehow unknowledgeable in the latest trends of comedy. While comedians have used race for years as a source of laughter and biting social commentary, we are not convinced that you understood the complexity of their comedy. While "satire is tragedy plus time," the tragedy of being a minority in America is timeless. Don't break out the tissues, we are not asking you to cry with us, we are asking you to understand.

Your comments seemed unnecessarily cruel, and like all good comedy, we found ourselves waiting for the punch line but it never came. We have

on Comedy Central because of what had resulted from the first two seasons of *Chappelle's Show*.

*Stephanie Jennings
Sid Richardson junior*

Thresher apology e-mail unacceptable

To the editor:

I am sad and highly offended after reading the Sept. 15 Backpage. I also found the e-mail apology unacceptable for the following reasons.

1. In the apology, this statement was made: "The Backpage was intended to laugh at — not with — racial stereotypes." This statement is disingenuous. Laughing at stereotypes is a tacit form of agreement and it displays an ignorance of other people. It also greatly diminishes people's sense of connectivity to the world. Institutions of higher learning must build an atmosphere that empowers if they are to foster global citizens who believe that all people are created equal. As such an institution, charged with preparing people for the next century, it would be more constructive presenting views that open minds rather than presenting material that inhibit them.

laws, racial profiling, niche-stereotyping, economic barriers, educational disparities and social ostracizing. Any such group has every right to be highly sensitized to public mockery because such behavior represents a perpetuation of oppression — in this case being located at Rice, in the very place where we are supposed to feel welcome and at home.

Moreover, the article did more to sustain stereotypes than debunk them: the suggestion that blacks have a criminal disposition, the stereotype that Asians have small eyes and over-study, the denial of the struggles that face women and gays, etc. Minority groups deal with unwanted obstacles throughout their lives — these obstacles often become permanent wounds. Stereotypes only serve to keep these wounds fresh. The *Thresher* is the voice of the student body, but when it expels minorities from membership in the community by printing racist and sexist trash, the paper becomes an extension of the oppressive status quo. And few things are more heartless than a perpetrator laughing at the pain he has caused.

Should the *Thresher* be censored in the future? Certainly not. But, any newspaper that expects to uphold a respectable and inclusive position in the community must impose high moral and ethical standards on itself.