

An Examination of *The Colbert Report* Through the Lens of the Theory of Egalitarian Comedy:
What Happens When the Audience Laughs, But Comedy Fails?

Introduction

In the pilot episode of *The Colbert Report*, there is a moment at the beginning of the show when Stephen Colbert, acting as the conservative character of “Stephen Colbert,” says “today a show aired and...” he cheekily stares down the camera, “changed the world.” Colbert, albeit in a joking manner, is raising the question: Can comedy have a real effect on social order?

Comedy has a long history as a form of commentary that can subvert expectations and challenge social hierarchy. However, its function is even more complex. In *Only a Joke Can Save Us: A Theory of Comedy*, Todd McGowan theorizes the various purposes and effects of comedy. McGowan examines how egalitarian comedy places both the oppressors and the oppressed on an equal playing field. McGowan’s theory of egalitarian comedy suggests it can only function when the comedian criticizes self and social order. In egalitarian comedy, nothing can be kept ‘safe’—not the commentator nor the thing being commented on—or else the comedy reinforces the hierarchy. According to McGowan, *The Colbert Report* does not qualify as politically subversive or revolutionary comedy; the show does not create egalitarian comedy. Furthermore, the show ultimately reinforces the established hierarchy. An analysis of episodes of *The Colbert Report* that aired during the Bush administration illuminates several components for consideration: the role of the comedian and the comedian’s audience, the possible dire effects of parody, and the real impact a “bad” comedy or a failed egalitarian comedy can have on society.

Political and Media Context

George W. Bush came to the presidency with the rise of partisanship, something that was encouraged and mirrored by the media. The political communications of the time were changing to become more polarized, choosing what is most entertaining over more objective news

reporting. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen examined this in his article “Political Journalism in Transition,” in which he identifies the “accelerated news cycle” (181) as a significant change in the communication of politics to the public. He states that an increase in sources and the rise of *CNN* and the twenty-four hours news cycle have accelerated the speed with which news is released to the public, and he examines the pressure to employ sensationalism to generate a greater audience. In the article, Nielsen quotes Dean Starkman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who decried “the constant churning out ... of stories by a reduced number of reporters ... ever more dependent on their increasingly professional sources feeding the bottomless editorial and managerial demand for breaking news” (qtd. in Nielsen 178). This change did not just create more news networks that fall under the category of “infotainment,” it changed the way that the media and politics are regarded as a whole, resulting in a “softening” of news and of politics—a result of the increased desire for spectacle and entertainment.

This “softening” of politics shared a mutualistic relationship to the intensification of political partisanship. With the exception of the post-9/11 rally, Bush’s election and following administration was particularly polarizing (Skinner 619). The Bush presidency proved polarizing, and alongside it emerged a genre of television known as “infotainment,” defined as programs with equal interest in entertaining their audience as they are with delivering information. These shows function as arenas “where the dualism of entertainment and information is dissolved,” blending “entertainment media, such as narrative content or humorous punch-lines, and elements from information media, such as anchormen or the focus on purely political topics” (Otto et al. 144). In fact, *The Colbert Report* would not have been as successful if not for the political climate inspired by the Bush administration.

In *Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement*, Jefferey Jones notes that Colbert gained immense popularity when he performed at the White House

Correspondents' Dinner in 2006: "The liberal logosphere erupted in celebration of the event ... widely posting transcripts and videos of it,... it became a viral video sensation, while an audio became a top-selling hit on iTunes" (82). Following this success, he "became an immediate folk-hero amongst critics of the Bush administration. His program [also] saw a 37 percent increase in viewership" (Jones 83). Colbert and *The Colbert Report* not only exist because of the material provided by the Bush administration and the conservative media, but his popularity also grew thanks to the platform of that Correspondents Dinner, given to him by the administration itself.

Colbert's refusal to claim journalistic responsibility is well-documented. In an interview on *Meet the Press*, Colbert described his character on *The Colbert Report* as "an active idiot"(Lynch). This title is an attempt to unburden himself from the weight of factual integrity; however, one still questions whether or not a person with a platform as large as Colbert's can successfully set aside this responsibility to truth.

This analysis goes beyond qualifying comedy based on audience engagement, but rather takes into account the way that *The Colbert Report* can affect its audience beyond the level of inducing laughter. Does his television show operate to dismantle hierarchy and take away an unfair authority? Or, does it shout noise into an echo chamber, affecting none of those around him? Is there a possibility that *The Colbert Report*, in its effort to entertain, fails to truly inform?

The Power of Comedy

A primary concern for this analysis is the potential power of comedy. As a show within the genre of infotainment, *The Colbert Report* inspired conversations about the weight of comedic voices in the political realm. In "The Persuasive Force of Political Humor," Beth Innocenti and Elizabeth Miller explain how "Political humor is ubiquitous in some contexts and forbidden in others, indicating a belief that humor has a persuasive force and affects the

legitimacy of political institutions and political participation” (366). Looking at the reaction to political humor through history and modern times, we can see that it is indeed effective. In his theory of comedy, McGowan locates comedy’s power in its disruptive nature. He explains that comedy “feels subversive. It disrupts the flow of everyday life and often calls social authority into question. If comedy didn’t upset our usual way of thinking, it would fail to be funny” (161).

This is where *The Colbert Report* proved successful, and it also inspired shows on other networks to make the same endeavor, though not all shows proved successful. For example, Fox News produced a show, *The 1/2 Hour News Hour*, meant to be a Colbert Report for the right. It made jokes about “predictable targets such as environmentalists, Barack Obama (as a presidential candidate), gays and lesbians, atheists, civil rights campaigners, and anti-war activists ... in other words, people not in power” (Jones 87). *The 1/2 Hour News Hour* was canceled after a year, likely because unlike *The Colbert Report*’s, this show’s primary target was not the people in power, but the general public. The target was too general.

Stephen Colbert ridicules a specific type of person. Innocenti and Miller explain the specific power behind the style of comedy that is ridicule:

Ridiculing generally involves impugning others’ conduct and making them the butt of the joke, so it performs additional functions... it performs a ‘hierarchization’ function as it ‘reflects and reinforces a dynamic of status ascription within a given domain of social interaction’ (Cowan, 2005, para. 33) (369).

Ridicule is a form of comedy that is unique and must be examined because of its ability to frame power and those who hold it through “hierarchization.” Colbert performs this type of ridicule, and as such, he reinstates the notion of the right wing media and even the mainstream media as the authority. Therefore, Colbert’s ridicule succeeds, however, Innocenti and Miller explain that

ridicule reinforces a form of hierarchy, which disqualifies it from McGowan's understanding of egalitarian comedy.

Analyzing *The Colbert Report* Through Various Theoretical Perspectives

Most commonly, when analyzing Colbert and other comedy news parody shows, researchers and scholars examine these works through the postmodern lens. For example, Baudrillard's theory of simulation and representation is used by Sophia McClennen in *America According to Colbert: Satire as Public Pedagogy*, where she argues that "a key to Colbert's satire is his use of postmodern spectacle, where Colbert manipulates the reality of politics or the media in such a way that viewers question the very logic of representation itself" (McClennen 90). Colbert mocks and parodies the news by mirroring elements of the "real" news. However, because his show is meant to be laughed at, the audience questions to what degree 'real' news is any more legitimate than what he is creating. Although examining Colbert through the postmodern lens is fascinating, examining the implications and effects of this particular form of comedy in this way is uncommon. This is because comedy is often not perceived as a legitimate or serious form of communication, and it is easy for the audience to overlook whether or not comedy is egalitarian. *The Colbert Report* serves as an almost a perfect case study for a failed egalitarian comedy. A comedy that succeeds in the laughs it gets, but fails in the effect it seems to want.

McGowan's chapter, "Ideology and Equality," examines the way that comedy can function to put those who don't have the same degree of power onto an equal playing field, and also notes how this comedy commonly fails to reach the level of "egalitarian." McGowan explains how true egalitarian comedy must "reveal that social authority itself is not simply a discursive entity but necessarily lacking. It must show the social order and the subject at odds with themselves" (170). Meaning, effective comedy is an equal-opportunity offender; no one is

above reproach.

Priscilla Marie Meddaugh contextualized Colbert through the theory of the carnival, which uses historical examples of a time where jesters would mock those in power, highlighting an existing hierarchy and what it looks like when that hierarchy is inverted. In “Bakhtin, Colbert, and the Center of Discourse: Is There No ‘Truthiness’ in Humor?” Meddaugh argues that *The Colbert Report* serves as a contemporary version of the carnival, because it is a commentary on the hierarchies in which we exist and “provides a temporary suspension from officialdom, inviting audiences to observe and question the shortcomings of political life through parody and satire” (387). Meddaugh explains, “If O’Reilly is the king of cable ... then Colbert is the jester, using the moniker of ‘fake news’ to lampoon socially ordained arenas of power: government, religion, big business, and the media” (380). This desire to put Colbert into the theory of the carnival and draw conclusions on his effectiveness to authority is fairly consistent and common in scholarship and research surrounding Colbert, Jon Stewart, and other comedic political pundits.

However, this is an oversimplification of the context and the format of *The Colbert Report*. It is not correct to say that he is simply the jester that mocks the king. There is more nuance and complexity because Colbert’s comedy is parody and ridicule. His comedy arises from not simply mocking the king, but placing himself on the throne, and relegating the existing king to the role of court jester. It is what makes satire so complex and difficult to untangle from its reliance on the oppressor. This tactic is what keeps Colbert’s persona from being assigned a clear place within the hierarchy; he exists somewhere outside of the structure.

Existing on the “Outside”

Colbert and peers like Jon Stewart exist outside of the set rules of journalism because they are primarily comedians. They are anchors of infotainment, not “real” news. Both Colbert and

Stewart evade certain constraints "because they seem to occupy a place on the line between internal and external criticism.... By being seen as both insiders and outsiders, Stewart and Colbert can clearly do—and get away with—what journalists cannot" (Borden, Tew). This "chameleon" ability of these shows allows the shows to exist outside of a pre-existing establishment because they have the freedom to choose their responsibilities.

However, Colbert's freedoms go a bit further; he has the ability to hide within his persona. McClennen records Colbert's understanding of this reality, as expressed in his interview with *Rolling Stone*. Colbert explains, "I get to hide behind a character's face. And so I get away with a lot that maybe Jon wouldn't because they would judge Jon. And I have the layer. I have the protective mask" (99). Dan Schill writes in his research about Colbert and his fan base, "I think it's brilliant that you can get away with saying anything under the veil of agreement" (Schill 766). Colbert can never truly be tethered to whatever "Colbert" says.

Colbert does not have to follow rules of a genre, does not have to follow the rules of a journalist, and he remains free from facing the consequences for what his persona says. His unique take on comedy and television allows him to exist even outside of the common theories of comedy or the postmodern theory of simulation. There is an added layer that allows Colbert and those in the Colbert Nation to believe they are exempt from societal criticism because they exist outside of everything. In some ways, the audience and Colbert behave as if they elude any certain ideology. This can be understood through the manner in which *The Colbert Report* breaks the fourth wall. It serves as the perfect symbol to analyze how Colbert and his following think that they are self-aware and all-knowing, and as such, exempt from criticism, acknowledgment, and accountability.

The Meta- Commentary

The first episode of *The Colbert Report* can be used to closely read how he uses

meta-commentary in the show. Colbert breaks the fourth wall and ensures that his audience also knows that they are watching something artificial. He points out the structure of his stage, comments on lighting, and how his name is plastered all over the studio. He pans out and allows the audience to see the cameras filming him and tells the audience that he knows he's not in the real world, that he is in a studio. At one point in the first episode, he introduces his audience to his stage manager, "Folks this is Bobby, my stage manager over here" ("S1 E1 Stone Phillips"). In the scene, the camera cuts to Bobby, and the audience can see the teleprompter running behind him and the boom microphone above Colbert. Colbert is poking fun of the idea of television being taken as truth by showing his audience just how fake it all is. Showing his audience the artificiality lets everyone watching Colbert be "in on the joke." It is used as a tool to allow Colbert and his audience to exist outside of any criticism because they know better. Looking even further, it's not just that they know the show is fake, they are also all-knowing because they know that the other side, the side that is being mocked, is just a joke.

Satirization of Media Pundits, Patriotism, and Religious Obsession

Before dissecting what specifically Colbert is satirizing in his show, it is important to note the difference between parody and satire.

Kumar and Coombe dissect the functions and power of satire in "Political parody and satire as subversive speech in the global digital sphere," breaking down the guidelines that can be followed to understand the function of satire. One element is that satire is polemic, "a passionate argument against something and in favor of something else" (Kumar, Coombe). Another is that because satire is a self-aware form of comedy it can do more with genre, "satire can present imaginative vignettes, semi dramatic storylines, or even entire plotlines as a way to argue for a certain point of view through scenes, characters, and voices. Many segments of *The Colbert Report* operate in this way" (Kumar, Coombe).

Finally, and the most important element of satire when it comes to understanding Colbert, is the narrative persona. The person delivering the satire can change the entire argument the satire is making. There are many different kinds of persona's that have been taken on for satire, one is the parodic narrator which is the "self-damning narrator. Such a narrator will lead us down the primrose path of a specious point of view that turns out, in the end, to be disastrously stupid. Stephen Colbert's elaborate satiric persona functions mainly by this formula" (Kumar, Coombe).

It is important to lay out just how powerful satire can be, and how it serves as an argument run by the narrative persona delivering said satire. While parody functions as an imitation of something that is often exaggerated or changed slightly for comedy, satire takes on a role of its own using the medium that it is parodying to offer a commentary and argument about something that goes beyond the thing being mocked. This can be seen throughout *The Colbert Report* as he uses his satire not just to mock conservative media pundits or networks, but rather make a commentary on American media obsession, patriotism, and religion's role in our culture.

One element of the show that can be used as a catalyst to highlighting the themes of the show and the subjects Colbert satirizes are the opening titles. These opening titles play each episode, which constructs a ritualistic experience for his audience.

In this introduction, the continuous shots of Colbert, Colbert looking seriously at the camera from various angles, and Colbert waving an American flag showcase how Colbert is mocking the conservative media and the pundits of this media who are using their media platforms to serve their obsessions with themselves rather than serve the people.

He mocks the media pundits' tendency for self-obsession, mocking people like O'Reilly: "On the very first show, Colbert made a point of drawing his viewers' attention to the multiple times his name appears on the set: behind him, on the desk, on the floor" (McClennen 114). He

has a desk shaped as “C” for Colbert, as well as a massive oil painting of himself in the studio. However, the comedy fails because, despite the satirizing of all this, it doesn’t negate the fact that they are watching a show with all the things that are being criticized. Colbert himself reached levels of American icon status. The painting of Colbert was so famous that he was able to petition for it to be put in the Smithsonian for a while (McClennen). Colbert becomes the very thing he was satirizing through his acts. Through all of this, he has almost the reverse effect of a real egalitarian comedy. Instead of bringing down people like O’Reilly, the over-the-top exaggerated and beloved elements of the show ensure that Colbert (and the audience) don’t have to have a serious relationship with the content or the contents message of critique. Therefore, Colbert and subsequently his audience get to exist outside of their very own critique and ideology.

Colbert also satirizes patriotism throughout his show, satirizing obsession through the various flags in his show and the color scheme of red and blue that characterizes *The Colbert Report*. McClennen notes that:

If one of Colbert’s goals is to satirically and exaggeratedly equate himself with America so that he can comment on the problematic way that concept serves as the central tenet for all right-wing pundits and politicians, another major goal is to critique the United States, calling attention to practices that contrast its ideals (155).

His comedy is trying to parody the obsession of the US with patriotism, attempting to use his platform to play a character of the obsessive patriot, to point out flaws within that institution. However, once again, he relies on this culture to exist for him to parody it.

Finally is the critique of religious fervor, which Colbert enacts by portraying himself as deserving of the respect reserved for religious leaders. In the chapter “Faux Real and Faux Play” from *Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement*, Jeffrey Jones goes

through various aspects for *The Colbert Report*, bringing forward an interesting point about how Colbert creates a mock “Religious” relationship with his audience:

Colbert is not just commenting on this quite old reflex in American political culture, but instead critiquing the way in which cable talk show hosts have taken it one step further by crafting themselves as stand-in saviors a cult of personality built on this blend of victimization, patriotic worship of country, ideological and religious certainty, political fervency and the desperate desire for truth amidst confusing times. The show’s set design represents this worship of self, country, and God through its own creative blend of narcissistic iconography (188).

This is the most subtle because he does not approach religion in the same way that he approaches journalism and politics. However, it is the critique and the comedy that fail the most. The obsession, cult-like, religious following that Colbert seems to critique in his parody is what gives him such a huge following. The satire fails comedically because of the involvement of the audience, who seem genuinely to idolize Colbert. “They are “the adoring audience—those who could follow and obey. What has resulted... is that Colbert’s audiences have played along with gusto, assuming their role as an essential character on the show, becoming the worshipful followers that such a parody calls for” (Jones 189). A passionate fan base was an unintended and unexpected result. McClennen records Colbert’s admission that the Colbert Nation was something “we didn’t expect because we joked about the Colbert Nation and then we said, ‘Oh shit, it’s real.’” (156).

Colbert’s attempt to satirize these themes of narcissistic media, patriotism, and religion were all destined to fail. Colbert is not simply trying to create egalitarian comedy by putting him and the character of O’Reilly on an equal playing field. He attempts to equalize himself with the

systems of power that are media, patriotism, and religion. Furthermore, even though Colbert mocks these institutions, he depends on them for his comedy. For his character to remain relevant, the structures he criticizes must continue to thrive. He also fails to be an equal opportunity critic.

The Colbert Report's Impact

Therein lies the problem with Colbert's comedy: his audience remains under the illusion that they are not active participants in the systems that Colbert critiques. Through the show Colbert constructs a binary from which "complicated policies and beliefs are reduced to simplistic 'good' versus 'bad' dichotomies" (Boesel 28). The oversimplification of these ideas makes it excusable for his audience to understand the concepts of what is a "liberal" or "conservative" and what is a "Democrat" or "Republican" in only the most basic of terms.

Colbert's failure to allow for a realistic understanding of the systems he mocks causes him to reinforce the dynamic he finds fault with. His audience walks away not with an understanding of the terrible implications that such a black and white (or red and blue) binary has, but instead they are humored by the conservative media or whichever demographic Colbert critiques in the episode. There is no call to action or critique of the binary itself, instead, there is just a ridiculing of the other, without any sort of reflection of themselves or their own media's role in this creation of the binary.

Another negative implication of *The Colbert Report* is that the rhetoric often goes too far. McClennen writes about the possible dangers of Colbert's show: "It is 'a media spectacle that exposes the problems with media spectacles'" (174). Dan Schill also elaborates on this in "Understanding the 'Heroes' and 'It Getters': Fandom and the Colbert Nation," pointing out "the layers of irony, satire, parody, and farce mean that the audience is always receiving multiple, often conflicting, streams of information" (772). Since Colbert's audience is constantly receiving

these conflicting streams of information means that there is a lot of opportunity for oversimplification or just plain misunderstanding. Furthermore, there has been research and evidence that points out that *The Colbert Report* has gained a following and fan base of people that don't get his comedy because it "creates a cult icon personality, and since sometimes Colbert's vituperative examples of interlace and bigotry are so entertainingly delivered, they could actually reinforce right-wing rhetoric rather than reverse it" (McClennen 139). Colbert consistently creates rhetoric that does not adhere to rules of ethics. He puts out speech that can be offensive and hateful and he constantly flaunts the risk of anyone misunderstanding his parody and misinterpreting what he says for affirmation of their own biases.

Colbert did not get a new audience of people to get engaged with politics. In "Democracy Inaction?: How 'Fake News' Is Defining American Citizenship," Julie Kendall wrote about this phenomenon, explaining how shows like *The Colbert Report* "lampoon the media's passive treatment of citizens in relation to political decision-making," (74), however, they don't use their power or their media to offer any sort of alternative or encourage people to get involved in the system to work to change it: "They endeavor to delegitimize journalists' communicative authority, but they don't in turn attempt to legitimize the communicative power of the people" (74). There's merit to comedy that criticizes authority, but does it not fail when it doesn't actually have an affect on the authority or who holds the power? Referring back to Meddaugh's theory of the carnival, just because people are laughing at the king doesn't impact his ability to remain the king. Comedy serves as a true communicative tool when that comedy functions to spur action of those who are listening. This can only be done through an egalitarian comedy, one that looks fairly at their role in the social order as well as the social order itself.

There can be no clear evaluation of the impact of *The Colbert Report* because there is no widespread way that everyone viewed this show. The ways people took in the information of this

program varied from person to person. Colbert's show sometimes had the opposite effect of what it likely intended. Because it was such a popular show, all political figures would garner attention from being on his show, "Colbert Nation supports causes and candidates so frequently that Stephen Colbert has coined a term, 'the Colbert bump,' for the surge in popularity that follows a Colbert endorsement" (Schill 756). However, this "bump" didn't always happen to democratic candidates, the candidates that were arguably the ones most likely to share the same fan base as Colbert's. Republican candidates would come on the air, giving *The Colbert Report* attention because the audience would love to see Colbert make a fool of the candidates they didn't support. However, "The Colbert bump entered the mainstream in 2008 when Republican presidential candidates Mike Huckabee and Ron Paul saw their poll and fundraising numbers increase after appearances on the program" (Schill 756). Giving evidence that sometimes it's not enough to make someone laugh. How can we say *The Colbert Report* was an effective show that helped strengthen the left in a time where there was a conservative president and popular conservative media, when it's seemingly more important that Colbert and his audience get a quick laugh even at the expense of popularizing the people and the party that they laugh at?

Another problem arises from audiences that watch *The Colbert Report* as a source of news and moral affirmation. In the analysis of The Colbert Nation (Colbert's fan base/audience) those who answered the survey to say that they watch *The Colbert Report* as an alternative to the news argued that "Colbert often accomplished the goals of journalism" (Schill 768). The research continues to give a quotation from one of the fans cited in the research who said that they watch *The Colbert Report* "because there is such a deluge of punditry, an echo chamber can form and both shows can incisively cut to the heart of a subject. ... There seems to be an underlying earnestness, even a moral standard parallel to my own" (768). This notion, reflected from the interviewees' statements, is that *The Colbert Report* can function as an alternative source for

information and news because the audience believes him and see parallels between Colbert's morality and their own. *The Colbert Report* enforces the idea that figures in the media have to have specific earnestness and morality, something that can arguably only occur for the news if they reveal their partisan ideological leanings, because to a polarized public, to be moral means to be on their side.

The show "meets a social need by offering fans community, validation, and confidence that they are in the right" (Schill 771). It allows them to continue to exist, believing that they are not only informed, but morally righteous, for having the information and opinions they have. This kind of thinking was encouraged through Colbert's comedy because of the lack of inward and self reflection and criticism. As such, it allowed itself to play as a show that could serve as a news source for the public, because why would you turn anywhere else, when the show you are watching reinforces the idea that you are morally superior?

Conclusion

Through this analysis, it can be concluded that the comedy created on *The Colbert Report* did not have the effect or impact of dismantling or calling out the right wing media, or the systematic issues in the US in terms of media-obsession, unceasing patriotism, and the sole acknowledgement of certain religions. Instead he allowed himself and his audience to exist protected from any sort of critique, and they were protected from considering their role or responsibility in creating any alternative to what was being parodied. They are protected and think that they can exist outside of all of this because they feel as though they are in on the joke. Highlighting the inherent danger of Colbert's comedy and all comedy where somebody or some group is safe from the joke by existing on the "outside." However, there is no "existing on the outside." One cannot exist outside of ideology. Those who believe they exist on the outside exist

in a place of presumed superiority, thinking their actions don't have any sort of impact, and as such they behave as they want without any kind of accountability. It is the danger of having the ability to operate in the background, to exist without accountability or responsibility. And this twenty-two minute political comedy show from the 2000s shows us just that. The fact that *The Colbert Report* is just a silly show on Comedy Central under the genre of comedy, a genre that people, expectedly, do not take seriously, means that the show gets away with the negative and occasionally detrimental effects that it has.

The idea that we are morally righteous because we know what is wrong with our country is more prevalent than ever. This idea exempts us from taking responsibility for how we contribute to the toxic institutions that we condemn. This creates the false notion that we exist on the outside of the ideology that creates these corrupt systems. All of this feels like it culminates in shows like *The Colbert Report*. Shows like this one changed the mediascape and subsequently our culture forever. Today it feels as though echo chambers, polarization, and false ideals are completely normalized. It's difficult to not to look at shows like *The Colbert Report* and wonder how much of the show is a product of this and on some level, even a cause of it. Therefore, In 2005, when Colbert looked down the barrel of the TV camera lens and said those few words in an over-the-top exaggerated tone, although it was likely not in the way Colbert expected, intended, or even desired, those initial words turned out to be prophetic. Stephen Colbert and "Stephen Colbert," did exactly what he said he would: changed politics, news, and the world.

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