

Why America needs Kimmel – and Colbert and Rogan and Carolla | Opinion

Their comedic art equips Americans with non-violent tools for adapting

David McGrath, September 25th, 2025

- The author compares Jimmy Kimmel's political humor to a childhood memory of using a cardboard box as an effigy for a bully.
- Political comedy, the article argues, provides a cathartic release for viewers' frustration and anger.
- The piece suggests that shows like Kimmel's can make powerful figures seem less intimidating and more human.
- This form of comedic release is seen as a non-violent tool for coping and is valuable for both liberal and conservative audiences.

No one is happier than I am that "Jimmy Kimmel Live" is back on the air after he was briefly suspended for joking about the president and his supporters following Charlie Kirk's assassination.

But this is about more than free speech.

The reason I'm so glad dates back to the summer I turned ten, when two days of rain had flooded the foundations of dozens of houses under construction in our suburban neighborhood. My older brother Jimmy, two grades ahead of me at St. Bernadette, saw it as the perfect setting to play Robin Hood with the other kids on the block and organized a water balloon fight on opposite sides of the "moat."

Unfortunately, all the fun and noise attracted the attention of "Fence," a bully who lived behind the bowling alley, and who had once gotten into trouble at school for cursing at a teacher. Another time, for punching a patrol boy. I got scared when he started shooting what looked like a BB gun in our direction.

“Ahoy,” said Jimmy in his Robin Hood voice. Fence didn’t move, taking aim down the barrel of his gun. “You gotta leave,” said Jimmy, and he skipped toward Fence, his right arm cocked with a water balloon. “Or drop your gun.”

Fence lowered his BB gun and took it by the barrel to hand over. But when Jimmy reached for it, Fence shifted and slammed the handle on

top of his head. The thwap of metal on my brother’s skull was sickening. I saw Jimmy wince, and his knees buckle. I think both Fence and I expected him to cry. Instead, he stood up and gritted his teeth.

“You are going to get it now, you big ass.”

Maybe it was the expletive, or maybe something he saw in Jimmy’s eyes caused Fence to turn and run. Jimmy started after him, and I ran to catch up. I never felt like that before: Scared, yet strong at the same time. Somebody hurt my brother, my family.

But Jimmy had turned and was already walking back. He passed me and slid down the dirt hill to the edge of the moat and lifted up a waterlogged cardboard box, setting it on top of the footing.

After walking backwards several steps, he let out a yell like Tarzan before throwing the water balloon which exploded on the box. Then he announced that the box was Fence’s “big head” and that we were the firing squad.

I charged down the hill, shouting “Big ass!” before blasting the box with my last water balloon. I watched the other kids drench Fence’s face, the black lettering on the cardboard resembling his mean and now pitiful sneer.

When everyone had used up their ammunition, Jimmy said he could go get more balloons; but I told him it was all right. That I had been boiling mad and ready to chase Fence to hell and back but didn't feel like it anymore.

"It's a catharsis," he said.

Three years younger, I didn't fully understand Jimmy's explanation of how we got revenge and sated our anger without hurting him. Without getting into trouble. But I understand now. And it's exactly why we needed Jimmy Kimmel back on TV.

In his book "Facing the Fire: Experiencing and Expressing Anger Appropriately," psychotherapist John Lee advocated that people vent by taking out their frustrations and anger on a substitute object or effigy, like my brother's cardboard box. By doing so, Lee asserts, "You will be doing violence to a pillow or punching bag so that you can stop doing violence to yourself by holding in poisonous anger."

Fans of Kimmel can relate. When I laugh at his over-the-top characterization of the president, my hopelessness disappears. The frustration or anger I had for something the president did, as when he quit the Paris Climate Agreement, or asked the attorney general to go after his opponents, is let out in the open, shared communally, and defused.

Kimmel's show offers up an effigy, a comical, hyperbolic image of Trump — using jokes, Photoshop, and AI — that we can laugh at, douse with water balloons, and view with calmer perspective. It converts our helplessness to a sense of control: audience laughter validates our shared perception of what's off kilter. It exposes the oppressive and indomitable despot as a bumbling, contradictory, and very human being.

I am not the only one. Countless guests on his show have expressed gratitude for his nightly monologues that transubstantiate their cynicism and depression to patience and possibility, with the reassurance that they are not alone .

Nor is the therapeutic restoration reserved just for liberals. We also need Adam Carolla, Dennis Miller, and Joe Rogan just as badly, for the same kind of effigy construction and catharsis for conservative voters. Their comedic art holds government accountable between elections, and equips Americans with non-violent tools for adapting, and for effecting change.

Thank God for Jimmy Kimmel.

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