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Racial Stereotypes in Satire: A Comparison of Mark Twain and Dave Chappelle

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Racial Stereotypes in Satire: A Comparison of Mark Twain and Dave Chappelle

Abstract:

This essay addresses the purpose and effectiveness of using racial stereotypes in satire by comparing works produced by two satirists, Mark Twain and Dave Chappelle. As a white southerner living in the post-civil war South, Mark Twain used satire, specifically including racial stereotypes partly inspired by minstrels, in his highly acclaimed and often maligned novel *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* to condemn society's treatment of African Americans. In the early 2000s, Dave Chappelle, a black comedian from Washington D.C., also used racial stereotypes in his satirical sketch show *Chappelle's Show* to bring to light the racism that is still alive in a country that often considers itself colorblind. Mark Twain stood by his representations of race, regardless of criticism, and has found modern day supporters such as Toni Morrison. Chappelle's critics spoke against his use of stereotypes, and Chappelle himself came to question how he portrayed the African American community on television. This paper argues that, though the use of racial stereotypes in satire may be funny to some and appalling to others, it generates important conversations regarding race relations, which is critical to abolishing the ridiculous stereotypes that these satirical works employ to shed light on the ongoing problems of race relations in the U.S.