

Hitler Walks Into a Bar: The Nazi in American Humor

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Abstract of Thesis

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Since the rise of the Third Reich in 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party have been made the subject of jokes in societies around the world. Performed in both face-to-face interactions and the mass circulation of media outlets, such as television, film, and the internet, these jokes have remained a relevant topic of American humor. It is just such instances of Hitler and Nazism in humor that will be portrayed and discussed here. This thesis serves to analyze primary data drawn from American mass media productions of Hitler and Nazi jokes. Specifically looking at their representation in *Family Guy*, *South Park*, *King of the Hill*, *The Producers*, and the internet meme “Hitler finds out,” I will perform a discourse analysis that applies prevailing anthropological theories of humor to these contemporary portrayals. This will serve as a means to determine how Hitler and the Nazi Party are depicted as humorous topics and why they are considered funny, paying specific attention to the forms the joke take, their referential nature, and the dialogue they form between the joke creators and audience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Nothing is so sacred, so taboo, or so disgusting that it cannot be the subject of humor.”

(Dundes and Hauschild, 1983:249)

Portrayals of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party were displayed on a large scale, in America, prior to the United States' official entrance into World War II and are still prominent in current media and popular culture. Through these forms of representation, the Nazi Party and their associated imagery continues to be distributed to and by the American public. It is through mass media uses of humor and joking that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party are often portrayed. I will explore American depictions of the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler, within the context of humor, to demonstrate the discourse surrounding the mass mediation of Nazi Era topics within contemporary America. By analyzing the use of humor, related to the Nazi Party, I will illuminate the methods of such representations that utilize the imagery and historic persona of the Third Reich in contemporary American discourse. Looking specifically at cartoon television, film depictions, and internet memes, I will analyze the contemporary depictions of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party, paying particular attention to their relationship to existing theories of humor. Among these theories, I will focus on the works of Alan Dundes, Sigmund Freud, William Beeman, and Elliott Oring, utilizing their approaches to humor

as an analytical tool with which to discuss and interpret the contemporary American portrayals of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. As was stated by Alan Dundes and Thomas Hauschild, these topics, and their continued presence in American humor, reflect the open nature of joke telling, in that nothing is out of bounds.

Where did this focus on Hitler come from?

Hitler and the Nazis are not new topics from which jokes have been derived. During the Nazi reign of power, which lasted from January 30, 1933, when Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany, until May 2, 1945 when the Nazi Party surrendered after the April 30th suicide deaths of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun, humor and joking were utilized as methods of resistance against the Nazi state (Caplan, 2008). In Czechoslovakia, even during the last days of the war, when their food provisions were dwindling and family members had disappeared, Czech citizens continued to utilize joking as a method of subverting Nazi rule. Aleš Dubovský, a Czech historian, claimed that “from the first day the German fascists occupied” their town, there was open resistance through cryptic mouth-to-mouth joke telling (Bryant, 2006: 135). The jokes that were told were the weapons with which the Czech people fought against the strictly structured regime of the Nazi occupation. Such actions allowed the joke participants to preserve their Czech-ness rather than become homogenized into the Nazi German state. Deemed “Germanization,” the threat of homogenization to the Czech nation was

combated through subliminal degradation of their occupiers, utilizing the Czech language (Bryant, 2006).

The general motif of the jokes presented by Czech citizens centered on the topic of a hatred of Germans. Bryant (2006) argues that although the people of Czechoslovakia represented many opposing demographics, their jokes demonstrated their united hatred of the German people. These jokes were a cathartic release for the occupied Czech people, allowing them to “make sense of an absurd world, or at least laugh it away for a few seconds.” (Bryant, 2006: 149) Yet, such an explanation of the necessity of humor in order to maintain one’s agency does not apply to the American uses of similar humor. Unlike Czechoslovakia, America was not occupied by Germany at any point during the war, and limited their involvement to the indirect assistance of the allied forces before officially becoming part of the war. However, America had already begun their mass media campaign against the Third Reich.

Prior to the war, American media portrayals of Hitler and the Nazis were focused on the role that America had yet to formally take on, that of an Allied power. One notable instance of such a mass media portrayal is the first “Captain America” comic book, on the cover of which the protagonist is shown punching Hitler in the face. This image, produced before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, was a statement by private citizens regarding America’s inaction during the current European conflict (Murray, 2011). After the bombing of Pearl Harbor propelled the United States into the war, the media representations of Hitler grew, with the American government itself producing propaganda that denigrated the Axis powers. Additionally, the pre-war effort at home, served as a tool for economic growth. Americans who remained in the United States

during the war were generally comfortable and became richer than before the war (Goldberg, 2012). This comfort contrasts with the standard living situation of the people in occupied areas of Europe, who experienced continued strain on their resources and lifestyles by the outside group. Yet both the American and occupied European groups utilized humor as a means of rejecting the power of the Nazi government.

It was during this time that anti-Nazi and anti-Hitler propaganda grew. The goal of these representations was to create a grotesque image of ‘the other.’ By placing the emphasis on the differences between the Nazis and the Americans, the United States use of propaganda served to de-humanize their war-time opponents. The representations of pro-American propaganda also relied on mass media as a means of propagating their ideals, including the use of cartoons, newspapers, film, and comic book representations (Murray, 2011). Of particular importance were incentive films that “used songs and humor to capture the attention of the audience” (Murray, 2011:58). These mass media representations from the past served as a fore-runner to the imagery and humor in contemporary American media. Despite this, the question arises as to why the current uses of Hitler and Nazis for humor are necessary, as there is no present need for a war-time propaganda effort that denigrates the Nazi party as they are no longer a ruling power

Why America?

American mass media presents a case study from which the humor references of Hitler and Nazism can be analyzed. While many countries were affected by World War

II, America continued their media references to the Third Reich and still mediates the topics of Adolf Hitler and Nazism. While the United States has many instances of such media, there are notable cases of other Allied power's representing these topics as well. In 1990, British television channel, Galaxy, picked up and aired the television pilot "Heil Honey I'm Home!" The show was based on the family sitcoms of the late 50s and early 60s. Hitler and Eva Braun lived in Germany in the pre-war years, after Hitler had become the Führer. The first episode, which was the only episode to air, featured Hitler and Eva preparing for the arrival of Neville Chamberlin while attempting to deal with their pesky neighbors, the Goldsteins (Calabro, 1992; Hawkes, 2005). There was a measurable public rejection of this show and it was quickly pulled from the airways. Such a reaction by the intended audience of the program, demonstrates the collective refusal to laugh at certain topics such as these. It is possible that this is linked to the high number of casualties suffered within the United Kingdom during direct attacks on England by German air planes. As such, the relationship between the physical damage sustained within the United Kingdom during the war and the rejection of the mediated humor of Adolf Hitler in modern day England is more direct than that seen in American reactions to similar humor. The speed of and degree of dissent shown to "Heil Honey I'm Home" is lessened in the United States, where parody pieces of Hitler have been a source of humor with less public outcry.

Other countries, such as Germany itself, have criminalized many of the icons of the Nazi era. Yet these icons are regularly used in the American references to Hitler and the Nazi Party, and in some cases are the sole method through which a joke is constructed. Germany's Strafgesetzbuch, or Criminal Code, §86 bans the "dissemination

of propaganda material of unconstitutional organizations” as well as “using symbols of unconstitutional organizations” (Bohlander, 2008:92). This law is vague in its construction, which allows for the liberal definition of what is unconstitutional and therefore, the more liberal application of it in the German judiciary system. While the law has four types of organizations, the only one specifically named comes in section §86(1) No 4 which states that “propaganda materials the contents of which are intended to further the aims of a former National Socialist organization” are not permissible (Bohlander, 2008:92). While this does state that the intent has to be against the German State, there are clarifications which argue that the production, import, and export of items that contain the symbols of these groups are also punishable under German criminal law. Additionally, Germany has criminalized the public denial or downplaying of an act that was committed under National Socialist rule (Bohlander, 2008). This includes the public denial of the Holocaust in whole or part. These restrictions have resulted in a considerable lack of Nazi imagery within Germany, even when used as a means of eliciting humor, which results in limited data from which comparable humor representations in mass media can be drawn.

The United States has produced a collection of mass media from which one can investigate why there is a prevalence of humor references to Hitler and the Nazi Party. Furthermore, the American constitutional protection over the expression of these references further provides the opportunity to examine the extreme lengths to which these references go and how they maintain a captive audience. The focus on contemporary humor also demonstrates the continued value that is placed upon the history of the Nazi Party and the atrocities they committed during and before World War II.

Chapter 2: What is humor and what does it do?

Having established a brief introduction to the topic of American mass media humor about the Nazi Party, I will now present several theoretical discussions of humor itself. Here I will point out the fundamental requirements of humor and how it operates within society. Discussing theories presented by Beeman, Freud, Oring, and Dundes, I will demonstrate how they can be applied to the presentation of Nazi and Hitler humor in America.

William O. Beeman (2000:103) argues that “humor is a performative pragmatic accomplishment involving a wide range of communication skills.” Whether it is through buffoonery, ludicrousness, incongruity, or grotesqueness, humor serves as the means through which a joke occurs (Fleet, 1970). In order to achieve humor, any number of techniques can be used; however, the most common is incongruity and it is upon this that I will focus. This term refers to the creation or existence of a frame within a given context, as the action within that frame moves forward, a catalyst of some kind occurs, which reveals at least one other frame. The incongruity occurs as these two frames compete against each other, emphasizing their differences. As the audience attempts to reconcile the competing frames, they experience enjoyment derived from the tension. It is within this tension between frames that humor lies (Beeman, 2000). In many of the instances described throughout this paper, the frames that are competing against each other are also competing against the frame of a larger narrative, often it is the disparity between the plot and what is occurring within the given frame that provide the tension and drives the creation of humor in mass media portrayals.

Freud (2003) further notes that other jokes revel in the implausible. That jokes which depart from normal thinking utilize the techniques of displacement and absurdity in an attempt to create something which is nonsensical or foolish. This demonstrates that the frames in operation within a joke are so absurd that their ability to coexist in a given moment of time is unrealistic, making the joke obvious for its drastically opposed frames. While others rely on frames that are based strictly in real situations, the ability of jokes to occur without a realistic frame demonstrates the flexibility of joke-making as well as the audience's ability to interpret such unrealistic frames.

Jokes themselves are a means through which the unspeakable is addressed. Those things that are difficult to state through other genres, such as face-to-face conversation, find expression through humor. Alan Dundes (1987) argues that tragedy can be used, by joking, as a means of catharsis or as the joke maker's projection of their own fears. Relating this to the expression "laughing to keep from crying," Dundes (1987: viii) states that many jokes are a means through which joke tellers create an environment which allows for discourse that cannot occur in other genres. Furthermore, jokes themselves deal with the unspeakable by combining the unspeakable universe, or frame, with one that contains the necessary discourse to speak about it (Oring, 1992). The connection between something that can easily be expressed, and something that cannot, provides the joke-teller with the ability to relate the two, making the joke easier for the audience to accept. While this is not always the sole purpose of a joke, it is a method through which discourse of unspeakable things can occur. This plays an important role in the ways in which jokes about Hitler and the Nazi Party's actions become possible. The jokes largely

utilize historical fact in order to elaborate on the presumably unspeakable actions of the Nazi party.

What is distinguishable about humor, as opposed to other communicative acts, is that it relies heavily on the audience, without which the joke is incomplete, or lost. The mass media demonstrations of humor are singular in that they present the joke, but are unable to confirm the reception by the audience. For example, when *Family Guy* presents a joke, the joke creators cannot be fully cognizant of every audience member's reaction to it and whether it is successful or not. Furthermore, it may be successful in some ways, but fail in others. The intentionality of the creators of the joke may not be perceived by the audience in the same way (Austin, 1975). In such a case, the creators of the joke may have intended for the audience to laugh at their reference to Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun's suicide. Yet, the audience may not find the joke funny. Their reception of it may be poor for any number of reasons, such as a bad understanding of the actual history of Hitler's death, or a close family member's recent death. This shows that intentionality doesn't always align with reception, yet for a joke to be successful it must present an audience with the opportunity to evaluate and critique it. However, the fact that a joke is presented at all, serves to fulfill at least part of the act of creating humor.

Within any individual instance of humor, Beeman (2000) argues that there are four stages that occur, of which the creator of the humor as well as the audience for whom it is intended, may or may not be aware. The first of these is the setup, during which the context of the given situation is presented and its frame is established. The second stage, the paradox, is the time in which another, or several other, competing frame(s) are introduced. The third stage is the dénouement, the moment when the frames that are in

existence become known for their distinctness and begin to compete. It is in this stage that the tension between frames is first discernable, although it may not always be perceived by the audience at this time. The final stage is the release. This comes with the audience's understanding of and enjoyment of the situation. It is in this stage that the completion of the humor occurs (Beeman, 2000).

I would argue that the failure of humor can occur in any of the four stages presented above. For the creator's part, the failure can begin in the first stage. Were the initial frames to be improperly established, the rest of the joke may fail. The creator of the humor must properly execute stages one through three, but cannot determine the outcome of the joke within stage four. Furthermore, if the audience is incapable of distinguishing the newly introduced frame, then they are not capable of perceiving and distinguishing the tension that the competing frames cause. Because of this, they are also not able to enjoy the humor when the fourth stage, release, occurs.

The potential failure of humor also distinguishes the role of the creator of humor and the audience to which it is directed. The audience must be able to interpret the frames of reference that are at play within a given situation while the creator must be able to effectively produce the frames. If the audience is unable to extricate the frames at work, they cannot detect the tension that is occurring, causing the enjoyment of it to also be lost. Furthermore, while an individual may be able to interpret the frames and follow the steps outlined above, they may not reach the enjoyment phase of the humor. There are several reasons why this may occur. Freud (2003) alludes to the fact that humor may fail because its performative aspects are not accomplished properly. This may be the result of the joke's creator failing to establish the frames and their discord to the proper extent at

which point it is appreciable by the audience. In such cases, the audience's ability to interpret the joke is hindered.

Additionally, jokes may not work because they are found to be too aggressive towards someone in the audience, or someone that the audience knows. These jokes are, therefore, deemed offensive. While the joke creator did not fail in the creation of the joke and the interpreter, the audience, did not fail in their interpretation, the joke is unsuccessful because the audience chooses to not be affected. However, the same audience may be offended by a particular joke, but be taken off guard by the dénouement and find themselves laughing, despite the fact that they find it offensive. In such a case, the humor is successful, despite the conscious wishes of the audience (Beeman, 2000). A joke may also be unsuccessful because of the limited scope from which it is derived. Someone who is unconscious of the frames of reference used within a joke would be unable to distinguish the tension therein presented. The success of the joke relies on both the execution by the creator and the reception and understanding of the audience. This cooperative system serves to demonstrate the value of humor in a communicative relationship between two or more individuals. Because jokes rely on relationships, a joke can only be deemed successful if it involves more than one person.

While some jokes rely on their timely association with the current moment, such as political jokes and references to popular culture, others must be removed from their historical moment, as some might find the topics too raw and choose to reject the humor. However, because jokes do have the ability to express what others find inexpressible, they may reach beyond historic limitations and still be created. Holocaust jokes were not as common just after the war's end, yet became more popular in the 1970s and 80s

(Dundes, 1987). Other jokes though, did emerge just after the historical moment they refer to. In particular, those jokes that were based on the Challenger explosion of 1986 emerged quickly after the event. While some ridiculed them and deemed the jokes tasteless, Willie Smyth (1986) argues that they are merely a progression of topical joking riddles that appear quickly and then give way when new events emerge. Such joking is situated in the moment it is referencing and eventually die-out in favor of other events that are at the forefront of a society's consciousness.

Freud (2003) argues that while jokes may exist unto themselves for pleasure alone, there may also be other motives behind joke-making. He contends that not all people are capable of making a joke; therefore, it is relegated to those who are described as witty. Secondly, a joke is not made for oneself alone, an audience is necessary for a joke to be completed and received, as was just discussed through Beeman's (2000) work. I would add another reason that jokes exist. In particular, the jokes that are produced within the mass media exist as commodities (Marx and Engels, 1978). The presentation of humor in a given situation strives for a return, either through laughter, or in the case of mass media, through financial gain. Their exhibitions to the public, as well as their reception, serve as indicators, to the joke's creators, of the success of the commodity. Without success in some form, the creators of the humor would need to re-evaluate the humor itself. Mass media is created to be a consumable product for the public, if the product is not received by the audience, then the commodity must change or it will become obsolete. The creators of the shows that feature Hitler and Nazi jokes are aware of the nature of their depictions and must cater to the audience in that way. As the shows progress, the acceptance of the depictions by the audience, demonstrates the audience's

ability to perceive, interpret, and enjoy the jokes at all stages, which establishes the show-as-commodity as a viable creation that will ultimately yield a return on itself.

Jokes are also created in order to relieve tension and to serve as a coping mechanism (Oring, 1992). Humor, if accomplished correctly, should result in enjoyment. Alan Dundes and Thomas Hauschild (1983) argue that those jokes that focus on one particular ethnic group or event are designed to be an expressive outlet. At times this may be the expression of aggression, but at others there may be a basic psychic need for a joke to be created. They contend that anti-Semitic jokes, which Dundes and Hauschild (1983) studied in Germany and the United States, are reflections of the continued anti-Semitism that can be found in Germany and elsewhere. Based on the patterns that emerged, they argued that, joking allows the tension between ethnic groups to be expressed in a way that limits the malice that face-to-face discourse would present. One joke they collected from an informant in Germany, in 1982, went like this; “How many Jews will fit in a Volkswagen? -506, six in the seats and 500 in the ashtrays” (Dundes and Hauschild, 1983:20). A similar joke was recorded in California in 1980. Their findings result in the conclusion that the telling of jokes of this kind serves as a coping mechanism for society to address that which cannot be easily discussed. This argument recalls the earlier statement of Elliott Oring (1992), who noted that jokes force an interaction between the unspeakable and the pre-established frame in a way that allows people to address the unspeakable.

This argument can be applied to many of the Nazi and Hitler jokes that prevail in American popular culture today. That we, as a society, make and consume these jokes in order to discuss the atrocities of the past while vilifying those people who caused the

damage in the first place, demonstrates a consciousness that is only accessible through humor.

Furthermore, many jokes that use the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler as their subject matter attempt to find amusement through the disparagement of this group and person. Disparagement humor “both ‘diminishes’ and ‘reinterprets’ its subject” and does so through the belittlement of the humor’s target (Ferguson and Ford, 2008:284; Fine, 1983). In part, it is theorized that such humor derives from a desire to express the feelings of superiority over an individual or a group through degradation humor. While these are generally thought to be hidden feelings, which are then brought to the surface, I believe that they can also be reaffirmations of feelings that are explicit. Considered a method of self-esteem enhancement, these jokes tend to target specific groups in strict comparison to others (Ferguson and Ford, 2008). Such enhancement of self is seen in many occurrences of humor where Nazis are the specific target of denigration. In these instances, the American audience is elevated in status compared to the Nazi collective, which is being belittled. However, in other cases, the humor arises in the Nazi use of marginalization of another group, such as the Jewish community, which served to demonstrate the power of the Nazi party. What can be distinguished here though, is that while the Nazi party is shown as strong, the audience for the joke is American, and despite the Nazi power, the historical reference reflects upon America, and their subsequent success during World War II, which puts them in the ultimate position of superiority above both the Nazis and the group that was the subject of Nazi belittlement.

It should be noted that such jokes are perceived to be a reflection of the feelings of a group as a whole towards another group. They are not reflective of a single individual’s

feeling of superiority, as that would alienate the joke creator from the audience that is believed to be represented by the joke (Ferguson and Ford). This hierarchy of superiority relates directly back to the duality of humor, that it must involve a joke creator and an audience. In this instance, the joke must be perceived and accepted by an audience that is also elevated to a higher status because of their portrayed power over another group. One could argue that the success of anti-Semitic jokes stems from this idea. That the Jewish people were unable to defeat the Axis powers themselves and needed assistance from the Allied forces, and that this is depicted through humor, shapes the status of the Allied forces and creates a hierarchy in which, the Jewish people are perceived to be lower than the Allied fighters. This is reflected in some of the jokes used in American mass media today as well.

Humor can also be derived from self-deprecation. Because humor creates interaction between the joke originator and the audience, such instances of self-deprecation are generally directed at a group that identifies with the creator of the joke itself (Juni and Katz, 2001). In many instances of this type of humor, the originator of the joke- as well as the audience have been victims of oppression. These jokes generally focus on ethnicity and form responses to ethnic humor. Because not all people are able to create humor, the ability to laugh at one's self demonstrates the level of wit which allows the creator to supply the joke as well as denigrate himself through it.

The theoretical concepts described here can be applied to the humor that is produced and utilized in today's American mass media. Below, I will examine several instances of humor that convey aspects of these theories. By applying them, I hope to demonstrate the consistent nature of Hitler and Nazi Party jokes despite the variety of

discourse types that is applied to them. I also wish to demonstrate the value of frames and reference in creating humor. By focusing on the relationship between the creator of the joke and the audience for which it was intended, I will demonstrate the systematic nature of humor and its reliance upon a relationship between the individual and society itself.

Chapter 3: Television as a catalyst for humor

Having established the role of Nazi and Hitler humor in American mass media as well as the prevailing theories about humor itself, I will now move towards a more specific representation of such humor through the mediation of television. I will briefly present a history of American television, followed by the presentation of the cartoon genre through which many representations of Hitler and the Nazi Party are mediated.

After the end of World War II in 1945, America began to experience an economic revival, particularly of industries that had been relegated to war-time efforts and were now able to revert back to their original products. Items such as the television became more abundant and by the end of the forties, they were becoming even more affordable (Goldberg, 2012). This provided a greater opportunity and exposure of the American people to mass media. As time passed, the American public was introduced to new television programming, including animated television

In the fall of 1960, the first prime-time animation show began. *The Flintstones* followed in the vein of the full length films of Walt Disney Studios and Warner Brothers, which saw an increase in popularity during the 1950s (Booker, 2006). The movement towards prime-time animation opened the way for more adult oriented humor to be presented through the medium of cartoons. Topics that were deemed unfit for children began to appear in prime-time shows. The tendency to push boundaries stemmed directly from the creation of *The Simpsons* in 1989. High ratings and a large viewership resulted in other prime-time cartoons being created, reenergizing the genre in American media

after a post *Flintstones* decline in popularity. In this paper, I will discuss three shows that derived directly from the prime-time legacy of *The Flintstones* and *The Simpsons: Family Guy, South Park, and King of the Hill*.

Prime-time cartoons allow adult oriented humor to be directly displayed for their audience; this permits jokes that may be too difficult or inappropriate for a child to understand to be aired when less children will be watching. Shows, beginning with *The Simpsons*, have utilized the topics of Hitler and the Nazi Party in order to elicit laughter from their adult audience. Because audiences have continued to watch the shows and similar jokes have appeared in many episodes, Hitler and Nazi jokes have continued to be relevant within American cartoons. The three cartoons discussed here; *Family Guy, South Park, and King of the Hill*, follow in the vein of World War II propaganda films like Disney's *The New Spirit* and *Fall Out-Fall In*, adapting the representations of Adolf Hitler and Nazis in order to elicit laughter from their intended audience (Murray, 2011). I will present several selections of the instances of Hitler and Nazi references in these cartoons and apply appropriate theories about humor to their use and representation, demonstrating the effectiveness of the aforementioned theories in analyzing humor that utilizes Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party as its subject matter.

Hitler's our *Family Guy*

I will begin my analysis of the humor by presenting examples of the primary data collected. These examples were derived from mass media produced television shows and

film productions. In analyzing these, I will look first at how the joke is presented and what its context is. I will also address the specific visual and auditory references used to create the structure of the joke. Next, I will analyze why the joke was humorous in and of itself utilizing the theoretical constructs already described.

Before going further though, it is necessary to discuss the role of genre in mass mediation. Bakhtin and Medvedev argue that genre has been defined as “a certain constant, specific grouping of devices with a defined dominant,” the “most important determining component of any work” (Morris, 1994: 175, 93). As such, genre is the form works take and the individual elements used in each work relates directly back to the genre in which it was originally situated. Bakhtin elaborates on genre when discussing finalization, stating that while an individual composition may be finalized, thematic finalization isn’t possible (Morris, 1994). Therefore, the works I will discuss here are a component of an individual work that is directed by the genre of prime-time cartoons. By analyzing particular sections of the works, I am decontextualizing the scenes and demonstrating their use of humor that is directly linked back to the genre from which it originated. Furthermore, the removal of these scenes, through decontextualization, keeps their particular genres intact and relates back to the processes of seeing the scenes and conceptualizing them as their genre would dictate (Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Morris, 1994). The discussion of genre is necessary in order for the scenes to remain affiliated with the rules governing the prime-time cartoon genre, from which they are derived. This relates directly to the means through which the jokes are presented and received by the audience, allowing for the reception of humor to be completed.

Family Guy, which first aired on Fox in 1999, was created by Seth MacFarlane (Booker, 2006). The show utilizes the traditional family sitcom structure established by its predecessor *The Flintstones*. Throughout each episode, scenes drastically shift from reality to dream-like scenarios. It is during these times that most, although not all, of the show's Hitler and Nazi references occur. Peter Griffin is the main character of the show. The father of the family, his actions usually result in unexpected trouble. His wife Lois is portrayed as the reasonable voice in the family, although she does deviate occasionally into the unreasonable. The two have three children: Meg, the oldest, Chris, the middle child, and Stewie, a baby who talks in an elevated language and is only occasionally understood by the other family members and series characters. Finally, they have a dog Brian who is also able to talk and communicate easily with all of the show's characters. In particular, Brian's relationship with Stewie drives many of the show's plots as the two often get into trouble together.

In the very first episode of *Family Guy* entitled "Death Has a Shadow," the family is dealing with Peter Griffin's unemployment. Fired after he fell asleep at his toy factory job, Peter eventually resorts to going on welfare in order to hide his job loss from Lois. A discrepancy at the welfare office results in Peter receiving thousands of dollars more than he should. Peter uses this money to get things for his family. Earlier in the episode, his daughter, Meg, asked her mother, Lois, if she could get collagen injections while Lois said no, arguing that most of the world's problems stem from poor self-image, Peter agrees to pay for it with his welfare money. Just after Lois' earlier rejection of Meg's request the scene cuts away to a building labeled "Das Gym." As oompah music plays in the background a skinny and weak looking Adolf Hitler is shown attempting to lift

weights. While he struggles, a muscular man wearing a Star of David necklace and orthodox Jewish beard and hat is shown on the other side of the gym. Adolf, depicted alone, sees the other man being swooned over by two attractive females and becomes enraged, grimacing and scowling in frustration (Shin, 1999).

The humor in this situation is derived from the comparison of body image and popularity with Adolf Hitler's actual actions during World War II. The frame shift from the Griffin's home to a fictional gym represents a shift in time and place. Furthermore, the imagery attempts to trivialize the reasons behind the Holocaust, while also depicting Hitler himself as a weak, jealous man. This imagery is an attempt to explain why Hitler would want to exterminate the Jewish race. Although this explanation of Hitler's actions is inaccurate, the cartoon's creators have demonstrated the possibility that jealousy and anger were the catalysts to the mass extermination of Jews during the Holocaust. Furthermore, by establishing this implausible frame so early on in the series, roughly one and a half minutes into the first episode, the show's creators are constructing a point of reference to which they will continue to return as the show airs new content. This forms the expectations of the viewers, allowing them to establish a clear frame within which all other *Family Guy* episodes will function, it also demonstrates the nature of the prime-time cartoon genre as being able to portray implausible concepts as reality.

Family Guy's second episode, "I Never Met the Dead Man," also features a joke aimed at Nazism. In this episode Peter has damaged the Quahog Television satellite, causing a complete black out of television in the town. Peter, though he goes through severe withdrawal from the lack of television, eventually realizes that there is more to life than just TV. He begins to spend more time with his family by fishing, cloud watching,

playing basketball, and going on a picnic. At the end of the day the rest of the Griffins are exhausted from their activities. Seated on the family couch, they are talking when the television finally turns back on. Peter enters the room dressed in German Lederhosen, asking who is ready for the local Bavarian Folk Festival. The family, who are too tired from their earlier activities, refuse to join him. William Shatner then appears at the Griffin's door and Peter invites him to the festival. The two, leave the Griffin household and the scene shifts to the Bavarian Folk Festival.

At the folk festival an oompah band is playing on the stage when several festival booths are shown directly across from them. The booths are occupied by two meat distributors, one with a sign that says "German Bratwurst" and the other whose sign says "Polish Sausage." Dressed in lederhosen, the German booth operator quickly looks at the Polish operator, who appears nervous. After several glances, the German man picks up a bratwurst from his stall, goes to the stall next to his and hits the Polish man on the head, knocking him out. He then covers the "Polish Sausage" sign with a new one that says "German Sausage." As the scene pans to the other side of the Polish booth it shows a man standing behind another booth bearing a sign that say "Czech Wieners." The German man repeats his quick stares at the Czech man who also looks frightened. The scene then cuts away to Peter and William Shatner at the festival talking (DiMartino, 1999).

This scene plays on the continued perception of German citizens as Nazis. Rather than being set in the past, it is situated clearly in the present which establishes a frame from which the audience can build. This continues to perpetuate the concept of German acceptance of and participation in Nazi activities. Furthermore, it reflects upon the sequence of Nazi power assertion, referencing the Nazi invasions of Poland and

Czechoslovakia. While Germany actually invaded Czechoslovakia first in March 1939, then Poland in September of the same year, the cartoon is still able to make the point that German power assertion was deliberate and overt (Caplan, 2008). This scene is accomplished with no dialogue. The imagery of the situation serves as the frame which establishes the scene's humor. Here, the lack of discourse is necessary for the joke to operate in a covert manner, reflecting the covert power seizure by the German man which serves as a commentary on the Nazi seizure of power. Furthermore, the scene assumes the audience is able to reference the history of World War II. Without this capability, the joke is unsuccessful because of the failure of the audience's perception of historical fact. By creating this boundary between those who are knowledgeable and those who aren't, *Family Guy* is alienating the joke from some of their audience. This relates directly to the belief that the success of humor is reliant on the audience's ability to perceive the competing elements of a joke as well as the references made within the joke. If they are unable to do so, they will not understand the humor that is at work in the joke itself.

In their third season, episode twenty, *Family Guy* aired a special episode entitled "Road to Europe" during which Stewie and Brian travel through Europe. At the beginning of the episode Stewie becomes infatuated with a children's show called "Jolly Farm Revue" which is filmed in London. When Peter and Lois leave town, Stewie takes the opportunity to travel to London and see the show with which he has become obsessed. Brian, after finding out that Stewie is gone, goes after him. Unfortunately the flight they caught ends up going to the Middle East instead of London. Through further errors the two end up in Munich, Germany before eventually getting to London.

After arriving in Munich, they decide to take a ride on a tour bus. Their tour guide is a German man with blonde hair and blue eyes, referencing the Aryan ideal. As the tour progresses, Brian notices that the pamphlet they were given is missing the years 1939 to 1945 and tells their guide. The guide becomes upset and tells Brian that everyone was on vacation. Trying to carry on the tour, the guide begins to discuss other aspects of the city, Brian doesn't allow this and continues to question him about Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. The guide argues that Germany was invited to Poland and continues to look uncomfortable with the conversation. As Brian presses further, the guide becomes even more upset, stating that he "will hear no more insinuations about the German people" and that "nothing bad happened" (Povenmire, 2002). He then begins to speak in German while raising his left arm in the Nazi salute. The guide states "*Sie werden sich hinsetzen. Sie werden ruhig sein. Sie werden nicht beleidigen Deutschland.* (You will sit down. You will be quiet. You will not insult Germany.)" (Povenmire, 2002). The scene then shifts to show the startled faces of the tour bus riders. Uncomfortable, Brian switches the topic to point out a beer hall. The guide follows this change of topic and discusses the historic beer halls of Munich (Povenmire, 2002) .

This is the first *Family Guy* episode to place a main character in Germany with the express purpose of making a joke about Germany's Nazi past. As with "I Never Met the Dead Man," this episode makes a joke out of the argument that the German people are still Nazis. Furthermore, it also references the history of Germany's conflict with other countries, namely Poland. Additional reference to German policies regarding Aryan appearance is seen in the physical appearance of the tour guide. This is also one of the few *Family Guy* episodes that chose to utilize the German language in order to further the

joke. The use of this language shift serves to alienate a part of the audience who can't speak German as they will be unable to successfully complete all the steps of the joke. By dividing the viewers into those who can and cannot understand the dialogue, the show creates two different jokes at the same time. For those that can speak German, the joke continues to reference Nazi ideology and the potential denial of Nazism by modern Germans. The audience members who don't speak German are lead to believe that his rant takes a more radical turn by the change in language. This allows them to fill in the rest of the conversation, providing the audience with imaginative space in which to decide how the joke ends. By giving the audience this lee-way, the show is also giving them the chance to participate in the joke, not just handing them the punch-lines directly. This enhances the intellectual connection between the audience and the show overall, providing the viewer's with agency in completing the joke. Furthermore, the episode epitomizes the ability to express the unspeakable, which is the concept that Germany remains anti-Semitic today and maintains pro-Nazi political leanings.

In "8 Simple Rules for Buying My Teenage Daughter," which was aired in season four, episode eight, *Family Guy* presents another humorous reference to Hitler. In this episode, Stewie, who has fallen in love with his babysitter Liddane, is upset to find that she has a boyfriend and does not feel the same love for Stewie that he does for her. Dismayed by her rejection, Stewie argues that they were supposed to be together forever, like Eva Braun and Hitler. The scene then cuts to Hitler and Eva in their Berlin bunker during the last days of World War II. As Hitler and Eva sit together and prepare to ingest lethal pills, bombs are exploding around them. The two agree to consume the poison together and begin a countdown. On three, they both put the pills towards their mouths,

but don't bite down on them in order to release the poison. They laugh and point at each other, accusing the other of not completing their side of the bargain. On their second attempt, they both again stop short before ingesting the pills. As they continue to laugh, Eva jokingly contends that Hitler wants her to kill herself, but won't do it himself. The two exchange accusatory "you suck" statements directed towards each other in a mocking fashion, then the scene ends and returns to present-day Quahog, Rhode Island, where *Family Guy* is set (Colton, 2005).

This episode centers its humor on factual evidence related to World War II. It is known that Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide during the final days of the war by ingesting cyanide and suffering from self-inflicted gunshot wounds (Caplan, 2008). Stewie's comparison of his love for Liddane and the love that Hitler and Eva Braun had serves as a point of departure from which the show could move to the depiction of the two. It also serves as an initial framework upon which the depiction of Hitler and Eva is set. The use of this moment in time as a demonstration of their love adds to the emphasis of how intense it was. That the two would willingly die for each other serves as an argument for the depth of their connection. However, because *Family Guy* depicts this final act of sacrifice as an attempt that is failed on both parties' parts, it forces the audience to question the authenticity of the pair's love. Furthermore, it causes the audience to reflect on the audacity of the actions the two took as to why they would want to take their own lives. It also demonstrates the conflict between the historical framework that was established in the cartoon and that which actually occurred during the war. The humor of this situation is derived from not only the inaccurate comparison that Stewie makes, which is evident by Liddane's lack of feelings for him, but also the questions that

come up regarding the real feelings of Eva Braun and Adolf Hitler in their final days together. That the two were depicted as hesitant to die, yet eventually do commit suicide, presents the joke maker's thoughts about their relationship and establishes the competing frames that result in the humor of the scene.

In the same season, episode 27, entitled "Untitled Griffin Family History," another story of Hitler and Eva Braun's death is depicted. The Griffin family, who has retreated into a safe room in their attic because of a home invasion, are slowly being overcome by water that is filling the sealed room. Meg has been sent through a vent to find help and Peter has been distracting the rest of the family with stories about his ancestors. He begins to tell the story of Peter Hitler, Adolf Hitler's brother. Peter Hitler is depicted as a bumbling oaf when compared to Adolf. The audience is shown that Adolf's focus on work and an upcoming rally have him somewhat preoccupied. As the scene plays out, Adolf Hitler begins to make a speech to the German people. Peter Hitler continually cuts across him during the speech to make exclamations like "Ohh yeah" and "Yeah, Germanator, I'll be back" (Moncrief, 2006). Adolf Hitler, upset at Peter's actions, confronts him and tells him to move out. Peter, who has been playing with a gun, tries to convince his brother to let him stay. As the conversation continues, the gun Peter is holding goes off and Adolf is shot dead. Eva Braun, having heard the conversation and having seen Peter kill Adolf, runs over and yells at him. Suddenly, the gun goes off again and Eva is shot. Peter Hitler, quickly looks around, and then places the gun in Eva's hand. He backs away and the scene shifts back to the present (Moncrief, 2006).

This scene offers an alternative death story for Hitler and Eva Braun, one that features a derivative of the show's main character, Peter. The scene is based partially in reality,

focusing on Hitler's speaking ability and relationship with Eva Braun. This sets up a historical framework of reference. However, the majority of joke relies on the fictional situation that is used to create a frame that competes with that reality. Peter's relative being the brother of Adolf Hitler begins the joke, as it would further imply that the present-day Griffins are, in fact, related to Hitler as well. Furthermore, the intentional opposition between the personalities of Adolf Hitler and Peter Hitler serve to demonstrate potential familial dynamics which could occur in any number of locations and time periods. The added reference to modern popular culture, with Peter's "Germanator" statement further distinguishes the incongruities that are in action in the sequence and pits the frames against each other. That Peter Hitler is ultimately the one that kills both Eva and Adolf reflects on the present-day Peter Griffin positively. The argument here is that, while his relative was related to Adolf Hitler, he was also the one that caused his death, completing a service to the world as a whole. This scene relies on the fictional changes that happened in order to present an altered reality of Hitler and Eva's deaths, placing the cause of the death on Peter Hitler's shoulders, which directly relates back to Peter Griffin's family and equates them with killing Hitler. This implausible retelling of history, as well as Peter Griffin's insistence that it was reality, creates the humor in the scene.

In a quick scene from season five, episode fourteen, "No Meals on Wheels" we see Peter utilizing an image of Adolf Hitler for his own purposes. Upset that his Jewish neighbor, Mort Goldman has been borrowing so many items and not returning them, Peter creates a scarecrow to place on his front lawn. The scarecrow is wearing a black Nazi uniform with a red, swastika armband, has black hair and a small black mustache.

Lois asks what he has made and Peter claims that it is a scare-Jew. Disagreeing with this, Lois argues that it is racist and they can't leave it in their yard. As she says this, Peter hushes her and they rush inside because Mort is approaching. As Mort nears the house, he begins to say that he is returning something of the Griffins. He suddenly sees the scare-jew and yells "Ohh my God, its Hitler!" He turns and runs, continuing to say "He's back. He's back" (Colton, 2007).

This scene, as well as many of the episodes that feature Mort, demonstrate the humor behind the image of the modern schlemiel (Wisse, 1971). Wisse (1971) argues that these characters allude to the false weakness of the Jewish community, even amongst their members today. The schlemiel is the embodiment of the perceived weakness of the Jewish culture. Through comedic representations of the schlemiel, the audience is supposed to believe that he is emphasizing his weakness in order to hide his true strength. However, this serves only as a misdirection, wherein reality the schlemiel is just as weak as he appears. *Family Guy* capitalizes on this identity and fashions their Jewish character Mort Goldman off of this concept. His inabilities are heightened by his comparison to other characters in the series. Furthermore, he epitomizes the conceptions of a stereotypical Jewish figure, weak, fearful, and reliant on others, therefore his image and actions are representative of all other members of his ethnic group. This leads to instances of self-deprecation, which extend beyond him and are applied to all other Jewish people (Wisse, 1971).

In this scene, Mort's fears stem from the potentiality that Hitler could return and continue his efforts to exterminate the Jewish population. While this is clearly not possible, it does bring up the concern that Hitler's actions could be repeatable by another

person and aren't entirely relegated to the past. Furthermore, the absurdity of the situation serves as a means through which the humor can be related to the viewers. By setting up the framework of a typical day in the suburbs, then including the reference to Hitler and his relationship with the Jewish community, the creators of this joke are establishing two competing frames of reality, successfully constructing tension between the frames, which allows for humor.

Mort plays a vital role in another Family Guy episode entitled "Road to Germany." This season seven, episode three plot features Mort time traveling to Poland accidentally. When Stewie realizes that Mort has inadvertently used his time machine, he and Brian go back to find him. They locate Mort at a wedding in Poland on September 1, 1939. As they are celebrating the wedding of Mort's grandparents, the scene cuts to a depiction of the German Army Headquarters where the German military has just received a letter from the Führer that states "Proceed with Case White: invasion of Poland P.S. got your last message. LMAO!!" (Colton, 2008) As the wedding celebrations continue, the German air force enters their planes, which are decorated with swastikas, and begin the trip to Poland. When bombs and gunfire reach the wedding party, Brian realizes the date and its historical significance and alerts the others. They quickly decide that they need to flee Poland. After setting up the time machine pad in order to return to the present, they soon discover that it is broken.

The group decides that they must take Mort to England as it is the only safe area for him at that time. As they attempt their escape, Mort is forced to go undercover as a Catholic priest. Unable to maintain the façade due to his lack of Christian knowledge and inadvertent Yiddish phrases, the group is eventually found out. One soldier calls Mort a

“filthy Jew” to which Stewie replies that he “should be glad [his] human resources person was not around to hear that.” (Colton, 2008) This bides them some time and they quickly rush off in a stolen motorcycle and side-car. After next stealing a German U-boat and diverting another with a newspaper that features an image of Hitler shaking hands with Mickey Mouse, the three eventually make it to England. At this time, Stewie tries to set up the time machine, again it doesn’t work and Stewie realizes it is because they need more uranium, off of which it runs.

Unfortunately it is quickly realized that the only place to find uranium is back in Germany. Stewie is surprised to hear this and Brian tells him that Germany is building weapons of mass destruction. Still confused, Stewie asks why, if America knows they are doing this, do they not just go in and kick their German’s asses? Brian states that it is because Germany doesn’t have any oil. Stewie, understanding the reference to the present-day’s struggles in the Middle East applauds Brian for his statement.

In order to get to Germany, the three, pretending to be British, join the Royal Air Force. Once they reach Berlin, Mort argues that it isn’t so bad. In an effort to show him how offensive the Germans are Brian shows him a picture that depicts a Jewish person, arguing that their vision of what Jewish people are is inaccurate and racist. However, when the picture is shown to the audience, it is a clear likeness to Mort himself. Eventually the three find where the uranium is being housed. They attack three Nazi soldiers and take their uniforms in order to invade the uranium bunker. When Stewie lifts up his lapel, there is a campaign pin there for McCain/Palin. As they walk into the lab, Stewie takes a marker and paints a black moustache and hair on himself in order to attempt a Hitler disguise. With this camouflage, the three are able to take the uranium. As

they prepare to leave, the real Adolf Hitler appears. Stewie stands in a doorway and pretends to be Hitler's reflection, but eventually gives up and blows a raspberry in his face. The three ultimately escape the Nazi threat and are able to travel back to the present day. In Quahog, they arrive just before Mort finds the time machine. Stewie, attempting to erase present day Mort's memory, destroys the time machine and the time traveling Mort, resulting in Mort Goldman's obliviousness about the events that occurred during the episode (Colton, 2008).

This single episode features a plethora of historical and humorous references to Hitler and the Nazis. The use of Mort as the actual time traveler serves to reiterate the image of the schlemiel and his apparent helplessness and naivety in the situation, while also allowing Mort to represent the entire Jewish population. Mort's actions, paired with those of Brian and Stewie, serve to demonstrate cleverness and trickery that goes beyond the Nazi ability, as is proven by their eventual escape. Through this representation, the entire Jewish population is shown to be revolting against Hitler's actions.

Again this scene can be characterized by a mixture of historical fact and creative fiction. The mixing of these two frames serves as the main catalyst to the humor that follows. Germany's invasion of Poland, which is a topic often addressed in *Family Guy*, and was discussed earlier, is set in reality, while Hitler didn't necessarily send a message containing the phrase 'LMAO,' the invasion was completed and violently so (Caplan, 2008). Additionally, the relationship between the British and the German forces, as well as the German attempts to create weapons of mass destruction are all historically documented and widely known aspects of World War II. However, the incorporation of

fictional scenes, such as Hitler's encounter with Stewie and Mort's attempts to pretend he is a Catholic priest, demonstrate a deviation from the truth in order to create humor.

Additionally, the incorporation of present day situations and a demonstration of how they relate to the past is a means of connecting these two time periods and stressing that connection to the audience. By tying together the details of the Nazi era to activities in the present, *Family Guy* is referencing something that is more easily accessible to their audience, and it is utilizing the parallel nature of the two instances to increase the humor of the situation. Stewie's reference to the typical, contemporary work-place human resources department demonstrates the competing frames of past and present to the audience, emphasizing the humor of the situation. Furthermore, the fact that the United States would willingly enter a country that has nuclear weapons now, yet allow Germany to develop them without interruption during World War II also serves to demonstrate the double standard of the American government, providing a tongue-in-cheek critique of the current American political system. The combination of these references and images shapes the humor of this particular episode, which is one of the most prevalent uses of Hitler and Nazis as the fodder for a joke in the *Family Guy* catalogue.

The final *Family Guy* episode that I will discuss here is from season nine, episode eleven and is entitled "German Guy." This episode follows Chris Griffin as he befriends a local man who owns a puppet shop. Franz Gutentag is a puppet maker who demonstrates the puppeteering techniques to Chris and then declares that they could become good friends. Mr. Herbert, a local elderly man who has often admired Chris, sees this interaction and becomes fearful of Franz Gutentag's encroachment on his relationship with Chris. Later, Mr. Herbert goes to speak with Peter and Lois and argues

that Chris has become friends with a Nazi. Mr. Herbert states that he is positive that Franz Gutentag is really the Nazi concentration camp guard Franz Schlechnacht. Revealing that he was a prisoner of war during World War II, Mr. Herbert discusses his interactions with Franz during his imprisonment.

Mr. Herbert describes his forced hard labor of sorting camp recyclables, arguing that the bottles would cause his hands to get “kinda sticky” and Franz would stand behind him smiling cruelly (Tang, 2011). The suffering that Mr. Herbert experienced, he argues, shouldn’t be subjected to by any people, which is why he has come to beg the Griffins to prevent Chris from interacting with Franz. Lois and Peter argue that they need to speak with Franz directly about the matter and state that they will invite him over for dinner, when they can discuss Mr. Herbert’s accusations with Franz. When Mr. Herbert tries to convince Chris to avoid Franz, Chris dismisses him, believing that Mr. Herbert is just jealous of the friendship that they have formed.

Later, Chris goes to Franz’s house. While searching for the bathroom, he stumbles upon a room that is decorated with Nazi era materials, including swastika flags, a map of the Nazi regime’s planned German occupations, Nazi golden eagles, an SS flag, a picture of Hitler, and a foam finger that says “Nazis are #1.” Chris is taken aback and learns that Franz Gutentag’s real name is, in fact, Franz Schlechnacht and he was a member of the Nazi party. Franz seeing that Chris has found out the truth refuses to let him leave, and when Peter arrives, he takes them both to the basement at gunpoint. Captured, they are eventually able to get a message out to Mr. Herbert as he passes by. Mr. Herbert goes back to his house and puts on his old World War II uniform. Returning to Franz’s house, he confronts him about his Nazi past. Franz confirms that he is indeed Lt. Franz

Schlechtnacht and reveals his old uniform under his clothing. A slow and feeble fight ensues between the two elderly men until Franz eventually falls down his front porch step and dies. After his death, Mr. Herbert looks at Franz and says “Say goodnight you Nazi bastard” (Tang, 2011). Chris and Peter are freed, and thank Mr. Herbert for his heroism (Tang, 2011).

This episode again references the potential that Nazis are still present in American society today. This concept is not necessarily unheard of or impossible, considering the belief that members of the Nazi party who escaped prior to the Nuremberg Trials moved to other countries, America included, and changed their identities in order to evade prosecution. However, the insinuation that such a person could exist in America today further alerts the audience to the possibility that they too might know a Nazi.

Two particular aspects of this episode where humor comes into play are in the interactions of Herbert and Franz. The first such interaction is depicted through Mr. Herbert’s memory of the prisoner camps in Germany during World War II. A major tool used to elicit humor is accomplished through the trivialization of Mr. Herbert’s experience. The audience’s expectations about the events surrounding prisoner internment in Nazi Germany are not met as Mr. Herbert describes his experience. His recounting of the horrors of having sticky hands pales in comparison to the actual horrors encountered by those in concentration camps during World War II. This elicits humor because the character still feels as though the two experiences are comparable and continues to insinuate that in his reaction to his interment. However, to depict Mr. Herbert’s experience as the same as those of the millions of Jewish, Gypsy, political dissenters, and homosexual victims of the Holocaust may have been viewed as offensive

by the audience, which would result in their perceived failure of the joke. The contrast created causes Mr. Herbert to be the joke because of his trivialization of the real events and horrors experienced by the majority of the people in concentration camps.

The second interaction between these characters, which occurs in the present day, is Herbert's confrontation of Franz. By depicting the two men in their former military uniforms, facing off against one another, *Family Guy* is reiterating the absurdity of the situation while alluding to the past conflicts of these two men, who have then shifted to become representations of their countries. That the men are incapable of actually harming each other as well as Franz's need to take a break during the fight also shows the fragility of the generation and absurdity of the situation. Furthermore, that the fight ends with Franz's death from a fall off a single step also elicits humor in that someone who was once so powerful was so easily overcome. This is a reflection of the Nazi regime as a whole. With the intervention of America into World War II, the Nazi powers encountered a force that reenergized the allied forces and eventually led to the destruction of the Nazi German state (Caplan, 2008). These relationships are alluded to in order to elicit a positive reaction from the audience, demonstrating the nature of the humor employed by *Family Guy*. Furthermore, this scene serves as a self-esteem boost for the American audience through the success Mr. Herbert has over Franz, which reflects the success the United States has over Nazi Germany.

Family Guy's references to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party rely on the audience's understanding of historical fact in order to distinguish these facts from the false reality presented in the episodes. By utilizing the disparity between the real and the fictional, *Family Guy* creates instances of humor. Through a variety of jokes and themes, such as

the relationship and death of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun, current Nazi leanings in Germany, and the schlemiel figure of Mort Goldman, *Family Guy* creates humor that is reliant upon the genre of prime-time cartoons and is aimed at their specific audience, who would appreciate and understand such humor.

Despite its attempts to relate to a particular audience, *Family Guy* has received backlash for its topic choice and presentation of humor. Ratings of the show were poor during the first two seasons and it was eventually cancelled. However, viewer anger over the cancellation, and changes at the Fox network resulted in the show being renewed for a third season. This did not last long and it was cancelled, once more, after the show's third season. However, the negative response from the show's fans, strong ratings of the show's reruns on Cartoon Network, and large DVD sales convinced Fox to pick the show back up, airing new episodes on May 1, 2005 (Booker, 2006). The reaction to the program by the studio is not solely based on the show's subject matter, but reflects, at least partially, on the types of humor portrayed within *Family Guy*. As was discussed earlier, the genre of humor used within *Family Guy* was presented to the audience in the first episode, joking that Adolf Hitler's jealousy as his motivation for the Holocaust. While the attempt to establish their genre of humor alienated some viewers, it drew others to the show, creating an audience who repeatedly demonstrated their devotion to the show, bringing it back to prime-time after its two cancellations.

Hitler in *South Park*, Colorado

Having looked at *Family Guy*'s use of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party to create humor, I will now move on to *South Park*'s attempt to do the same. *South Park* was created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. First airing in 1997, the show appeared on the Comedy Central network. The show's premise centers around four elementary school aged boys and their families, as well as the town of South Park, Colorado. The four children that drive the plots of the show are Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, a Jewish boy, Eric Cartman, the most boisterous of the group and often the antagonist who is also referred to by his surname, and Kenny McCormick, who comes from a poor part of town and whose speech is often muddled due to his clothing, the hood of which is pulled securely over his mouth (Stratyner and Keller, 2009). The relationships between these four boys and their interactions with others in the town are the focus of the plots presented throughout the series.

A source of continued controversy, *South Park* has been ridiculed for its bold and audacious storylines. Among those plots that draw public scrutiny are those that discuss Nazism. One such storyline occurs in season one, episode seven entitled "Pinkeye". Kyle and Stan have gathered at the bus stop before school dressed in their Halloween costumes. Kyle is wearing a Chewbacca head while Stan is dressed as Raggedy Andy. While the two boys talk about their costume choice, Eric Cartman appears dressed in a Nazi uniform with a swastika armband and sporting a small mustache. Kyle asks what the costume is supposed to be and Cartman says that he is Adolf Hitler. He then performs the raised arm Nazi salute while saying "Sieg Heil" (Parker et al, 1997). Eric Cartman also states that his mother made the costume for him. Kyle, who is Jewish, is particularly upset about the costume choice and tells him that it isn't cool, despite what Eric thinks.

Later, at school, Chef, the school's chef, and Principal Victoria come up to Cartman and ask him why he is dressed that way. Not understanding why his outfit is a poor choice, he simply says that his mother made it and repeats the salute and "Sieg Heil" statements. Principal Victoria is appalled and tells Cartman to be quiet. She says that he must see an educational video and takes him to her office. Away from the rest of the group, Principal Victoria tells Eric to watch a video called "That Guy Hitler." The video opens to documentary footage of Adolf Hitler at a Nazi rally. A narrator tells the viewer that Hitler was a naughty man. As Hitler begins to speak, Eric Cartman imagines himself as Hitler. Speaking in unintelligible German, Cartman is depicted as Adolf Hitler standing before a large crowd. The film ends and Cartman is enthralled by the image of Hitler that he has seen. Upset, Principal Victoria tells him he must remove the costume he is wearing. When he refuses, she creates a costume for him out of a sheet. She says that he will now be a ghost, but once the costume is completed he resembles a member of the Ku Klux Klan more than a ghost, which the principal does not notice. Eric eventually leaves the room and returns to class (Parker et al, 1997).

This is the beginning of Eric Cartman's exposure to Adolf Hitler and, as I will discuss in more detail later, is not the first time he envisions himself as Hitler. This clip utilizes a method of humor that has not yet been seen in the other examples provided. That is the exaggeration of a discernable generation gap between those people who perceive a discussion of Hitler as a bad thing and those who utilize it freely. This will come up again, but for now it's important to note that the reactions of Chef and the principal upon seeing Eric's costume were that of disgust. There are other reactions as well, namely those of Eric's mother and his friend Kyle. While Eric's mother is of the

same generation as the other adults, she shows her approval of Eric's costume by creating it for him. Kyle, on the other hand, is of the same generation as Eric, yet as a Jewish child, appears to have a better understanding of the person that is Hitler. This causes him to reject Eric's costume as inappropriate.

While this episode demonstrates a generation gap between the characters, the sections are funny because Eric Cartman refuses to accept the information that the adults give him despite the use of historical documentation to support their claims. He, instead, becomes infatuated with the images he sees, further alienating him from those who argue against his actions. This disjuncture between the expected and the actual serves as an incongruity upon which the humor is established. Furthermore, the change of costume that is forced upon him adds to the humor of the situation. The principal, in rejecting his costume choice of Adolf Hitler, sanctions his unintended Ku Klux Klan member costume. The switch from one racist character to another, without notice by Principal Victoria, serves to demonstrate the discrepancy in American society where Hitler is emphasized as more evil than the KKK, a domestic group that acted against African Americans. This is a statement regarding the hypocrisy of modern America in that the KKK costume was only detected and object to by Chef, who is African American. Furthermore, the audience must be able to perceive the KKK reference being made. Without the ability to reference that within one's own knowledge, the joke is unsuccessful. These needs within the scene project the joke onto the audience, requiring that they perceive and understand the references made in order for the joke to be a success.

Another method of depiction that *South Park* tends towards is the choice to depict Hitler as a character in the overall narrative. In “Mr. Hankey’s Christmas Classics”, season three, episode fifteen, Hitler is depicted in Hell. This episode, based on traditional Christmas specials that feature musical numbers, shows Hitler seated on a cliff in front of a wall of fire. Hitler is upset and crying as “O’ Tennenbaum” plays in the background. Depicted as a cartoon body and documentary photograph face and head, he is wearing a black suit and red swastika armband, he begins to sing the German version of “O’ Tannenbaum.” As he sings images of his childhood appear behind him. The first images are of his family and his father helping him put the star on top of the Christmas tree. Hitler’s is then depicted, as a child, throwing snow balls at three Hasidic Jews. Then, a young Hitler imagines the countryside with lines of soldiers goose stepping and saluting.

Satan appears and asks Hitler why he is sad. When Hitler only continues to sing the lyrics to “O’ Tennenbaum,” Satan offers to throw a Christmas event in Hell. He gathers the damned around him and has them begin the preparations for Christmas. Erecting the tree and stringing lights, the damned are soon joined by demons. Satan and the demons begin to sing about it being Christmas time in Hell. Satan points out some of the more influential citizens of Hell, such as Jeffrey Dahmer, John F. Kennedy, and Mao Tse Tung, discussing what they are doing as they prepare for the holiday. Satan calls to Hitler and gives him the gift of the Christmas celebration that he has put together. Happy, Hitler hugs the tree as Satan continues to sing about the wonders of Christmas in Hell. As the song winds to a close, other famous people in Hell come onto the screen, including Gene Siskel and Princess Diana. The song ends and the scene shifts back to the special’s

host, Mr. Hankey as he prepares to introduce the next segment of the episode (Parker, 1999).

This scene finds humor in its absurdity and frame shifts. The transcendence into Hell in order to commiserate with Hitler over the lack of a Christmas is removing the audience from a realistic situation and immediately placing them in a fictional setting. However, the actual photos, which are used for the famous residents of Hell, provide a realistic quality to the events that are taking place. This allows the audience to relate to some aspect of the events. Furthermore, Hitler's morose singing is accessible to the show's viewers because, while it is sung in German, "O' Tennenbaum" is a song that has been directly translated into English and retains its meaning. When the scene shifts to an unknown song, performed by demons and residents in Hell, it also shifts into English. This provides the audience the chance to understand what is going on during the festivity preparations. Finally, the uses of music as a method of narrative for the events in Hell, as well as the theme of Christmas in Hell, provide additional areas of joking. Hitler's clear association with Christianity and not Judaism is heightened by the choice of Christmas as a focus of the narrative. Also, music, which here is being used in a jovial manner, points to the opposing nature of hell and the residents therein, where the joyous tune opposes the pre-conceived notions of hell. These aspects of the scene enhance the joking nature of the show and this episode in particular.

In season eight, episode three of *South Park*, "The Passion of the Jew," Eric Cartman's preoccupation with Adolf Hitler is, again, a major plot point. Following his earlier exposure to Adolf Hitler in the documentary shown by his principal, this episode sees Eric take on the persona of Hitler once more. In this episode, Eric has just seen Mel

Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." Having loved it so much, he ends up seeing it over thirty times and believes that the events depicted are the absolute truth. He decides to hold a meeting of others who liked the film while Kenny and Stan go directly to Mel Gibson to get their money back after hating the film. As Eric Cartman prepares for his meeting, he is seen in a brown Nazi uniform with dyed black hair. His mother comes in to let him know that his guests are here. Once his mother leaves, Eric cracks a riding crop under his arm and raises his left hand in a Nazi salute. Mimicking German speech in the style of Hitler's oration, Eric turns to a poster of Mel Gibson and says that he is ready to do his bidding.

At the meeting, Cartman walks onto the stage and stands behind a podium that features a black, red, and white banner. Greeting the audience with the Nazi salute, Cartman begins to address the crowd. He states that they must do something, but shouldn't talk about their plans out loud, at least not before they "have most of them on the trains heading to the camps." (Parker, 2004) The audience seems confused, but don't address the issue, instead reverting to stating their love of the film. Eric agrees and says that, in order to have a stronger following, they must take at least one other person to see the film. He argues that once that is done, they will be able to begin the cleansing. The crowd again agrees and the meeting is over.

Later, the same group, led by Eric Cartman, is at the local movie theater. Cartman is again dressed in his Nazi uniform with black hair. At a podium that is decorated with a large, silver eagle, he stands in front of two red flags with white circles in the middle of them. Cartman states that, as their numbers have now grown, it is time for them to change the world, first by marching in unwavering support of the film. The audience agrees,

likening their march to a parade. Encouraged by their reaction, Cartman argues that they should also voice their support for the film. He provides them with a line to say, “Wir müssen die Juden ausrotten.” whenever he says “Es ist Zeit für Säuberung” (Parker, 2004). The crowd believes these to be a form of Aramaic, as was seen in the film. In reality, these are German phrases, the first being “We must exterminate the Jews.” and the latter being “It is the time for a cleansing.” The group begins to march through the streets gleefully chanting, unaware of the true meaning of the words they are saying.

When the local Jewish community comes upon them, a verbal dispute arises. Suddenly, Mel Gibson appears in South Park. Eric Cartman turns to him and pronounces that he has assembled the masses in order to do Mel’s bidding. However, Mel Gibson begins to act erratically, surprising his followers in the crowd. As his behavior becomes more and more outlandish, the people of South Park begin to realize that he is not the man they had thought. The crowd begins to disperse and Cartman turns to them, begging that they return as they are “so close to completing [his] final solution.” The episode ends as Kyle notes his appreciation of the Jewish religion and his own Jewish identity, which had come under question after seeing “The Passion of the Christ” (Parker, 2004).

This episode is the culmination of Eric Cartman’s obsession with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. After being exposed to the film, which depicts the passion of Jesus Christ, Cartman takes from it that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ. This feeds his already biased opinion regarding the Jewish people and is the catalyst to his actions. The humor of this episode can be related back to several events. First, the fact that Eric was able to easily convince many of the people of South Park about the value of this film, as well as to march through the streets chanting anti-Semitic phrases, is both improbable

and reflective of the Nazi propaganda machine of World War II. This serves as a reference to Adolf Hitler's ability to persuade others to follow him, relying heavily on his speaking prowess (Caplan, 2008). It is in this episode that mimicry of this ability is seen through Cartman's actions. Furthermore, this alludes to the mob mentality that can be seen in many other political arenas. That the crowd was so willing to follow Cartman and his every word presents the argument that the German people were merely doing the same. This relates directly to the absurdity of the people of South Park and their reaction to Eric Cartman, providing a humorous moment in the brief questioning of their actions, yet ultimate decision to follow Cartman's wishes none-the-less.

Additionally, the episode continually references the Nazi era and Nazi propaganda. Eric is giving speeches behind podiums that are decorated with Nazi colors, icons, and similar flags. These features are emphasized by their relationship to Cartman's actions throughout the episode, as well as his allusion to a final solution and train cars. The placement of a Nazi-centered frame into the present day frame of South Park, Colorado creates a disjuncture between the two. These statements are intended to make one consider the Nazi activities both as they were and how they maintain the potential to occur again. Making the perpetrator of these atrocities a child, rather than an adult also adds to the humor of the situation in that it alludes to the concept that adults would be more easily taken in by a child. Also, it places Cartman's intelligence above that of the people who, while adults, are more easily manipulated. Furthermore, this episode continues to place Cartman against his peers with regards to his actions. None of his friends join him in his activities and whereas the earlier episode, "Pinkeye," shows the adults turning away from him, this episode shows them joining his cause. This reversal of

roles further creates humor in its absurdity. The ability of *South Park* to create situations based on the plausible, yet that deviate into the absurd, is part of their play on humor and instances of joking.

South Park relies on creating humor that focuses on the absurd. By utilizing an elementary school child as the successor to Adolf Hitler, they are demonstrating the incongruity that comes with a lack of historical knowledge. Furthermore, they utilize generational divides in order to present multiple interpretations of the activities that occur in the episode. This is a reflection of the audience of the show as a whole and demonstrates that several, conflicting, reactions may come out of the episodes themselves. The choices made by the joke creators throughout *South Park* are also tools used to point out and critique American racial and political hypocrisy. Through the portrayals of the ignorance of the show's characters with regards to the Ku Klux Klan, The Passion of the Christ, and World War II facts, the show's creators are commenting on American society today.

Unlike *Family Guy*, *South Park* places their humor references to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party into their plot lines, although there are some exceptions to this in both shows. This action establishes the jokes as a major plot point for the show, adding to the audience's need to understand that which is occurring. If the audience is unable to perceive the jokes that are presented, their understanding of the plot as a whole will diminish, alienating them from the story line.

Hitler's Canoe

King of the Hill, unlike *Family Guy* and *South Park*, is much more firmly situated in reality. The show doesn't utilize the scene shifts or imaginative moments that are seen in the others, which provides it with more situational comedic performance. First airing on Fox in 1997, the show was created by Mike Judge and Greg Daniels (Booker, 2006). Hank Hill is the head of his family, upon which this cartoon is based. His wife Peggy, son Bobby, and niece Luanne live in their Arlen, Texas home. Hank is depicted as a rational man that works at a propane supply store (Booker, 2006). The two scenes that will be described here are reflections of the broader use of Nazi related humor in the series compared to the other prime-time cartoons that have already been discussed. Furthermore, the realistic situations are often directly related to the fact that Cotton Hill, the main character Hank Hill's father, is a veteran of World War II and continually references his experiences therein.

In the sixteenth episode of the fourth season, "Movin' On Up," Hank Hill's elderly neighbor Pops, unexpectedly dies. Later that evening Hank's niece, Luanne, comes home late and is frustrated when she is unable to use the shower because it would be breaking the rules. Luanne, reacting to the strict regulations that Hank puts on her, decides to rent Pops' old house. She finds three roommates, Griffin, Tanya, and Kate, who move in with her and share the expenses. However, Luanne quickly determines that she dislikes her new roommates because they are sloppy and selfish, taking all of her groceries, failing to do the dishes, and unwilling to pay the bills. When Luanne confronts

them with the utility bills, the others make excuses for why they can't pay them at that time. When they refuse to even listen to her, Luanne becomes even more upset, arguing that she signed "a document that said [she] would pay on time" (Hall, 2000). Griffin, seeing her reaction tells her that she is "being a house Nazi right now" (Hall, 2000). Shocked, Luanne turns to her other roommate Tanya and sees her lighting a cigarette. When Luanne asks her to stop, Tanya responds by saying "You know who else had anti-smoking laws? Uhh who was it? Ohh yeah, Hitler!" (Hall, 2000) This is followed by Griffin coughing the word "Nazi" at Luanne, who then leaves the room (Hall, 2000).

On another day, Hank, Peggy, and Bobby decide to visit Luanne at her house. As they are sitting waiting for Luanne to arrive, Tanya hears her approaching and states that Der Führer has arrived. When Luanne sees that the roommates are, again, breaking the rules of the house, she confronts them. This elicits a "Sieg Heil" response, Nazi salute, and goosestep around the room from Griffin. Peggy suggests that Hank speak with the German roommate, Griffin, in order to alleviate the tension, but he refuses. Instead, after seeing how upset Luanne is about the situation in her home, Peggy suggests Hank speak with her. Hank provides Luanne with advice on how she can deal with her roommates, urging her to find something she can do to escape the tension they cause. As the roommates become more and more ridiculous in their actions, Luanne gets more upset. Eventually though, she finds her ability to escape when she cleans the pool. This calms her and allows her to deal with her roommates rather than cause stress for herself. Hank applauds her actions and they sit down to enjoy an evening beer together.

As the show's credits roll, Hank's father Cotton, and his friend Topsy come to the house, still under the impression that it is Pops'. When Griffin opens the door, he tells

them that Pops died. Disbelieving the young man, Cotton urges Topsy to arrest him under the suspicion of murder. As Topsy reaches out for him, Griffin yells “Hey, get your hands off me you Nazi” (Hall, 2000). Cotton Hill becomes enraged at this and responds with “Who are you calling a Nazi?” (Hall, 2000) Topsy and Cotton Hill attack Griffin, immobilizing him in the house before they eventually leave. (Hall, 2000)

This episode has two sets of interactions that lead to the final, culminating argument between Griffin, Topsy, and Cotton. The insulting use of the monikers Hitler and Nazi, as they are directed at Luanne, are humorous to the audience in that they are phrases that are often stated in American discourse, despite their original context, and are now utilized as insults. However, when the same phrase is used to imply that Topsy’s actions towards Griffin were too controlling, the reference to the contemporary use of the phrase was lost on the men who had actually served during World War II. Topsy and Cotton took offense to the names, whereas Luanne saw them as continuations of the poor behavior the other roommates had already expressed to her as well as a display of the lack of respect they had for her and her property. By demonstrating the perception differences in the generations, *King of the Hill* is alluding to the ongoing arguments about when it is and is not appropriate to use these names in such a manner. The main point of humor here is in the distinction between Griffin and Tanya’s reactions to the word ‘Nazi’ as opposed to Cotton’s and Topsy’s. Whereas one group finds its use descriptive, the other finds it insulting. This mimics the reality of today’s usage of these terms and their perceived shift in meaning. Furthermore, it is a reflection of a failed attempt at humor while using that humor as a joke itself. Essentially, for Griffin, the insult is an attempt at joke-making, however, for Cotton and Topsy, the joke is not successful because of its

reference to their own experiences. For the broader audience watching the show, the failure of this joke is a joke unto itself, relying on the misinterpretation and double meaning of the word Nazi in contemporary discourse.

The interactions seen here are representations of the perception differences between people of a different age in relationship to the portrayals of Hitler and Nazism. The expectations of the younger generation with regards to how their statements will be received do not follow the reception of the older generation. This mimics the humor seen in the failure of two frames to coexist. The conflict of the frames is seen within the conflict of the generations.

The second episode discussed here, in which Cotton again plays a large role, is “Unfortunate Son” from season six, episode eleven. In this show, Cotton’s local veteran’s group is having difficulty paying their bills and has decided to host a yard sale. As Cotton stands before a table of war memorabilia, including “an authentic Nazi skull” which he argues will thrill the ladies, he sees a young man looking at a canoe nearby (Lioi, 2002). The man offers to buy the canoe for \$100 dollars, which Cotton argues is too little. Cotton claims that the canoe is not just any canoe, but Hitler’s. When the buyer admits that he is just looking to buy it for a camping trip, and it will cost him money to paint over the swastika that is on the side, Cotton becomes incredulous. Arguing that the canoe is a war trophy, he refuses to sell it. When the patron turns to leave, Cotton gives in, selling him the canoe.

Cotton and Hank begin to carry the canoe to the buyer’s car, but when Cotton sees that the car is a Mitsubishi, he becomes enraged, arguing that Mitsubishi made the planes

that bombed Pearl Harbor and he can't sell Hitler's canoe to a traitor. Angered by the buyer, Cotton tells him he doesn't deserve the canoe and throws the money back at him. When Hank urges his father to calm down, Cotton becomes more enraged, arguing that he is a war hero who killed 50 men. When he picks up a gun the buyer affrightedly leaves without the canoe. Bolstered by his success, Cotton yells to all the patrons at the sale "if you drive a Nazi car or an Italian scooter, get your Axis lovin' ass out of here." (Lioi, 2002) several people leave, upset at Cotton's behavior.

Due to the failure of their yard sale, the members of the VFW are kicked out of their facility for inability to pay. Hank, upset at the treatment these veterans have received invites them over to his house in order to continue their VFW there. Peggy finds that the men are rude to her and disrespectful of her house, however, she begins to care for the elderly men as though they were her children. After some urging, Hank successfully gets the VFW members to sit down and discuss possibly allowing the Vietnam veterans to join the VFW. Despite tension between the groups, they both agree to sit down and discuss the possibility. However, at a barbeque, the World War II veterans glorify their war experience while the Vietnam veterans are trying to recover from the horrors of theirs. The high tensions boil over and a fight between the men ensues. Hank and Cotton are forced into the woods in order to escape. After a long flight, they are cornered by the Vietnam veterans. Cotton is impressed by their military abilities and finally agrees to allow them into the VFW, securing its continued existence in Arlen (Lioi, 2002).

This episode again points to the generational differences of the groups of Americans represented, however, it centers this discussion on the experiences each had in

their respective wars, World War II and Vietnam. What is necessary to note is the materialism related to Cotton's experience in the war. That he held onto the Nazi skull and Hitler's canoe shows the value he placed on them. However, his willingness to sell the items also demonstrates how that value has shifted in the present. That he advertises the objects as directly related to Nazism and Hitler is his way of perceiving how others would also value the goods. When they fail to sell based on these merits, he becomes upset. The objects, he argues, are worth more because of their association with World War II.

The scene is humorous because the audience is led to believe that these objects are not authentic. That the canoe is emblazoned with a swastika may prove that it was a Nazi object, but to argue that it is specifically Hitler's causes the audience to question the claims Cotton makes. In particular, the relative ease with which he does sell the canoe further leads the audience to question the authenticity of his statements. Furthermore, the fact that he believes the Nazi skull will sell simply because it is a Nazi skull adds to the humor of the situation. These instances also demonstrate the differences between Cotton Hill and the intended demographic of *King of the Hill*, who would perceive the situation as less likely than Cotton does with his interpretation of the events surrounding his participation in World War II. These combine to create humor upon which the interactions of the characters of different generations rely.

King of the Hill situates its humor directly in reality. Utilizing contemporary conceptions of, and understandings, of World War II, they create humor in less absurd ways than *Family Guy* and *South Park*. This reflects the type of joking seen in American face-to-face discourse and becomes more relatable to the show's audience. However, the

competing frames of reality and cartoon fiction are still present, situating the show in prime-time cartoons and successfully establishing the humor in its context.

Family Guy, *South Park*, and *King of the Hill* utilize the genre of prime-time cartoons in order to depict humor. Reliant upon their own method of interpretation and presentation, the means through which each represent Hitler and Nazism vary, yet they all obtain the same ends, that of humor. The jokes discussed here present a mediated form of humor and in doing so, they serve to inform public perception of acceptable humor. While this occurs, the jokes themselves are irrevocably drawn to the genre in which they were created and displayed. The individual jokes can be decontextualized and recontextualized in many ways, but any reiteration of them will always refer to their original context (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). This both limits the jokes and allows them to be maintained through time. If someone were to attempt these jokes without the support of the prime-time cartoon genre, the jokes may not succeed in the same way. This is directly related to the abilities that this genre imparts upon all jokes derived from it. *Family Guy*, *South Park*, and *King of the Hill* are examples of the representational abilities of prime-time cartoon media, demonstrating its ability to expand beyond the realistic in order to create a joke.

Chapter 3: Springtime for Hitler and Germany

The Producers (1968) is a film directed and written by Mel Brooks. In 2005 he went on to co-author and produce a remake of the film, also entitled *The Producers (2005)* which was based off of a 2001 Broadway musical adaptation of the original film. Here, I will examine the ways in which both films depicted Hitler and Nazism. While not specifically analyzing the play itself as primary data, it is referenced with regards to the genre changes that occur between the two films. I will be expressly looking at the changes that were made between the 1968 version and the 2005 version as I believe it will demonstrate the changes of perception and representation of humor related to Hitler and the Nazi party. First though, I will begin by discussing the overall plot of the movies. This will then be followed by a discussion of the specific changes, related to Nazism and Hitler, which occurred in the films over time.

The basic plots of the two films are the same. Taking place in the late 1960s, Max Bialystock is a Broadway producer who has recently produced several major flops. When his new accountant, Leopold Bloom, comes in to do the books on his last play, he finds a slight discrepancy. Bialystock convinces him to hide the oversight. After Bloom agrees, he notes that a person could potentially make more money with a flop than a hit because the IRS wouldn't look into the accounts of a flop. This statement strikes Bialystock and he comes up with a plan to make a lot of money on a sure-fired flop. He tries to convince Leopold Bloom to join him, but he is hesitant. Eventually, Bloom realizes that this is his chance to become the Broadway producer of his dreams and agrees.

The two men begin to shift through the plays that have been submitted to Bialystock. Suddenly, they come across a particular play entitled “Springtime for Hitler.” They decide that this play is so offensive, it will not even run a full week before it closes. The two men go to meet with the playwright, Franz Liebkind. Liebkind is an eccentric, German Nazi who is infatuated with Hitler. Despite his excitement over the play being produced, he won’t agree until Bialystock and Bloom prove their conviction and dedication to Hitler and the Nazi movement. After they prove this, he willingly agrees to have his play produced by the men.

Bialystock and Bloom begin to work on finding backers for their play. To do so, Bialystock goes out and seduces the elderly women of New York, taking their disposable cash in exchange for large percentages of the play. After raising the full amount necessary, they have sold around 25,000% of the play to financial backers. The next step for the men is to hire an incompetent director. Bialystock suggests Roger De Bris. De Bris is excited about the play and notes that it has many historical goodies that they can utilize, like the fact that the Third Reich was another term for Nazi Germany. He suggests incorporating a female storm trooper kick line and taking out the third act of the play since it shows Germany losing the war and this is too sad.

Next, the producers audition potential actors to play Hitler, eventually choosing the one they think will be the least well-received. It is here that a major change between the movies occurs which will be elaborated on later. Eventually, opening night comes up. The play begins with the song “Springtime for Hitler.” Performed by men and women in Nazi uniforms, the audience is taken aback and several members begin to leave. Thrilled with the successful failure of their play Bialystock and Bloom also leave the theater.

When the actor portraying Hitler first appears on the stage, he is ill received. As the play progresses though, he is the recipient of hesitant laughter that eventually becomes more raucous. The audience now believes that with the casting of this particular Hitler, the play is meant to be a comedy. Laughter continues throughout the play and eventually Bialystock and Bloom learn that their intended failure is actually a success.

Fearful that they will be discovered and have to pay their financial backers their percentage of the profits, the producers return to their office, each trying to gather the materials they need to flee IRS persecution. When Liebkind comes in, he is visibly upset about the reaction to and representation of his play and attempts, unsuccessfully, to kill Bialystock and Bloom. Eventually, the financial missteps of Bialystock and Bloom are discovered and the men are thrown in jail, along with Liebkind. While there, they create a new play called “Prisoners of Love” and continue to oversell the rights to the play, eventually raking in a large sum of money for themselves (Brooks, 1968; Stroman, 2005).

There are three distinct areas of the two films where the most drastic changes occur. In the original version, when Bialystock and Bloom go to meet the playwright Franz Liebkind for the first time, he is on his apartment roof with a flock of pigeons. Leo Bloom points out that Liebkind is wearing a German military helmet. Fearful that they might lose the play, Bialystock urges Bloom not to offend the man. When they first approach him, Franz frantically turns and says “I was never a member of the Nazi party. I’m not responsible. I only followed orders.” (Brooks, 1968) He goes on to place his hand on his heart and sing *America, the Beautiful*. Bialystock tells him to relax, that they aren’t government officials and are here about his play. Excited that they want to produce it, he turns to his birds and proclaims that they are finally going to clear the Führer’s name. He

begins to sing the German National anthem saying “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles. Über alles im der Welt” (Brooks, 1968). This anthem is received reluctantly by Bloom, who reminds them that others nearby may be able to hear what he is saying. In an attempt to cover up his actions, Liebkind begins to sing *Yankee Doodle* and invites the men into his house.

Once in his house, the men strike up their conversation again. With a picture of Adolf Hitler hanging on the back wall, Liebkind tells them that Hitler was a terrific dancer. He argues that the United States was taken in by Allied propaganda and told lies. Liebkind explains that Winston Churchill was a rotten person, yet everyone loved him. He notes Hitler’s painting ability, stating that he could “paint an entire apartment in one afternoon” (Brooks, 1968). As he continues to explain why Adolf Hitler was a better person than Winston Churchill, Bialystock urges him to allow them to make the play so they can “show the world the true Hitler.” Liebkind agrees and Bialystock and Bloom are shown leaving the building with Nazi arm bands on, which they promptly dispose of in the trash can (Brooks, 1968).

While the newer version of the film has a similar scene, there are some slight differences. The scene opens with Franz shown speaking to his pigeons while wearing lederhosen, a black and white striped shirt, and a German military helmet. He picks out a pigeon and tells it to deliver a letter to Ernst Schlangdorf in Argentina after which Bialystock and Bloom emerge on the roof. Bialystock urges Bloom to refrain from saying anything that would prevent them from getting the play. When confronted, as with the original film, Liebkind quickly states that he was never “a member of the Nazi party. [He] only followed orders. [He] had nothing to do with the war” (Storman, 2005). He

argues that he lived right across from Switzerland, and all they did was yodel. He finally confronts Bialystock and Bloom, asking what they want. When they reveal their desire to produce his play, he is overcome with joy. He turns to the pigeons and tells them that they are going to clear Hitler's name. One particular bird, named Adolf, who is white, mimics the "Sieg Heil" salute with his wing upon hearing this.

Liebkind again argues that Hitler was a great man and much better than Winston Churchill. When Bialystock urges him to sign the contract for the play, Liebkind rejects it, stating that they must prove that they believe what he believes about Hitler. To do so, they must perform "Der Guten Tag Hop Clop," Hitler's favorite song. Hesitant, but desirous of the rights to the play, they eventually consent. As they dance, Bialystock claims that it is some sort of Nazi hoedown. Satisfied by their performance, Liebkind agrees to allow them to produce the play. However, he says they must first take the Siegfried Oath. Again hesitant, the two men eventually agree to take the Siegfried Oath. They don swastika arm bands and swear that they will not dishonor the spirit and memory of Adolf Elizabeth Hitler. As they say the oath, they mockingly raise their middle fingers when Liebkind is not looking. Afterwards Franz signs the contracts, allowing the play to be made and warns the men that if they break the Siegfried Oath, the consequence is death. Bialystock and Bloom confirm their understanding, but leave quickly (Storman, 2005).

A source of some of the differences between the two scenes described here is the change in genre represented by the two films. While the earlier version was a feature-length comedy, the 2005 film was a musical comedy. The latter genre relies on music to further and enhance the plot of the film, whereas the earlier film relies on spoken

discourse. As was noted earlier, the genre is the means through which representation occurs and as such, it dictates the rules that govern that representation. For the audience, the shift to music is a physical manifestation of a frame shift, demonstrating the movement from that which must be spoken and that which is able to be sung. This change also places emphasis on the song lyrics over the spoken words. By pairing the producer's verbal affirmations of their alliance to the Nazi Party with their physical and vocal performance during the musical number, the director effectively places more emphasis on this moment in time. While Bialystock and Bloom react with hesitance, they are involved, not only verbally, but physically with the pro-Nazi request presented to them by Liebkind. This added dimension of physicality demonstrates to the film's audience that the two men are not only verbally invested, but also corporally invested in the play and its positive propagation of Nazi ideology. This is further confirmed by Liebkind's statement that, if Bialystock and Bloom were to break the Siegfried Oath, they would be punished with death.

In both films, two opposing frames are created which help to create the humor seen in the situation. Both scenes take place on a New York rooftop, yet they involve a German Nazi. By placing the characters in an American environment while alluding to the continued presence of Nazi party members and supporters, the film makers are establishing competing frames of reference which cause tension. This tension is palpable to even the characters, as is demonstrated by Bialystock's warnings to Liebkind that others may be able to hear them. Bialystock is aware that the things they are saying are not appropriate for the environment in which they are being said, yet he must obtain the rights to the play, which causes him to ignore this problem. The competing frames of

Nazi Germany and post-war America, as well as Bialystock and Bloom's own frames of morally correct actions and the need for the play rights compete in these scenes, which causes the tension of the frames that produce the humor of the situation.

It can be further argued that the first film's emphasis lies in demonstrating Franz as a Nazi through his desire to write the play, his paranoid rejection of accusations of Nazism, and his overt display of Adolf Hitler's photograph. However, this scene focuses more on Franz's clear dislike of Winston Churchill. While this is mentioned in the newer film, the bulk of the scene relates directly to Bialystock and Bloom's efforts to convince Liebkind of their belief in the Nazi movement through the dance performance and Siegfried Oath. The outlandish display of both these events serves to promote the humor of the situation that Bialystock and Bloom find themselves in, enhancing the idea that they will do anything in order for their play to be a flop. Again, the role of the audience in these humorous moments is vital. Much of the humor is derived from subtle representations that may or may not be perceived by the audience, such as Bialystock and Bloom raising their middle fingers while taking the Siegfried Oath, however, when they are perceived, the joke is successful.

Another notable change between the films is the choice of actor to play Hitler in the play. In the first film, the stage is overcome by men dressed as Hitler and sporting small moustaches, raising their arms in the "Sieg Heil" salute, saying "Hiel Hitler." Others are shown dancing and goose-stepping. The director comes on the stage and separates the dancing Hitlers from the singing Hitlers. Eventually, Bialystock and Bloom, with the director, reject all of the actors who come in with training and experience. Instead, they decide to hire a beatnik named LSD who comes onto the stage after having

gotten lost. He is wearing a Campbell's soup can around his neck and performs a song called "Love Power" with three backup singers. Bialystock and Bloom see this peace-promoting beatnik as an opportunity to cast someone who is unbelievable as Hitler in the role (Brooks, 1968).

In the new version, the auditions go as they do in the old. However, as Franz Liebkind sits in the audience watching the process, he becomes upset with the performances and runs onto the stage in order to show one actor how he should really perform the song "Haben Sie gehört dass Deutsche Band." As he performs the song, Bialystock decides that he is the perfect person to play Hitler and casts him on the spot. By casting a Nazi as the Nazi leader, Bialystock believes they can do nothing but fail with this play. However, on the night of the play, Liebkind accidentally breaks a leg. This causes him to have to pull out from acting as Hitler. Instead, the director, Roger De Bris steps in. De Bris is a flamboyant character who portrays Hitler as similarly flamboyant. The juxtaposition of Hitler's perceived persona with the feminized performance results in a different version of the play than Bialystock, Bloom, and Liebkind had anticipated (Storman, 2005).

The slight plot shift that takes place during this scene demonstrates the public and writer's changing attitudes towards, not only Hitler, but also beatniks and the gay community. In 2005, the beatnik persona did not have the popular culture reference that it did in 1968. The perception of change had to have been noted by the film's writers, who adapted this plot point in the new film, but the change as a whole is also a reflection of the public's attitude towards the two groups. This demonstrates the cooperative aspects of humor in that both the audience and the joke creator have to understand the value placed

on both beatniks and gay people. Without similar perceptions of these two groups, the joke creators and audience may perceive the joke differently, or fail to understand it as a whole. This would result in a failed joke, where either one or both of the parties have been unsuccessful at creating or receiving the joke.

Additionally, despite the casting difference, another change occurs in that the casting of a gay man in the role of Hitler was accidental, whereas the concept of having a real Nazi play the part was intentional. The humor of the choice in actor arises in the distinctions created between the real Hitler and the actual personalities of actors portraying him. This is seen in greater detail during the performance of the play, where both the beatnik Hitler and the gay Hitler elicit multitudes of laughter from the audience, who originally believed the play was meant to be situated in reality. The juxtaposition of the reality of Hitler and the façade of the contemporary beatnik and gay man serve as the start of a joke for the play's audience as well as the films' viewers.

Finally, the play itself is portrayed in strikingly different ways in the two films. Both films feature the song "Springtime for Hitler" and Nazi imagery, such as uniforms and swastikas. They both also have women dressed in showgirl outfits devoted to German icons, such as the silver German eagle, pretzels, and beer. The song itself features dancers incorporating both the Nazi salute and the goosestep into their choreography and utilizes a storm trooper as the lead singer (Brooks, 1968; Storman, 2005). However, in the newer film, once Hitler is introduced, he begins a new version of the song, singing "Hiel Myself" in an effeminate voice (Storman, 2005). In the original film, Hitler is shown being pestered by Eva Braun for not paying her enough attention. When the character of Hitler argues that he took an oath that Germany was above all else,

he meant it, yet LSD, the beatnik actor, performs Hitler as a dumb, incapable oaf of a man (Brooks, 1968). This makes the audience laugh at the inabilities of Hitler himself, not merely the actor playing Hitler. By depicting Hitler as such, LSD is emphasizing Hitler's shortcomings as a leader.

The newer film relies on the feminized version of Hitler to create situations where Hitler's character is seen as ridiculous whereas the older version relies on the actor and his interactions with others to display his idiocy (Brooks, 1968; Storman, 2005). But the humor of these scenes doesn't just rely on the actors. For the outside viewer, the humor is also derived from the subject matter and imagery of the play. The use of iconic imagery related to the Nazi era combined with the gleeful statements regarding Germany's rise in power as it is sung by the performers, provides a distinct image of this supposed life in the Nazi regime. The addition of Hitler serves to further alienate the play from the actual truth of the Nazi era, which causes additional humor and allows for more joking to occur. Through the use of overt reference to the Third Reich, while separating their use into the frame of a play within a film, the directors are able to establish a multi-layered system on which to build their humor and jokes.

The Producers relies on racial camp in order to create humor. Reliant upon making a mockery of the grand nature of the Third Reich, they utilize Germany's own methodology of grand gestures to establish humor (Gubar, 2006). The play itself is a statement about the history of the Third Reich as well as the consumerism of American theater and, in particular, Bialystock and Bloom. While the original film received complaints from those who thought it was too tasteless, the remake did not cause so many problems. The discrepancy between the reception of the two films is directly related to

the years in which they were released. The 1968 version was much closer to the end of the war, in 1945, and was made on a scale that had not been seen in the television humor productions of the past (Gubar, 2006). Whereas, the 2005 version followed not only the earlier film and Broadway play, but also many other television and film productions, including those of the prime-time cartoon genre noted previously, which resulted in a desensitization of the media towards imagery that may have been deemed tasteless in the past.

Despite the differences in their dates of creation, both films served to elaborate on the pre-existing humor related to Nazism and Adolf Hitler, while also establishing new frames of reference upon which future works could build. Although many factors dictated the changes that occurred between the films, one of the most important is the change of genre. Genres themselves are not static, they continually change based on their contact with aspects of the environment into which they are brought. Both of these works were created in a specific time, under specific circumstances and the form they take is directly related to the conditions in which they emerged (Morris, 1994). Not only is the later film referencing the first film, it also references the Broadway play. Even if it were attempting to deviate completely from both earlier reiterations of the plot, it would be incapable of doing so. The existence of the previous works would always impact the emergent piece because the environment, into which it enters upon its creation, has been affected by the previous works. This concept relates directly to the propagation of humor through mass mediation.

Mass media places these instances of humor into the environment. Their existence then relates directly to all the other elements of the environment from which genres are

derived and created. Such relationships help shape change in genres. By distinguishing between the musical comedy genre of the 2005 film and the comedy genre of the 1968 film, the audience establishes different expectations of the films. While they would expect musical numbers in the 2005 version, they would be less anticipated in the 1968 film. This also provides the audience with additional knowledge that would be necessary to understanding the frames that are used in the films, which is essential for their understanding of the humor used and individual jokes created in the films.

The humor of this film is derived not from just the jokes presented, but also from the situation established by the plot itself. While there are variations in the two films, that is a reflection of the nature of mass media and its continuous contact with genre changes and references. Neither film can exist as an entity unconnected to the rest of the world. As such, both films are able to create jokes and humor that are perceivable and interpretable by their audience. Relating directly to the argument established earlier, the audience is a necessary aspect of humor and without their understanding of the jokes presented; the joke fails and is incapable of eliciting the response of humor intended by the joke-creator. Moving away from media that is mass produced for the public, I will now move onto a form of media that is created and distributed on the internet, by members of the public, unaffiliated with film and television studios and networks, and discuss how the internet meme utilizes Hitler and Nazism as a means of eliciting humor.

Chapter 4: Hitler finds out

In 2004 the film “*Der Untergang*” (*Downfall*) was released (Hirschbiegel, 2004). The film depicted the last days of World War II in the underground Nazi bunker in Berlin. Based off of historical accounts of the last days of the war in 1945 as well as the diary of one of Hitler’s personal secretaries, it was the first German film to depict Hitler which utilized an actor’s portrayal. Up till that point the use of Hitler’s image in German film was relegated to documentary footage. The film was well received around the world and critically acclaimed, earning a 2005 Academy Award Nomination for best foreign language film (Heffernan, 2008). However, in 2006, one particular clip took on a new meaning. A YouTube user posted a video clip of the film that was roughly four minutes in length and re-captioned it to change the interpretation of the German language used in the scene (Dubs, 2009). From this, a slew of other clips stemmed all featuring changes in the captioning that brought new meaning to the scene but still relied heavily on the imagery that the film brought to it originally.

The original scene that was adapted depicts Hitler when he is told that his reinforcements are not able to make it to Berlin to prevent a Soviet siege on the city. Hitler, upset at this turn of events, attempts to reason with his advisors as to how they will still be able to successfully win the war. When he slowly begins to realize what the failure of his backup means for the Third Reich, he starts to express his full anger at the situation. Hitler is frustrated that his direct order was disobeyed and feels betrayed by his own military. As the other bunker occupants stand outside of the room, listening to Hitler’s rage against the superior officers, they begin to become fearful of the situation. The scene cuts back to Hitler as he yells at his advisers, calling the German generals the

scum of the German people. Hitler blames the military for hindering his plans and argues that he should have liquidated them like Stalin did. He touts his successes to date and argues that those who have not followed his orders are betraying him as well as the German people. As he calms himself down, he states that because his orders are no longer being followed, he is no longer able to lead. He says that it is over, and the war is lost. However, he will not leave Berlin, stating that he would rather commit suicide than leave. As Hitler exits the room, his advisors question whether he would actually kill himself. He pauses in front of his secretaries Frau Junge and Frau Christian, urging them to take a plane out of Berlin as “everything is lost” (Hirschbiegel, 2004). The women refuse and state that they are going to stay in the bunker, demonstrating their solidarity with Hitler (Hirschbiegel, 2004).

This somber scene features extreme displays of emotion, ranging from anger, to submission, to fear. In the original redubbed version, instead of Hitler being angry about the war, he is instead angry at the lack of features on the demonstration of Microsoft’s *Flight Simulator X*. Originally posted on August 10th, 2006 by a YouTube user, the dub was done in Spanish. On August 30th, 2006, another re-dub of it was posted by the same user in English. The clip was called “Sim Heil: Der untersim.” Unfortunately, due to a copyright claim by the original film studio, the clip was removed from the internet on December 26, 2009 (Dubs, 2009). However, this clip started a wave of new dubbings, now called the “Hitler Finds Out” or “Hitler Reacts” meme, which continues to depict Hitler getting angry at different situations. Many of the videos posted on the internet have received millions of views and the topics range from political issues, to anger at the outcome of certain sporting events, to Hitler ranting about how the term “Hitler” has

taken on a different cultural meaning, which was a concept discussed earlier in relation to the *King of the Hill* episode and Cotton Hill's interaction with Luanne's roommate Griffin. Here, I will discuss a few of these clips in order to demonstrate the nature of the clips and then discuss why they are successful in their attempts at humor and continue to be created and posted onto the internet.

Despite the attempts at humor, some people have found these videos to be in poor taste. Martin Moszkowics, the head of film and TV at Constantin Films, who created the original movie, had been trying to get the videos removed for years before they requested that the clips be removed under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Moszkowics claimed that the tastefulness of the clips was no longer under control and that all of them should be taken down to maintain the copyright of the original film. Others such as Abraham Foxman, of the Anti-Defamation League, agreed and said that the clips were trivializing the Holocaust and World War II by creating a cartoon out of Hitler. (Dubs, 2009) Yet, this is not the opinion held by those people who took part in the creation of the original film. The director, Oliver Hirschbiegel said that he finds them funny and that the re-dubbing is a compliment to his work. (Dubs, 2009) However, despite questions regarding the clips' copyright claims, internet users have not stopped uploading new videos to video sharing websites like YouTube.

One such recent clip was uploaded on March 19, 2012 and within a month had already received 11,759 views. This clip demonstrates the anger that Hitler feels about Tim Tebow being replaced by Peyton Manning on the Denver Broncos NFL football team. The clip's creator utilizes arguments that are both for and against the trade, mimicking Hitler's own discussion with his advisors who attempt to subdue his anger.

Eventually, Hitler succumbs to the inevitability of the trade and begins to consider his options regarding what new team to watch now that Tebow isn't playing (Eriksonvision, 2012).

This particular re-dubbing is aimed specifically at people who are football fans and can understand the references made throughout. Without that specific audience, aspects of the jokes may be lost, causing a failure of the humor as a whole. Additionally, the viewers are required to have some knowledge about World War II and the persona of Hitler or else much of the humor would be lost. This is true of all the "Hitler Reacts" clips online. The humor comes into play through the juxtaposition of the reality of Hitler's life at the end of World War II with the trivial nature of the issue presented in the re-dubbing. Here, the comparison between the end of a war and the trade of Tim Tebow demonstrates just such a discrepancy between image and text.

The most popular "Hitler Reacts" meme that is still available on the internet is "Hitler gets banned from Xbox Live" (MOTURK49, 2007). This particular clip was uploaded on June 7, 2007 and has received roughly 6,876,000 views during that time. The re-dubbing explains the frustration Hitler feels over finding out that his Microsoft Live account has been terminated because it was set up on a modified console. He is told that a major sweep was conducted and his account has been permanently terminated. He has also lost his gamerscore and Microsoft points. His anger is coupled with his refusal to switch to the new Wii system and his resignation that there will be no more gaming for him (MOTURK49, 2007).

This clip again points to the need for the viewer to understand both the written references and the visual references. The argument can be made that the intended audience for this particular clip is one that would be able to navigate the internet to find it, possibly explaining the large number of views it has received in the six years of its existence. The resulting anger that Hitler feels regarding the takedown of his account is not only stated in the words used to dub it, but is also reflected therein through the use of capital letters and exclamation points. The creator attempts to emphasize his feelings about the event through Hitler, adding text based imagery to mimic Hitler's emotions. This use of the text is a way in which the visual aspect of the clip and the written aspect are creating a relationship, enhancing the clip's coherence as a whole.

The genre utilized here is the most dependent upon the previous creations in regards to its own structure and development, of those discussed previously. Memes themselves are replicators that reside in the human brain. They reproduce on their own during their transmission between individual people (Aunger, 2002). Once instilled into someone's brain, memes interact with other ideas that are already there, adapting and growing more complex. Originally conceived of as biological term, memes have taken on new meanings, particularly with the advent of the internet (Aunger, 2002). In order for a meme to be a replicator, it must have a catalyst that sets off the replication. In the case of intent memes such as "Hitler finds out" the catalyst is the person who creates the item, be it video clip or photograph, that is placed on the internet. It is a meme because it relies on previous incarnations of the clip or photograph. In the case of the original, that would not be considered a meme, as it is not a replication, only those that come after and utilize the structure of the original would be considered memes (Aunger, 2002). The very first

“Hitler finds out” clip was not a meme, however, the second clip posted that used the same format of the first was.

In instances of memes, humor comes in because of the adaptation of the original. While there is a set format that all clips must follow, the changes made between the clips is the cause of the humor. For the audience, this helps to situate their expectations of what is to come. Because the audience is aware of the structure of the clip or photo they will be seeing, they have a pre-existing frame from which they expect deviation, in the “Hitler finds out” meme’s case, the deviation is in the text used and overall theme of the dubbing. As has been seen with many of the instances of humor depicted, the humor derives partially from the realistic historic portrayal of Hitler and the Nazi party compared to the unrealistic situation being presented. In the examples provided above, the unrealistic aspects of the clips are Hitler’s frustration over his XBOX Live account being cancelled and Tim Tebow being traded. Such instances are incongruous to the reality of Adolf Hitler’s situation during this clip, but it is just that disparity which creates the humor of the situation.

Internet memes provide a structure upon which humor can build. However, these memes are not guaranteed to be successful jokes. While the creator must follow the structure established by the other memes, they may not appropriately connect the original clip’s emotions with their redubbed text. Furthermore, they may repeat a topic that was executed earlier, or they may fail to mimic the original meme’s format properly. The failure of such a meme may also be on the part of the viewing audience. If the audience is unable to reference the joke being made, it may fail. Additionally, if they are unaware of the meme itself, they may take offence to the redubbing as a whole, and find the humor

inappropriate. Such instances of failed jokes may occur in this particular genre, as they would in the others discussed here.

The “Hitler finds out” meme has aided in establishing the Hitler and Nazi meme genre on the internet. It is part of the continued cycle of referencing that was discussed earlier, and demonstrates the impact of mass media on imagery and representation as it relates to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in American discourse. By understanding the structure of this meme and its attempts at humor, users can create more reiterations of it, perpetuating its existence on the internet as well as its impact on those references that come in the future.

Chapter 5: Hitler walks into a bar

Through the analysis of the works mentioned above, as well as the larger collected pieces of contemporary American mass media, I have determined that there are several themes that carry throughout the representations of Hitler and the Nazi Party through humor. Firstly, these jokes are situated in a manner that portrays both historical and fictional aspects of World War II era Germany. This serves as a tool with which expectations can be broken. By demonstrating the perceived role of Adolf Hitler, as well as the many other Nazi Party members, and then subjugating it through a change to a fictional depiction, the audience's expectations are changed, providing them with a surprising moment during which humor occurs.

Secondly, that these reference rely on reality, even if it is only fractional, to create the distinctions between what is and is not humor demonstrates the need for the audience to understand the basic reality of the situation. As referencing occurs throughout the humor discourse, all parties involved must have some pre-constructed frame upon which this reference depends, and can easily be called forth in order to analyze the given situations. This relates directly to the role of the audience and their interpretation of the humor in order to obtain success. Furthermore, the role of the audience in the creation and reception of a joke is equally as necessary as the role of the joke creator. This mutual relationship serves to both create and disseminate humor.

Additionally, the shift to user-generated humor, which is seen in the re-dubbed *Downfall* clips, demonstrates the participatory nature of American humor. It may also reflect the changing emphasis towards publically created, rather than privately dictated,

humor that is shared with a given audience. These nuances about humor operate under a system in which humor itself is a commodity. Bought and sold, it serves as a tool of trade. In order for the trade in humor to continue, it must be successful in joke making and adapt to the needs of the audience. This constant adaptation helps to point out trends which are occurring overtime. That the subjects of Hitler and Nazism have continued to be utilized since World War II, demonstrates their adaptability as fashions in humor shift. This alludes to their anticipated presence in the future of humor.

When discussing the instances of humor related to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party, the genre in which it is depicted is an essential consideration when determining if a joke is successful or not. While the jokes can be decontextualized, they remain referential to their original genre and as such, reflect that genre's attempts at humor. Without understanding this, the goal of establishing a joke is not possible. A joke creator and a joke interpreter must be aware of the genre in which they are operating as well as what the rules of that genre are. Without such an understanding, the joke cannot be created, establishing its failure at the moment of impossible inception. However, since all genres reference that which has come before, the use of genre in joke telling is inseparable from the attempt to create a joke. The joke teller knows that they are telling a joke, which places it into the genre of humor at its basic form.

Finally, such references establish that humor is both derived from and aimed at the individual and the group. Benedict Anderson (1991) argues that community identity is derived from the mediation of visual and auditory representations. The examples presented here serve as confirmation that these jokes create a community of individuals that understand the humor presented and are able to comprehend that humor through its

genre and references. Bakhtin (1984) argues that by participating in and understanding humor, individuals become part of a collective as well as part of the world in which that joke operates. The singular person becomes a part of the collective by understanding a joke and relating it to the world as a whole (Bakhtin, 1984). However, jokes must also operate on the individual themselves. Without the individual's understanding of the joke, they are unable to join the collective group that does grasp it. Therefore, I argue that humor is a tiered system that first requires individual comprehension. Once that is obtained, the singular person becomes a member of a group that is created based on their understanding of the joke. These two steps occur nearly simultaneously, however are differentiated by the ability of the individual to understand. Whereas a joke creator may only be a single person, the audience of a joke is both the individual person and a group of joke recipients.

The references to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party that were discussed above are just a small number of the growing American mass media interpretations of the Third Reich. It is my hope that by demonstrating the theoretical value that the interpretation of these scenes provides, new analysis can be done which further situates these jokes in their larger role within American society. With additional resources, I would attempt to determine what the impact of these representations is on the consciousness of the American people as a whole. Has it affected their views of the Third Reich and Adolf Hitler? Or is it simply seen as a tool that is used to create humor and, therefore, enjoyment?

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