From Sketches to Standup: Comedy that Makes a Difference

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In this seminar we will attempt to understand how humor allows authors and comics to tackle subjects that might otherwise seem taboo, and how this freedom provides a unique opportunity for social commentary and critique. We will pay particular attention to how comedic authors balance the need to entertain an audience with their efforts to provide insight on controversial issues. We will discuss contemporary examples of both comedic sketches and standup, such as clips from Saturday Night Live and segments of a routine by Sarah Silverman that created a nation-wide backlash. In addition to providing an entertaining look at how comedians critique society, this micro-seminar will introduce students to some of the critical reading skills that they will be asked to employ throughout their coursework at USC.