

The Myth of Racial Diversity: What Comedy Central’s “South Park” can Teach us about Religion and Politics, and Why it Matters

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Abstract

In an unconventional fashion, and righteously stretching the truth, the comedy-sitcom South Park is not exactly a fairytale, but it does explore the psychological, religious, and political choices that we make in our society today. Although South Park might be seen as an intolerable threat to our democracy, the creators are telling us that they don’t like idiotic rules, or the notion of being politically correct. The South Park duo are also right in exploring religion, as they invent uncomfortable situations in the form of a crazy cartoon show. Of course, everyone, perhaps, has experienced the phenomenon of South Park differently. Indeed, the comedy show might hurt the feelings of some viewers. Parents, for example, may be disturbed by some of the vulgar elements of respective episodes, which can be often tough to watch; but Parker and Stone (the creators) attempt to speak truth to power.

South Park has also benefited from the fact that keen interest continues when it comes to portraying (reality or) real-world events, even though the animated kid show is fictionalized. To be sure, South Park is still ahead of its time, particularly when it comes to explaining religion and politics, as the creators try to see all sides to a specific story. Parker and Stone, however, don’t have some kind of sacred relationship with their viewers. All in all, the duo just want a peaceful society, in harmony with our world and universe.

Introduction

The crude, *politically incorrect* and artlessly drawn, animated television program, *South Park* is loaded with religious, social and political commentary for our times, as the little squat-bodied and foul-mouth third and fourth graders – the pugnacious Cartman, Stan, Kyle, Kenny – and other discourteous little *nitwits* make their way in a confusing world, in a strange and red-neck town in Colorado (Pinsky, 2004, p. 9B).¹ *South Park* is certainly a raucous and thought-provoking place to live. Indeed, the peculiar area where this imaginary tale takes place (or occurs) is actually “named after a real Colorado county notorious for alien sightings and other rural myths” (Gegax, 1998, p. 57).² Put simply, *South Park* is like a funny, new world order, in line with absurd and magical thinking. Most striking, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the co-creators, take a *macro* view in presenting this comedy show for public consumption. Additionally, and rather surprisingly, the weird adults in this “snowbound mountain hamlet” are far more psychologically afflicted (or damaged in some way?) than the young delinquents, because of their shameless ignorance, ardent support for misguided, conservative ideas and conspiracy theories.

To be sure, the delusional behavior of the adult population of *South Park* blindly believe in conventional wisdom, without batting an eye. More importantly, they (the adults) do not necessarily believe in the truth or specific facts.

Furthermore, their odd beliefs and depravity are mostly based on (fatuous and) faulty political thinking, or fallacies, which are false and mistaken notions about things – mostly *everything*. This is also to say that the undignified adults of *South Park* try to (righteously) pass off their smug, petty opinions to their impressionable and misfit, big-eyed children; but often without a lot of success. Moreover, their sometimes unethical conduct and bad, aberrant behavior is even normalized. Unfortunately, “race issues” are mostly avoided by the predominantly white community of *South Park*. Nevertheless, the creators – Matt Stone and Trey Parker – are sensitive to varying political and social conventions as they present their foolhardy characters. Which is to say that the *South Park* creators always consider the political spectrum; therefore, practical politics and solutions never escape them (Stone and Parker).

The Matter of Race and Race-Relations

Perhaps the strangest thing about *South Park* – this disorderly comedy sitcom – is its inexhaustibility when it comes to making an ideological statement. For example, the late Isaac Hayes, a Black *Oscar* and *Grammy* winner, who once voiced the Chef character, quit the *South Park* show, because the creators – Matt Stone and Trey Parker – made fun of and demeaned his *Scientology* religion. In fact, they negatively portrayed his faith as some bald-faced, religious *chicanery*. And this disrespectful episode for Isaac Hayes, who was one of the few African American characters, besides the intelligent little black-boy named Token, and his Black girlfriend Nicole, was the last draw. Token is the *archenemy* or nemesis of the arrogant Eric Cartman, who is the main trouble-maker and major, fictional personality of the *South Park* comedy show. Hayes or Chef (while he lasted) kept a watchful and vigilant eye on the precocious, ten-year old *South Park* children, giving them (sage) advice; as well as serving as their confidant and moral, adult protector, before he was unceremoniously and eventually killed off, so to speak (Gegax, 1998, p. 57).³ The irony is unarmed Black males in the United States (today) are being disproportionately killed by predominantly white, law enforcement officials (on an almost monthly basis – that is, somewhere in the country). Why? Do these unnecessary police killings occur because of *racial profiling*, or a lack of understanding of racial injustice, or racial discrimination, and a resistance to integration, in general – that is, on the part of some white American citizens? Perhaps. Distinguished professor of law at the University of San Diego Law School, Roy L. Brooks (1996) writes:

White resistance in promoting racial equality through integration (that is, in fostering two-way or mutual integration) is precisely why we have civil rights laws. In other words, racial integration must generally rely on coercion in the form of civil rights laws to being about equality for African Americans. Such coercion, however, necessarily diminishes the quality of equality. It begets a low-grade or second-class equality for African Americans, because the ensuing racial mixing is nonconsensual on the part of whites. Even moral suasion taints racial equality for African American, because altruistic whites are merely feeling charitable rather than indebted. (p. 105)⁴

Of course, positive race-relations on *South Park* is almost non-existent, and seems (sadly) as an afterthought in this animated, comedy show. In other words, *racial equality* is hardly talked about, less it turns-off certain audiences, like an episode where a white male parent literally kisses the buttocks of an animated Jesse Jackson character for using the N- word. *South Park* also deals with other controversial political issues that many government office-holders or unscrupulous, sometimes corrupt politicians, even today (in our society), are unwilling to address or dare broach, less they (might) be driven out of political office – that is, for their racial empathy, complicity, or for caring too much about the plight of African Americans, and other people of color. But such complex, hot button, and contentious racial issues should always matter. To say the least, *South Park* should expand the debate or discussion about some serious problems in our nation, and government, like systemic racism, gun-violence, domestic terrorism, or how some American citizens are not adhering to the Constitutional rights of *everyone*; while advancing abstract speculations, bad political ideas and policies that might adversely affect us all. Finally, many American politicians won’t specifically talk about the needed solutions when it comes to racial issues, in public, because it might hurt their chance for a future political career. Or so it seems. Unfortunately, the *South Park* show does not examine or highlight the many racial problems in the United States, even though Trey Parker and Matt Stone don’t like to leave *anything* to chance. Finally, the *duo* try hard not to miss *any* opportunity to insult people.

Of Religion and Politics

Although the heartfelt cartoon show, *South Park* can be uncomprehendingly rude, cruel, and hilarious, some episodes are compelling, insightful, and even give us important lessons about our world, in general, as the cartoon sitcom teaches us how to make fun of ourselves and political hypocrisy (Fagin, 2000, p. 41), particularly when it concerns faith or religion. *South Park* also reinforces our understanding of why we should challenge the political and religious *status quo*, or organized religion. Journalist Mark I. Pinsky (2006, p. 21A) writes: “South Park is that part of TV Land where the profane regularly head butts the sacred, [as it is] a show that stir[s] up [extreme controversy over episodes about Mormonism, Christianity], scientology and Islam.”⁵ In this regard, the comical, outrageous show, of course, attempts to mock or make fun of *everyone* (in caricature), including a sort of take down of famous religious figures, such as Buddha, Muhammad, Krishna, Moses, Lao-tzu, and even Jesus Christ (who is supposedly a resident of *South Park*), where he wears “a white robe and sandals [and] host a local cable-access show.” According to journalist T. Trent Gegax (1998, p. 58), Jesus “is a force of holy goodness.” The creators of *South Park*, perhaps, are trying to impart an honest take on religion. To be sure, Trey Parker and Matt Stone are really just revealing the harsh truth of the hypocrisy and contradictions of religious faiths, while ramming home these points with a vengeance, and in almost every episode, as we mix our politics with religion. No doubt, *everyone* thinks differently about religious satire. However, some political and religious leaders believe that ridicule of *any* religion incites “discrimination and hatred,” particularly when faiths are based on certain values and (unfathomable) religious grounds (Sterling, 2010, p. 16A).⁶ So does this attitude show a sort of narrow-mindedness, especially for those who can’t distinguish between humor, religion, politics, and facts? Needless to say, the sophomoric and discomfiting, animated *South Park* also has a nightmarish aspect to it, as the “irreverent sitcom” explores the “dark side” of humanity; but Trey Parker and Matt Stone could care less about who they offend; nor do they concern themselves about the collateral damage of their sometimes offensive storytelling.

Furthermore, “network [executives] aren’t concerned that *South Park*’s raw language and impish take on hot-button issues will put off parents, or anyone else” (Gardner, 2011, p. 6D),⁷ because the comedy sitcom is neither *here* nor *there*, to use the metaphor. And for the most part, network executives don’t really care about ruffling feathers, since the show is [extremely] successful. In fact, “the 18-to-24-year male...” and even younger individuals make up the demographics of those who actually watch *South Park*, as well as “older fans as well” (Gardner, 2011, p. 6D). Steeped in ugly truths, political *clichés*, and perhaps an overreaction to religion, some of the *South Park* episodes really offend the sensibilities of some thin-skinned viewers of the program, as the creators continue to make uncomfortable waves. Is this because Parker and Stone deliberately set out to disturb most people with their explosive, fulminating, violent and *vile* content? Perhaps. The obnoxious *South Park* cartoon/sitcom might even anger, or enrage some parents who might be unprepared for what is covered on *primetime* television (and in syndication) – that is, in terms of demeaning certain religions, like one sexually explicit and peculiar episode condemning *pedophile* priests of the Catholic Church – out to convert and sexually molest space aliens. For some viewers, this episode might be hard to take. Or, perhaps, it is hard to digest. Parents probably don’t like the indecency of this harsh take on religion. Therefore, in April 2010, Parker and Stone received death threats for insulting several organized faiths and religious prophets (Parker, 2010, p. 11A).⁸ Paradoxically, the two co-creators of *South Park* successfully wrote and produced a Tony Award-winning Broadway musical-comedy, “The Book of Mormon,” which was not really condemned, but celebrated, even with the concerned and hesitant Broadway actors portraying the “mismatched [Mormon] missionaries,” while singing and saying the “naughtiest [things or] words they can think of,” like with the deviant, mealy-mouth *South Park*, animated characters (Itzkoff, 2011, p. 6).⁹ About the Broadway musical-comedy “The Book of Mormon,” journalist A. J. Jacobs (2011) writes:

The play follows two scrubbed Mormon missionaries assigned to a corner of Uganda rife with AIDs and warlords. The mission is a disaster until one of the Mormons starts improvising changes to Joseph Smith’s story. For instance, he has Joseph Smith cure AIDs by fornicating with a frog. His revised story resonates with the [Black] Africans, who end up adopting it. (p. 173)¹⁰

To say the least, this awkward and disturbing take on Mormonism is offensive to members of the faith and Black people from Africa everywhere. Equally important, journalist Virginia Heffernan also tells us that Trey Parker and Matt Stone have a serious problem with not only religion and religious leaders, but with politicians as well.

To be honest, Heffernan (2004, p. 6E) has a problem with authority, too, particularly with “American hypocrisy, the combination of [political] greed and sanctimony that let religion and would be spirituality provide cover for rapacity.”¹¹ Moreover, with our current political (divide and) polarized environment and climate, the naughty *South Park* show also has a propagandistic purpose; but for some viewers, some criticisms go in one ear and out the other, with eyes closed. Yet, Stone and Parker have vowed that they would not cower to fear or intimidation, which would undermine their free-thinking *Modus Operandi*, and *good-vs-evil* vibe or message. Apparently, this belief is the only way that they (Parker and Stone) can be true to themselves, and their artistic work as serious cartoonists. To be sure, the co-creators of *South Park* are very much in touch with themselves, as they continue to follow their conscience. Hence, Parker and Stone will continue to move on, creating the next, *jaw-dropping* episode; despite the formidable difficulties involved in producing the longest-running hit for *Comedy Central* (Gardner, 2011, p. 6D),¹² while remaining very critical of the world around them; and without having a *know-all* pomposity. We can easily draw out the political lessons of *South Park*, as the creators give us – with a *mordant* sense of humor – pragmatic and serious advice. More important, according to journalist Frazier Moore (2011):

After all these years, “South Park” has lost none of its edge, its scathing truthfulness or aversion to good manners. Nor has it lost the funniness with which it views the world through the eyes of Stan, Kyle, Kenny and Cartman, four bratty, perpetually bundled-up youngsters in [their] unhinged Colorado cartoon town. (p. 7B)¹³

Survival and the Ratings Game

For Trey Parker and Matt Stone, it is all about writing thoughtful episodes, and portraying inconvenient truths. This is to say that the duo actually try to consider all angles of certain political situations – to be funny. The creators also try to think through things before their cartoon show seriously obfuscates the *reality* of things. Moreover, their laughable attacks on public figures can be relentless, merciless, mean-spirited and even cruel. For example, there are respective episodes that show the late Saddam Hussein (of Iraq) in love with Satan. Or there is an overactive Tom Cruise character, literally coming out of the closet, implying that he might be *bi-sexual*. Then there is a brash episode that shows Mel Gibson as a raving, bigoted lunatic –or Britney Spears living with a partially exploded head, going *commando*, or without wearing underwear. Furthermore, there is a *dogmatic* Al Gore and his belief in a cryptid Man-Bear Beast creature. Parker and Stone also make fun of a deranged, *loud-mouth* Kanye West, and an androgynous Michael Jackson character and his shy son Blanket. In addition, they criticize and spoof casino-developing Native Americans; the problems with (futuristic) space-alien immigration; and devote an entire (distasteful, but hilarious) episode about tiny *lice* living in the heads of *South Park* children, and finally, in Angelina Jolie’s private parts. What? There is also an embarrassing Richard Gere/gerbil episode. Parker and Stone also present the Australian actor, Russell Crowe as a fighting fool, a *buffoon*, and mad-man, who is always beating people up. When it is all said and done, the upsetting, but funny *South Park* comedy-sitcom explores other crucial social, religious and political issues that we are (sadly) dealing with in our society today – that is, mixing our politics with our faiths. Furthermore, as Jacobs (2011, p. 172) tells us, “*South Park* has repeatedly portrayed [Barbra] Streisand as a giant screechy-voiced robot that emits poisonous green gas from” her private parts. Or “*South Park* [brutally] mocked [conservative] Glenn Beck as a conspiracy freak,” or a *nutcase* and raving maniac, “obsessed with protecting Smurfs.”¹⁴ Another episode on the animated sitcom *South Park* shows a lot of back-and-forth between religious communities and atheists, while portraying the famous philosopher Richard Dawkins as a horny, *amorous*, and sexually wicked person. Jacobs (2011) writes:

One of *South Park*’s best episodes featured [Richard] Dawkins as a substitute teacher who ends up having kinky sex with the boys’ creationist teacher, Miss Garrison (formerly Mr. Garrison, pre-sex-change-operation). The show ended five hundred years in the future, when Dawkins-worshipping atheists are at war over whether their religion should be called the “United Atheist Alliance” or “United Atheist League.” (p. 172)¹⁵

Neither Trey Parker nor Matt Stone, of course, have *any* strong views about religion; but they are mindful about the *poltroonery* of atheists too. Equally, politics and religion consumes the duo and their take on life on the weird, fairy tale-like *South Park*. The creators also cover drug-use (and Opioid-addiction), suicide, sexual harassment, same-sex marriage, and transgender relationships; and tactlessly, they portray Blacks as pimps and criminals, without racial redemption.

Other *South Park* episodes deal with issues of obscenity and profanity, jailbreaking from a child's institute; climate change, the BP Oil spill disaster, Covid-19, human decapitation, child-rape, the size of human poop, *Brown Noise*, which negatively affects the entire world, where people crap themselves to death. Additionally, Kenny dies repeatedly, but comes back, or is magically resurrected over and over again. In successive episodes, Parker and Stone, in their fevered imagination explore the possibility of *real-life* super heroes, fighting hippies, and beatniks; the gall of those who support bestiality, prostitution, animalism, cannibalism, Space aliens, the problem of growing old, or ageism; and *God* as a strange, sort of ugly, mystical creature. *South Park* goes on to indict corrupt televangelists, psychics, like the disgraced John Edwards, Boy-bands, stupid NASCAR driving, terrible foster care, peeing in swimming places, video games, homelessness, fighting the government and making money on the Internet. There are also gospel singing and paranormal activity episodes. It goes on and on, almost without ending.

More than anything else, Trey Parker and Matt Stone make fun of *idiots* and *fools*, and so-called pundits. They also have tremendous intuition about what the viewer might want to see on this crazy, cartoon, TV show, *South Park*. In this way, the creators also address the necessity of *unjust wars*, and the possible necessity and dangers of having Walmart stores, located everywhere – or all over the world. The notorious Parker and Stone even joke about *farting* with Terrence and Phillip, on their TV show, live from [sic] Canada; and the flatulence of girls and women from their private areas. In their first major movie production, entitled *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*, the United States goes to war with Canada, our northern neighbor, for really ambiguous reasons; but in the end, their differences are worked-out or resolved with Canada in a melody of theatrical songs. Ultimately, the Canadians continue to be friendly and a staunch ally. The endearing characters and potty-mouth *South Park* children, however, are far from innocent, as they occasionally curse (or trash-talk), while accepting a drug-addict, marijuana-smoking towel, called *Towelie*. The *South Park* children also embrace the sickening “Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo,” and his family, which is really discharged human feces. The Poos, or turds, become their holiday friends. In this regard, some viewers of this comedy-sitcom might see the contrived show as “a pop-cult obsession” (Gegax, 1998, p. 57),¹⁶ whereas some might see the program as reprehensible and reckless; but, also a part of our realistic social and political lives. Moreover, this comedic-parody of sorts, *South Park* addresses “Freedom of Speech” issues, and even gives a red-colored, *loony* Satan a platform for people to worship him. But as journalist Frazier Moore (2011) writes:

Typically, each episode of the [South Park] show, for all its focus on naughty behavior and potty humor, crystallizes into an overarching parable, with a cut-the-crap, common-sense sort of moral expressed by the kids that usually boils down to some version of “do the right thing.” (p. 7B)¹⁷

Unfortunately, the *South Park* children seem to never “do the right things.” Finally, we might ask: What *exactly* is wrong with political cartoonists, like Trey Parker and Matt Stone, articulating some of these really profound, controversial and societal issues, rather than being silenced or stymied by political correctness, *hubris*, or religious morality. These two ingenious and remarkable cartoonists, while trying to change the course of political events, have essentially learned that:

By changing what can be said, you eventually change what is and can be thought; by changing what is and can be thought, you change the composition of the elite, that is to say the elite that must form in a society above the hunter-gatherer stage of development, [and] any ideological commitment to egalitarianism notwithstanding. (Dalrymple, 2010, p. 48)

It is not that Matt Stone and Trey Parker are egocentric, despite their words to the contrary; but they do have their eccentricities. Perhaps the duo are this way because they (Parker and Stone) are passionate about what they are doing when it comes to *South Park's* nihilism, politics and religious complexities, albeit in a different, comical form. In so many words, Parker and Stone make decisions about what is presented (beforehand) on the show, and for what they think are the right reasons, while shouldering the consequences of what goes out to the public.

South Park and Democracy

Unfortunately, we find that there are certain radical groups, like the *Action for Children's Television* that believe that the phenomenon of *South Park* is uniquely harmful, has no political or redeeming social value, and is “dangerous to [our] democracy” (Fagin, 2000, p. 40).¹⁸ What nonsense. Our democracy will *never* be in danger of becoming obsolete, sabotaged or weakened, because of a silly cartoon show. Indeed, such a notion or worry is unfounded; therefore, such a pronouncement should be outright rejected.

Furthermore, we should take into account what political scientist John Dunn has written in regard to our survivability as a democracy. Which is to say that, we-the-people “need to understand the political reality of the world in which we now live [because it] is still every bit as urgent as the need which prompted the Athenians to invent and deepen that very distant system of self-rule, or the ideas of Democracy” (Dunn, 2005, p. 21).¹⁹ Undoubtedly, many of the “tongue-in-cheek” episodes on *South Park* are grounded in reality, as mentioned, which is a plus in understanding *all* democracies. But, *South Park* is not necessarily a safe program for very young children, because of its worrisome content; but many kids are big fans. Nevertheless, this *irksome* cartoon show is not always for the whole family, as the program is mostly for mature audiences. According to Mark I. Pinsky (2004, p. 9B), as already discussed, “the show continues to be a huge hit with viewers in the 18-to-34 range,” which is an understatement, because *free-thinking* adults are also captivated by, and love the quirky comedy-show. Therefore, *South Park*, as discussed by Gegax (1998, p. 57), is a “grown-up show with irresistible kid appeal.”²⁰ However, in no uncertain terms, some parents may not relish the idea of exposing their *offspring* to the chaotic, political, and social world outside of their own little censorious lives, or protected households; or exposing their children to such gross and *uncouth*, counter-culture ideas as presented in this twisted little cartoon-sitcom. Indeed, it might be too much for them to handle or cope with, perhaps, causing psychological harm to parents and their young *South Park* devotees. In essence, this show might be a disaster for such *sequestered* kids in the future. Does this mean that we should not allow (our) children to watch *South Park*, under *any* circumstances? Professor of Philosophy Diana Mertz Hsieh (2004) succinctly puts it this way:

A person cannot judge, choose or act rightly if willfully blind to relevant [ideas and] facts. By denying what he [or she] knows or suspects to be true, the self-deceiver distorts his [or her] thinking processes and thereby renders [themselves] oblivious to ever-growing threats, unable to acknowledge problems and failures, and prone to put others in harm’s way. Hence facing reality – whether pleasant or not – is seen as essential to good moral character, a healthy mind, and a happy life. (p. 23)²¹

Even more important, Barry Fagin (2000, p. 40), as a political commentator, tells us that *trouble* might ensue if our children are not allowed “to experience things for themselves” – that is, children shouldn’t be prevented from facing *reality*, or “having a real social life,” or not allowed to confront the *ugly*, disagreeable truths of their existence.²² Fagin (2000, p. 40) goes on to ask: “Can [children] make important choices as adults if they haven’t had any [experiences or] practice?” Probably not. Therefore, trying to hide such a funny, political, and ridiculous, high-jinx program like *South Park* from our children *is not* really a (morally) sound solution at all, because with their *tech-savvy* sophistication (and computer skills), our kids (for better or worse) can, perhaps, have unfettered access to the confounded Internet. According to Gegax (1998, p. 60), “the availability of *South Park* on the Internet is [indeed] another pesky issue for grownups worried about [what] kids are or should be watching.”²³ Time and again, and ostensibly, *apoplectic* parents are aghast when (and if) they watch unpleasant things on *South Park*. But it is perhaps *wrong* and insulting to tell children that their lives will always be uncomplicated, pleasant, happy and protected. In the final analysis, our children will always be curious about the world outside their immediate families – that is, before they become adults, while studying, experimenting, learning, and participating in the larger society. This point is important to understand, particularly when it comes to caustic issues of politics, religiosity, and our interactions with different people, or other complicated human beings. But many concerned parents, especially those who are not progressive in their thinking, have lodged serious complaints against Parker and Stone, while protesting *Comedy Central*, in general, with righteous indignation. Indeed, some quarrelsome parents want the scripted *South Park* show to be pulled from the network, as they want their children to be spared from “unfiltered adult issues before they’ve accumulated enough life experience and emotional maturity to deal with them” (Fagin, 2000, p. 40).²⁴ Or perhaps parents don’t want their children to believe in the nonsense, or to be exposed to bad or *subversive* ideas; and finally, having access to the present (outside) world, or the greater community.

Without doubt, it should be understood that (today) our children, for the most part, are very intelligent, shrewd, cunning and more mature than they have ever been. Hence, our children can handle the social and controversial political issues, and religious implications presented in this comic-opera, called *South Park*. Indeed, our children today are very *worldly*. But as columnist Michael Medved (2006, p. 13A) turgidly writes: “In the earliest stages of life... it makes sense to keep them [our children] protected from such conflicts and to avoid using preschoolers... as the pawns of [political and religious] propaganda.”²⁵ Therefore, should we blame or point the finger at the adult population for creating an unbalanced (or unrealistic) life for our vulnerable children, particularly when it comes to social, religious and political causes in a harsh world?

Conclusions

Although some of the foul and tawdry episodes of the trenchant *South Park* are inappropriate for young, impressionable minds, we must still allow them to watch some of the relevant programming, with (of course) parental guidance, particularly if they deal with current political, social and religious matters. The worrying question: When and where should parents draw the line with such buffoonery? Who knows exactly? No doubt, rebellious children will probably find a way to watch, as discussed, unwholesome cartoon programs such as the unorthodox *South Park* – that is, if they have a mind to, despite the expressed wishes of parents, or their specific desires to the contrary, like them possibly avoiding or ignoring dangerous race issues. Some parents, of course, are frustrated; but being overprotective, or having a *sheltered* upbringing might not make a difference for our children in the larger scheme of things, or in the long run. More importantly, how exactly should we perceive a comedy-show like *South Park*, which has had such a profound influence on so many people over the years? Is it all about our perceptions? *Newberry Award* winning author, William H. Armstrong, tells us that: *Perception* is the means whereby [we] become acquainted with the world around [us].” We should also “look at the world of values through the study of religion, [politics] and philosophy.” Finally, Armstrong (1995) writes:

Perceptive power is the principal dynamic of growth and achievement for the individual. [Furthermore], thought is the means whereby [we] measure that which has been perceived. It is through thought that judgments can be made as to what is possible. Experiences and observations are weighed and evaluated, refined or amplified, and accepted or rejected. By thought the problems of existence are solved, and only by thought is the world which [we] have perceived given directed purpose and action beyond the native instincts of animals. (p. 17)

Ultimately, parents should reserve the right to screen and watch *South Park* episodes, to determine if they are suitable for their precious [sic] children to view; but it might negatively affect them psychologically (all the same), if they *are not* allowed to see the comedy-show at all, or even have access to the TV program. In the final analysis, we must all understand that we can't run away from how people feel about the *cockeyed* social, religious and political equations and ideas of *South Park*, even when it comes to our negative perceptions or perspicacity about the show itself. Question: Can we live under a rock when it comes to the different opinions or beliefs, and the perceptions people have about a nonsensical sitcom? In other words, do our children need to hear other points of view, no matter their perceptions or the circumstance?

Finally, at the heart of things – that is, when it comes to *South Park*, parents should have the option to ensure that their children are grounded and guided by their own moral values through positive, political socialization. But this alternative (for our children) just might be an impossible thing to accomplish, because of racial politics and religion. Indeed, for the rest of their lives, our children will have to face a *cruel*, unscripted and sometimes *uncaring*, unsparingly wicked world; while we (adults) must help them fight back against indifference, racism, and other evil forces in their respective lives, in a constructive and *grown-up* way; or in an adult fashion, no matter the consequences of them watching a *crass* cartoon like the funny, but sometimes (offensively) flawed *South Park*. In the end, which is a *no-brainer*, people and parents should be able to draw their own conclusions about this intrepid, comedy program, while deciding whether it should be made available to *everyone* – or our *youngsters*, including susceptible and racially oppressed children of color. At any rate, perhaps *South Park* does not greatly matter.

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Footnotes

¹ The wily kids of *South Park* remind you of the late Charles Schulz's timeless Peanuts characters in his television programs and comic script.

² Keep in mind that *South Park* debuted in 1997 with an episode in which Cartman gets anally probed by an alien." See Jacobs, "Americans of the Year," 173.

³ The little Black character Token also is a great songsmith; and he is extraordinarily mature for his age. The *upshot* is: Token continues to be a calming force in *South Park* with the other children in their segregated, white community – that is, when he *is* included on the comedy show, which isn't often.

⁴ Segregation even takes place on the made-up comedy sitcom, *South Park*. Is this an unconscious development on the part of the co-creators, all things being equal? So is the Token character added to the comedy show as a nonconsensual afterthought, like the Black boy Franklin character in the Peanuts comics?

⁵ Keep in mind that lampooning Islam's Prophet Muhammad is considered taboo; and the *South Park* creators' biggest fight with Comedy Central was over an episode that was going to feature an image of the prophet Muhammad." See Jacobs, "Americans of the Year," 172.

⁶ For some, *South Park* is dismissed out-of-hand, because viewers will never agree with the co-creators' political or religious points-of-view. But religion to the *South Park* duo *is not* everything.

⁷ In many respects, for parents, there is a debauched despair, even though what is discussed in many of the episodes is very complicated. And, of course, *South Park* is not a personal preference for most parents.

⁸ *The Book of Mormon* has received none Tony awards and is still a popular Broadway musical today; and will probably be even more successful after the ravishes of the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁹ According to journalist Elysa Gardner, Trey Parker and Matt Stone "regard their Mormon [Broadway] success with the same mix of gratitude and wry humility." See Gardner, "It's back to school," 6D. This is important to understand because "Parker and Stone made it clear they did not believe in Mormonism or any other organized religion." See Itzkoff, "Blasphemy coming to Broadway," 6. The co-creators valuably believe in a *god* or some kind of *spirituality*, but they [belong] to no particular church.

¹⁰ According to Jacobs, *The Book of Mormon* "has brought in \$37 million... and quite possibly rescued the Broadway-musical genre." See Jacobs, "American of the Year," 173.

¹¹ So does this comedy sitcom (*South Park*) has any religious value, given that "Parker and Stone usually mock people for [their] strong belief"? See Jacobs, "Americans of the Year, 174.

¹² The show has been on television for over 24 seasons; and it is still going strong. Question: How will this animated, comedy sitcom finally end?

¹³ We should not watch *South Park* with anger, or with our hearts on our sleeves. If anything, viewers should understand that *South Park* is a strange land of fantasy, which reflects the reality of political and religious things in our society.

¹⁴ Parker and Stone especially dislike Academy award winner Sean Penn, who they consider a “giant *douchebag* with legs running around Haiti.” See Jacobs, “Americans of the Year,” 172. Sean Penn is also portrayed as a bad man in Parker and Stone’s less successful puppet movie, *Team America: World Police*, which has an explicit, gratuitous puppet sex scene.

¹⁵ With much confusion, and *in-fighting*, the *South Park* creators carefully lay out different futuristic scenarios, especially in terms of social and political realities, as they present the struggle against religious *orthodoxy*.

¹⁶ What should we think about the infamous *Human Centipede* episode, which parrots the original Japanese movie, of the same name, where Steve Jobs and other characters’ mouths are sewed together, mouth-to-anus? And for what *real* purpose?

¹⁷ We must also consider Trey Parker and Matt Stone’s “short film that launched” *South Park – The Spirit of Christmas*. See Jacobs, “Americans of the Year,” 172. For the most part, the kids of *South Park* believe in fair play and the truth. In this regard, the co-creators have passionate hearts, even as they live in the moment. Unfortunately, some viewers might not want to know the truth of things discussed on the comedy sitcom *South Park*. But Trey Parker and Matt Stone will continue to voice their concerns on *South Park*, and fight for causes that they consider relevant and just.

¹⁸ It should be noted that some hard-core conservatives believe that no one should resign themselves to the *antics* that go on at the *Comedy Central* network, regardless of the “Freedom of Speech” issue. But some parents will never like the *risqué* things, or foul language espoused on *South Park*. Consider: The *South Park* creators present unpleasant topics about mostly political, social and religious things, and always will.

¹⁹ Of course, politics can be also a drag on almost *everyone*, as well as engender trouble of a significant kind. For example, African Americans are still being excluded from the franchise, in our political system, through no fault of their own, and because of voter suppression tactics by conservative Republicans. They are also limited in certain professional endeavors.

²⁰ In consequence, *South Park* is ridiculous, outrageous and even irascible.

²¹ There is at least one *caveat*, however: Children who are isolated, “off the grid,” or not exposed to television, or have no access to the Internet will never have to deal with such matters in their adolescence. Therefore, these children will never see and understand a world outside their homes, until perhaps adulthood.

²² Without being oblivious to what’s going on with the *South Park* programing, some parents believe that our entire society has lost a sense of decency and credibility. So it should come as no surprise that some parents are reluctant to let their children watch any controversial programing, or cartoon show on TV.

²³ Of course, fighting a TV program based on “Freedom of Speech” rights is another (political) story. Finally, should we consider abandoning more perverted, abnormal, prurient interests presented in the media?

²⁴ In consequence, how exactly can Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators, ward off such assiduous complaints? To say the least, Stone and Parker shouldn’t let their emotions dictate what they do and say on television.

²⁵ Unfortunately, the *South Park* children have to fend for themselves, and learn about the facts of life on their own.

Biographical sketch

EARNEST N. BRACEY is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, with over twenty years of active military service. He was commissioned through Reserve Officer Training (*Distinguished Military Graduate*) at Jackson State University, where he graduated with honors (*Magna Cum Laude*), and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science in 1974. In addition, he received the Masters of Public Administration in 1979 from Golden Gate University, his Masters of Arts degree in International Affairs in 1983 from the Catholic University of America, his Masters of Business Administration in 2009 from California Coast University, and his doctorate of Public Administration (with emphasis in Public Policy) in 1993 from George Mason University. Dr. Bracey also earned his Ph.D. in Education from Capella University in 1999.

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