

CT Opinions

Quote of the week

"If you believe in a cause, be willing to stand up for that cause with a million people or by yourself." — OTIS S. JOHNSON



Illustration by Sammy Newman

I appreciate your white guilt, but I don't want it

TAGWA SHAMMET
Opinions Editor

Dear White People,

This isn't a Netflix show. This isn't a Justin Simien movie. This is real life. There's a serious elephant in the room that we need to discuss: your white guilt.

I'm sure some of you are thinking, "I don't have white guilt." Maybe you don't. But maybe you aren't aware what white guilt truly is. Think on your life, think back to your last interaction with a person of color; did you pick your words more carefully so you wouldn't come off sounding racist? Did you stay quiet because you thought you'd offend someone? Have you made fun of yourself and your privilege? If you answered yes to any of these questions, chances are you're suffering from white guilt.

Well, my diplomatic white peers, I appreciate your white guilt, but I really don't want it. You see, your white guilt actually does more harm than you think. I appreciate the abundance of care you have for my feelings, but your delicate tiptoeing around me makes me wonder: What would you say if you didn't filter your words so carefully?

Your political correctness leads to uncomfortable, disingenuous conversations that feel forced and one-sided. Your self deprecation causes painfully awkward silences because I have no clue how to respond to you.

The worst thing your white guilt does is make you the center of attention. Isn't that what you're trying to avoid?

White people, let me set the record straight for you: It's truly not that deep. I understand that you feel shame on behalf of your oppressive ancestors, but I don't need you to apologize to me every five minutes.

If you feel so compelled to reimburse me for the past, I take Paypal, Venmo, Cashapp and just straight cash. What I don't take is your constant self-reproach and condemnation.

I know you don't mean harm with your actions; in fact you mean the complete opposite. I understand that this comes from a sense of you wanting to be my ally. I get it, you voted for Obama, and I see that you have black friends — you don't have to keep reminding me. I'm going to let you in on a secret: Your "I'm not racist" act just makes you microaggressive. Whether you want to admit it, your cautious treading around me allows me to believe you have a preconceived notion as to how I'll react. Due to your implicit prejudice, you probably think I'll get angry and hostile because you've offended me. Well, that in itself is microaggressive.

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opinions editor

Microaggressions are more than just insults and explicit prejudice. They come in all sorts of forms such as implicit bias and uninformed stereotypes. Sometimes, we don't even know we're being offensive until it's too late.

I'm not saying your white guilt is offending me, I'm saying your white guilt is unnecessary. I promise you, as long as you're not out here being wildly racist, it's not that deep.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating for ignorance on white people's end — that happens more than enough without my approval. I'm just coming to the conclusion that you don't need to go through an agonizing cycle of self-hate in order to realize

your white privilege. Sulking in your white privilege, forcing me to coddle you in this systematically burdening era, isn't getting us anywhere. Frankly, it's just annoying black people. Black people, and all people of color, aren't asking you to diminish yourself so we can all be on the same level. We're asking that you remove your institutional barriers and help lift us up.

White guilt isn't going to close the pay gap. As a black woman, I'm still set up to earn 61 cents to the white man's dollar.

White guilt isn't going to release the disproportionately incarcerated black male population from prisons. One in every three black men will still be incarcerated, as opposed to the one in every 17 white men.

White guilt isn't going to stop the police brutality against black communities. Botham Jean, Oscar Grant, Sandra Bland, Mike Brown and so many unarmed black people are still dead, and will continue to die.

My favorite quote is one by Angela Davis: "I am no longer accepting things I cannot change. I am changing things I can no longer accept." Well, my darling white people, if you're so guilty about what your ancestors did, start making a better future for communities of color. Davis said this while your ancestors oppressed her, while they held her down and tried to strip her of her will to be great.

Since you're so obviously distraught about the past, fix the damage your predecessors did.

You apologizing to me in the privacy of a classroom, a party or wherever we are isn't going to help me. I want your help to build up my community. I'm tired of you telling me that slavery makes you uncomfortable or that you would have marched side-by-side with Martin Luther King Jr. I'm tired of you bragging about how Obama is your favorite president or how Beyonce is one of your icons.

Sitting in a history classroom, having all the white students stare at me during the slavery unit, made me feel far more than

discomfort. I still march forward with the vision of MLK and my ancestors. Obama and Beyonce are my idols because they showcase black excellence in this white society. Don't belittle me by saying my struggles are suddenly yours. They're not.

Racial equality is apparently difficult, it's not going to happen overnight. But, for as many of you white people plagued with white guilt, there are those without any sympathy for the black community.

Start educating your fellow white people with all this lovely information you've learned to stay politically correct. Let them know about how Flint, Michigan, still does not have clean drinking water. Let them know about how Botham Jean's white killer only got 10 years in prison for murdering an unarmed black man in his home. Let them know inner city school districts with minority-majority schools still have the lowest graduation rates in the United States. Let them know how while the United States poverty line is at 11.8%, the black population makes up more than a fourth of that number.

Let them know that they continue to do what your dreaded ancestors did: Oppress the black community.

White people, from the bottom of my heart, I appreciate your white guilt, but I want you to do more with it. Rather than bathing in your self-pity and wallowing in self-hate, start making a difference. Take that anger and shame to your nearest community of color and see how you can help them. I genuinely mean this and it's the last time I'm willing to say it: I don't want your empty apologies. Actions speak louder than words, and right now, your lack of action is speaking volumes. The only way to cure your white guilt is to stop sulking in your shame and hate and start advocating for racial justice. That's the only apology we want.

Sincerely,
The Black Community.



Illustration by Jeffrey Belfield

Comedy: the line between charismatic and problematic

TAGWA SHAMMET
Opinions Editor

I clicked on his face ready to roll on the floor, clutching my stomach to stop the pain of his humor. I clicked on his face. I can't seem to decide whether I regret doing so.

Dave Chappelle's latest stand-up comedy special "Sticks and Stones" premiered last week on Netflix. His special, just like many of his specials before, poked at topics ranging from the excessive school shootings to the opioid crisis. Chappelle held nothing back, especially when it came to his infamous punches at LGBTQ+ people, specifically targeting the transgender community. Time and time again, Chappelle finds himself in hot water over his "offensive" jokes, yet always comes out unscathed. Is this the special that will finally dampen Chappelle's career?

I've always loved Chappelle. My dad has been a fan of him for as long as I can remember. Once it became appropriate, or as close to appropriate as it gets, to let your kid watch "The Chappelle Show," it was on in my house like cartoons on a Saturday morning. He had this humor that was so raw and uncensored, yet eloquent and articulate. His jokes made me cover my mouth in horror, while laughing my butt off at the same time. Chappelle's jokes are what all of us are thinking, yet can't say.

Or, at least they used to be.

Comedy has always been a gray area. For as long as I can remember, comedians have taken real-world issues — political tensions, social controversy and many other dilemmas — and used their stages as outlets. A prime example is Def Comedy Jam. Premiering in 1992, it served as a stage to prop

up aspiring black comedians. Well-known actors such as, but not limited to, Chris Rock, Eddie Murphy, Bernie Mac, Adele Givens, Cedric the Entertainer, Martin Lawrence and Chappelle got their starts on Def Comedy Jam. The show, which aired on HBO, was notorious for its profanity and "ghettoizing black stand-up."

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opinions editor

Def Comedy Jam allowed black comedians to be unapologetically black, never censoring their humor to fit white norms, while allowing black audiences to laugh to the sound of people who looked like them and made jokes about struggles they understood. In 1992, the black community may have respected Bill Cosby, but his conforming comedy didn't give them the relief they were looking for. In 1992, the black community needed and appreciated the raw jokes that eased the pain of Rodney King's

beating and shined a light on the realities of mental illness. Def Comedy Jam conquered everything from oppression to depression.

But as the times evolve and social sensitivity is encouraged, when does a joke cross the line and become an issue?

For many, Chappelle's "Sticks and Stones" crossed it. Surpassed the line. Critics dragged the special, saying Chappelle's jokes "make you wince" and accusing him of being "out of touch with today."

I'm conflicted on my feelings toward "Sticks and Stones." I won't lie, the special had me unusually uncomfortable at some points. I was relatively prepared for the outrageous jokes Chappelle was about to throw at me, and I was abnormally excited for that taste of home he was going to provide. But with the aggressive ignorance toward the transgender community by openly disregarding transgender people's pronouns and belittling their struggles — comparing them to something as impossible and ridiculous as an Asian man being trapped in a black man's body — I was unamused.

Nevertheless, I won't be "canceling" Chappelle. This might seem problematic to some of you, but I knew what I was doing when I watched this special. Like Chappelle said: "You clicked on my face." He has always been wildly inappropriate, and this show was no exception. A portion of me felt guilty watching the special, but I won't front and say the special wasn't entertaining in its full Chappelle glory.

I grew up with the understanding that comedy is meant to be painful. That it is meant to trigger you and make you laugh. That it is meant to be disturbing, meant to make you uncomfortable. What you do with that irritation is your choice. After hearing those jokes about transgender people, the discomfort led me to educate

myself on the community, to understand their struggles.

Coming to VCU, I was thrown into a diverse world. Not just racially, but a university that accepts all sexualities and gender identities. I, however, was not as understanding. I wasn't intolerant in any way, but I will admit, I was wildly uninformed; ignorant, frankly. Growing up, the LGBTQ community was slowly introduced to me, only minimal fragments being showcased at a time.

While the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities were relatively easy for me to understand, gaining a grip on the transgender community and culture was far more difficult. To put it in simpler words, before I came to VCU, I knew nothing about transgender people. Now, ever since beginning my college career at VCU, I've been introduced to many new concepts, even some as simple as using a person's correct pronouns. After watching Chappelle's special, I hopped on my laptop, intrigued to read about the outrage the transgender community felt towards "Sticks and Stones." Let's just say, problematic and offensive were the kindest words people used to describe the special — and rightfully so.

Comedy does evolve with the times. It elevates that uneasy feeling in your chest, while leveling out that need for humor in your bones. However, comedy never conforms to societal expectations. Was "Sticks and Stones" wildly belligerent? Yes. Isn't that what comedy is all about? Yes. But, even I agree that comedians need to be somewhat mindful of audiences' ability to digest the content. Chappelle won't lose any of his key audience members after this special, but he certainly isn't accumulating viewers from younger generations, and that will ruin his views.

Quote of the week

"There are no goodbyes for us. Wherever you are, you will always be in my heart."

— MAHATMA GANDHI

Another day, another shooting

TAGWA SHAMMET
Opinions Editor

Another day, another shooting. Another day in the land of the free, the home of the brave — another heart-wrenching amount of lives lost to unnecessary gun violence: to preventable, avoidable gun violence.

Within a span of less than 24 hours, 31 innocent people were maliciously taken from this world. Over the weekend of Aug. 2, two mass shootings happened in two American cities — collectively ending in the murder of 31 innocent people. On Aug. 2, 22 residents of El Paso, Texas never went home. Hours later, nine Dayton, Ohio residents lost their lives.

Surprised? I wish I could say I was. However, mass shootings have become normal in the United States. These shootings have become an epidemic. In fact, there have been more shootings this year than there have been days. According to the non-profit organization Gun Violence Archive, as of Aug. 5, the 217th day of the year, there had been 225 mass shootings in the United States of America.

Yet, no matter how ordinary these shootings have become, we seem to constantly center the conversation around some sort of political agenda. Whether it be a call for gun regulation or a plea to pay more attention to mental health, we gravely overlook the lives carelessly taken. Today, I want to write a more emotional, yet rational tale, rather than further my personal political ideologies.

It's difficult not to think about where the next shooting will be. It's difficult not to fear that the next shooting could affect me. Just think of how many times we've all, VCU students and Richmond residents, received a VCU alert warning us about some form of shooting. West Broad. North Belvidere. West Marshall. Main. I've read about shootings in all these areas, and more, plenty of times — and I'm only a sophomore this year.

Just a few days ago on Aug. 10, police in Richmond responded to a shooting at a sports bar on Midlothian Turnpike. Four innocent people were shot, however, all thankfully survived. Just two days ago, on Monday, Richmond police, yet again, responded to a shooting in Creighton Court. A man was left with a gunshot wound, yet thankfully survived as well.

These shootings happen so close to us at VCU. We here about Dayton and think, "Thank God I'm not in Ohio." We hear about El Paso and think, "Thank God I'm not in Texas." We think, because these shootings are not close to us, we don't need to be as concerned.

Well, there are mass shootings and acts of gun violence happening right here. Creighton Court is less than five miles outside Monroe Park campus. Is that close enough to care? We hear about schools like Columbine, Parkland, Virginia Tech, and it's unrealistic to firmly believe that VCU can't be added to this infamous list.

I won't lie: It's easy to sit here and bash Trump, the Republican party and anyone who cannot see these senseless killings are primarily a result of the loosely restricted gun industry in this country. It's easy



Illustrated by Evan McGrady

to blame bullies for their mistreatment of others and to point fingers at families and friends who couldn't see the signs to prevent such tragedy. It's easy to use those affected, whether lost or having lost someone, as political ammunition to further political causes.

However, what's not easy is genuinely comprehending and sympathizing with the pain endured by families and friends of the victims of these heinous murders. We're constantly subjected to hearing: "Guns don't kill people, people kill people." Now, imagine hearing the names of the victims with the same frequency with which we hear that phrase.

I cannot even begin to recall the last time I've collectively seen all the names of those lost during American mass shootings. Aside from the Washington Post's extensive list of the 1,196 U.S. mass shooting victims since 1966, there isn't much coverage regarding the full display of all victims. That's just as disheartening as using the "saddest" story as political capital. For every mass

shooting in this nation, a few victims are primed as political gold; their loss is utilized as a conversation starter, as opposed to just letting the shooting itself be the most heart-breaking piece of it all.

We read stories like this, about these lives ruined by senseless acts, and we cannot even begin to fathom the pain these people are being forced to feel. My dad believes there is no longer a place in the U.S. that is safe. We've seen shootings at schools, universities, stores, malls, cinemas, parks, concerts. Everywhere.

As a nation, we need to become more sympathetic to one another. Yes, we need to have the conversation about regulated gun laws, mental health and being nicer to one another. Yes, we need to begin to try to minimize — and hopefully eradicate — the amount of mass shootings that occur in this country. But, until that happens, we need to start centering our focus and attention to helping those heroes who have fallen victim to fruitless brutality.

JORDAN AND ANDRE ANCHONDO

A couple recently blessed with a beautiful, healthy two-month-old baby boy in El Paso, Texas. A couple that was parenting a five year old girl. A couple full of youth and love. A couple that died protecting their son. On Aug. 2, a baby boy and his older sister lost their parents. That day, a family was shattered.

LOIS OGLESBY

A mother raising two children: a two-month-old son and a seven-year-old daughter in Dayton, Ohio. She was working tirelessly to provide for her children, just trying to return to her usual lifestyle prior to having her baby. A mother who was brutally shot on her first day out. On Aug. 3, a baby boy and his older sister lost their mother. On Aug. 3, a family was shattered.

EL PASO

Javier Amir Rodriguez
David Johnson
Arturo Benavides
Jordan and Andre Anchondo
Sara Esther Regalado Moriel
Adolfo Cerros Hernández
Gloria Irma Márquez
María Eugenia Legarreta Rothe
Ivan Manzano
Juan de Dios Velázquez Chairez
Leonardo Campos Jr.
Maribel Campos
Angelina Silva-Englisbee
Maria and Raul Flores
Jorge Calvillo Garcia
Alexander Gerhard Hoffman
Teresa Sanchez
Margie Reckard
Elsa Libera Marquez
Luis Alfonso Juarez

DAYTON

Megan Betts
Lois Oglesby
Saeed Saleh
Derrick Fudge
Logan Turner
Nicholas Cumer
Thomas McNichols
Beatrice Warren-Curtis
Monica Brickhouse