

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8396>



Review

Boycott “celebrities” and companies that endanger the lives and violate the dignity of oppressed people

- Reviews section -

Publication date: Sunday 28 January 2024

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights

reserved

On December 31 last year, Dave Chappelle released his third comedy special on Netflix, “The Dreamer”, which is a follow-up to 2021’s “The Closer” and 2022’s “What’s in a Name”? And the special includes heavy-handed commentary against his favorite target in recent years: gender minorities.

In the comedy special, Chappelle once again made jokes mocking the trans community after previously being criticized for his comments about transgender people. Since 2021’s *The Closer*’s airing on Netflix, Chappelle’s discriminatory words and actions have been controversial. The misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, and antisemitic nature of his comments has also been criticized.

The year before 2021 was the deadliest year for transgender people on record. In the U.S. alone, 44 transgender and gender variant people were killed by “violent fatal acts,” and 2021 was on track to supersede that number. [1] Actually, in 2021, at least 59 transgender or gender non-conforming people fatally shot or killed by other violent means. [2] In 2021, transgender Netflix employees declared an October 20 walkout from the streaming service in protest against a variety of ongoing issues that all connect back to Chappelle’s “*The Closer*”. However, Netflix has continued to give Chappelle work since then, and he has continued to deliver anti-minority and victim-blaming jokes to more than 200 million users over the past two years.

Netflix employees stage walkout over 2021 Dave Chappelle special

Dave Chappelle is one of the best comedians of his generation, the recipient of numerous awards, including Emmy Awards and Grammy Awards, as well as the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor in 2019, given by the Kennedy Center as America’s highest comedy honor. In *The Closer*, released in 2021, Chappelle declared with a wry grin, “I’m team TERF.” [3] After giving this explanation of what a TERF is, Chappelle ultimately claims “I’m team TERF”. The hour-plus of stand-up show that followed was a dizzying barrage of transphobic jokes. Chappelle brought up the fact that Caitlyn Jenner, who is a transgender woman and won the Glamour Woman of the Year Award in 2015. He also sarcastically remarked “ain’t that something” and said “never even had a period.” After that, Chappelle’s transphobic comments escalated.

Chappelle began talking about the genitalia of transgender women. He claimed that transgender women have “fake” genitals or “imitation” genitals. After the release of “*The Closer*”, Netflix also came under fire. In the midst of the criticism, the Netflix CEO defended Chappelle and refused to cancel the program. Immediately after that, Hundreds of Netflix employees walked out of work in protest of the streaming platform’s controversial Chappelle’s special. The protestors streamed out of the company’s Sunset Boulevard building, where they held a rally to “underscore the importance of responsible content offerings that prioritize the safety and dignity of all marginalized communities”. Jaclyn Moore, a transgender writer and co-showrunner of *Dear White People*, announced on social media that she would no longer work with Netflix after watching the Chappelle’s standup special.

Experiences of intersecting discrimination

Transgender people have felt outrage at both Chappelle and Netflix for amplifying transphobic and anti-scientific

views about gender and trans identity. The content of “The Closer” consisted of Dave Chappelle’s transphobic beliefs towards transgender people. And Chappelle’s comments in the comedy special have consisted of false misinformation about gender and femininity. And Chappelle’s defense that he’s not transphobic because a single trans woman found his transgender jokes funny is unjustified. The data which was released in 2020 in the US indicate that 82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have attempted suicide, with suicidality highest among transgender youth. [4] Transgender people are among the most vulnerable populations in society. Chappelle’s ongoing case from 2021 to the present day makes us think about intersectionality. Intersectionality is a concept that emphasizes the overlapping experiences of discrimination faced by the most disadvantaged people in society, such as immigrants, people with disabilities, or transgender women of color. Also, racism and sexism frequently converge—and the condition of white women workers is often tied to the oppressive predicament of women of color. [5] Chappelle has trashed the LGBTQI community, including a joke about a “gay white man” acting racist in one of his jokes. He frames the concerns of queer and genderqueer people, especially the linguistic discussions about bodily features that often arise from conversations about trans and non-binary identities, as simply a product of white privilege. However, there are also non-white LGBTQI people. Discrimination is also caused by a complex interplay of multiple factors, including race, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity. Chappelle’s language and actions that fuel the conflict between the black community and the LGBTQI community are sterile.

“Am I canceled or not?”

In response to the criticism, Chappelle said “Am I canceled or not?” without any offense. It is only recently that the term “cancel culture” has been used frequently in a political context. The term is used wildly by conservative media critical of recent progressive social changes. And those who do not like these social changes have tried to take away their validity by calling them an unjustified “cancel culture”. Among its leading figures are Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. Trump has shut down speech denouncing his own discriminatory words and actions as “cancel culture” saying “the very definition of totalitarianism” and “absolutely no place in the United States”. [6] Putin has observed such an American society and has always looked for the signs of social division. He has repeatedly made statements fomenting the division of this society, including speaking of a “cancel culture”. Some right-wing Americans sympathized with Putin. At the annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club in Moscow held in 2022, Putin openly criticized the “cancel culture” of Western countries. One example that Putin has often referred to in the context of “cancel culture” is the J.K. Rowling fiasco. “Harry Potter” author J.K. Rowling came under fire after posting a series of controversial tweets about the transgender community. Putin seemed to see an overlap with Rowling, who has drawn worldwide criticism for her discriminatory remarks against transgender people. The violence with which Putin confronts us is not just military. It is his discriminatory values that are ready to oppress and suppress minorities. We must be surprised by the fact that there are more than a few forces in the US and other countries around the world that resonate with the discriminatory values that Putin embodies. [7]

“Celebrities” and companies that endanger the lives and violate human dignity should be boycotted

Putin, Trump, and conservatives who share their values often refer to a “cancel culture” to avoid accountability. But the original meaning of “cancel culture” is not new; it is something we have seen throughout history. Modern “cancel culture” is essentially boycott. The means of expression given to oppressed and marginalized people today give individuals without organizational, social, or cultural power an opportunity to hold those in power accountable.

In a capitalist society where discrimination and oppression are rampant, it is a fundamental human right to say “no”

Boycott “celebrities” and companies that endanger the lives and violate the dignity of oppressed people

with one’s own voice when faced with a crisis that threatens one’s life and dignity as a human being. It is merely the latest manifestation of an ongoing struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor that is deeply rooted in our historical structure. The Black people who joined the Montgomery bus boycotts did not refuse to ride the bus because the bus seats were uncomfortable. In 1969, radical queer and transgender activists in the US took to the streets to riot at Stonewall to end state-sanctioned discrimination. Each of the activists did not riot because the drinks served at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, tasted bad. They were saying “no” in the midst of a crisis that threatened their lives and human dignity, when they had no other choice. The “no” of the oppressed is the new form of personalized protest, one of the few ways to demand social changes in the society that has yet to allow liberation for all. It is also a form of democratic expression that has always been at the forefront of our liberation.

The audience is laughing with Chappelle. But it is not funny at all.

We abolish the despicable reactionary “culture” that thrives at the expense of oppressed people, endangering their lives and sacrificing their inescapable grief.

Boycott “celebrities” and companies that endanger the lives and violate the dignity of oppressed people.

19 January 2024

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

[1] Eric Maroney, IVP, 6 November 2021, [“Theorizing trans liberation”](#).

[2] The Human Rights Campaign, 2021, [“Fatal Violence Against the Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Community in 2021”](#).

[3] The term TERF is considered to be an abbreviation for “Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists”. We would prefer to NOT use the term, since “radical feminist” means something very different from one country to another, and, also, in any country, it is a term that shuts down debate immediately, as noted in the Rosa Segui’s article [“Feminist analysis and perspectives at Fourth International women’s seminar”](#) on the Fourth International website.

[4] NCBI Literature Resources, 29 April 2020, “Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors”) Socialist Resistance’s article “Trans Liberation and Socialist Feminism,” published in the 2021 [International Viewpoint](#), also refers to statistics showing the dire situation of transgender people.

- More than four in five (83 per cent) trans young people have experienced name-calling or verbal abuse, three in five (60 per cent) have experienced threats and intimidation and more than a third (35 per cent) of trans young people have experienced physical assault. (Youth Chances 2014, sample size – 956)
- More than one in four (27 per cent) trans young people have attempted suicide and nine in 10 (89 per cent) have thought about it. 72 per cent have self-harmed at least once. (Youth Chances 2014, sample size – 956)
- Two in five (41 per cent) trans people have been attacked or threatened with violence in the last five years. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- In the last year alone, two thirds (65 per cent) of trans people have been discriminated against or harassed because of being perceived as trans. Over a third (35 per cent) avoid expressing their gender through physical appearance for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- Almost three in four (70 per cent) trans people avoid certain places and situations for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)
- More than half (55 per cent) of trans people have experienced negative comments or behaviour at work because of being trans. (FRA LGBT

Boycott “celebrities” and companies that endanger the lives and violate the dignity of oppressed people

Survey 2012, sample size – 813)

- One in four trans people report having been discriminated against at work. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- More than two in five (44 per cent) trans people have never disclosed to anyone at work that they are trans. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- Almost half (48 per cent) of trans people in Britain have attempted suicide at least once and 84 per cent have thought about it. More than half (55 per cent) have been diagnosed with depression at some point. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)
- More than half (54 per cent) of trans people reported that they have been told by their GP that they don't know enough about trans-related care to provide it. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)

[5] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, Random House Inc., 1981

[6] Oliver Noble, *Vice*, 15 July 2020, “Trump Called ‘Cancel Culture’ the Definition of Totalitarianism. But He’s Tried to Cancel All These People and Businesses”

[7] The present writer was even more surprised to see CNN's January 16 report, “Donald Trump's huge win in the Iowa caucuses.”