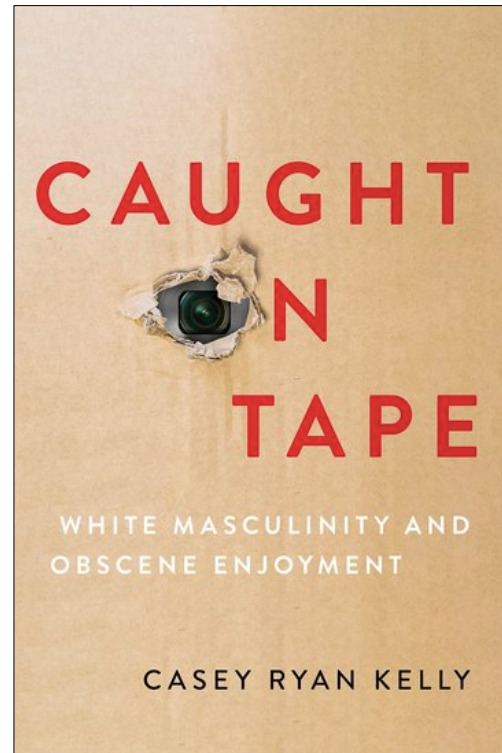


Casey Ryan Kelly, **Caught on Tape: White Masculinity and Obscene Enjoyment**, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2023, 187 pp., \$146.00 (hardback).

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From the opening pages of this monograph, it is clear that the work being done is timely, intentionally familiar to audiences and politically charged—from Mel Gibson’s anti-Semitic tirade to Donald Trump’s *Access Hollywood*’s sexist remarks, incidents all “caught on tape.” In **Caught on Tape: White Masculinity and Obscene Enjoyment**, what Casey Ryan Kelly rightly points out is that the 21st century has given rise to a vast array of technologies—with which it has become much easier to detect and record such inappropriate behavior (p. 3). Examples include 2017 evidence, released by the *New Yorker*, that would help incriminate disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, thus launching the #MeToo era; furthermore, racist remarks by President Richard Nixon and future President Ronald Reagan (from 1971) were unearthed in 2019 (see Andrejevic, 2007; Naftali, 2019). Such acts “violate the rules of decorum and the ideological sensibilities of a putatively colorblind, postfeminist, and democratic society” (p. 4). In making this claim, one term with which Kelly engages is that of *irruption*, which refers to “the sudden, arresting, and forcible incursion of hate speech into public life” (p. 5). This sort of publicity is key to Kelly’s analysis, as acts (“transgressions”) like hate and offensive speech are no longer relegated to margins; through technology, the hidden can come to light.



Kelly’s sophisticated and layered argument brings to the fore a curious paradox: There is a certain “enjoyment” that arises from such “obscenity”—Kelly’s chosen terminology here is *obscene enjoyment*, which consists of “an experience of ecstatic and excessive pleasure-in-pain” (p. 5), building on Jacques Lacan’s (2006) idea of *jouissance*, where such behavior is compulsively repeated over time. Yet audiences, too, play a critical part in this *jouissance*, also repeatedly and compulsively watching and/or listening to that which is caught on tape. Thus, figures such as Gibson, Trump, Nixon, and so on are not the sole perpetrators; spectators are also to be held responsible. Racism and misogyny—fueled by “White masculinity”—are continuously “enjoyed,” and thus normalized. Kelly buttresses this claim with Henry Jenkins’ (2008) argument that media allows for *convergence* or *participatory culture*, where spectators “consume and produce media, and traffic across a variety of mediums to make sense of everyday life” (p. 32). Such participation becomes transgressive, such as with Internet pornography, where viewers may participate, virtually, in perverse acts as a way for sexual gratification (see Marshall, 2014). Kelly’s

theoretical framework is vast, covering many oft-cited texts on spectatorship and psychoanalysis; Laura Mulvey (1975, *scopophilia*; p. 18) and Sigmund Freud (1990, *the pleasure principle*; p. 142) also make appearances. Yet Kelly's argument does not become lost in the dense psychoanalytic theory; rather, such complicated concepts are distilled in a very digestible manner. To Kelly's credit, it is the timeliness—and provocative nature—of his case studies that anchor his book and thus make it immensely readable.

In chapter 1 ("Leaked Celebrity Tirades and the Primal Scene of Racism"), Kelly considers racist outbursts such as that by *Seinfeld* star Michael Richards in The Comedy Store in Los Angeles in 2006—in response to a heckler with "a barrage of racial epithets I will not reproduce here" (p. 31). Another example here is Mel Gibson's racist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, and homophobic remarks, as leaked by RadarOnline in 2010, with the headline "Mel Gibson's INSANE Racist, Screaming Rants EXPOSED!" (p. 29). There is something innately *primal* and animalistic in what he calls "an ever-growing public archive of hate" (p. 29), following the work of Frantz Fanon (2008) and Homi Bhabha (1992). Chapter 2 ("Anxiety, Racial Capitalism, and the Donald Sterling Tapes") builds nicely on this argument by bringing the role of cultural norms into the conversation. Here, the primary case study is the audio recording of Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling with his girlfriend, V. Stiviano (released by TMZ Sports in April 2014). Sterling berates Stiviano for an Instagram post of her with Earvin (Magic) Johnson. Kelly posits that Sterling's remarks reflect a certain "plantation culture" where athletes of color are treated akin to slaves (p. 56).

Such an analogy of slavery continues in chapter 3 ("YouRacist.com: The Libidinal Economy of Public Freak Out Videos"). Here, Kelly examines the YouTube channel "Roland Martin Unfiltered," specifically the recurring segment "Crazy Ass White People" (p. 82). These videos consist of amateur footage of racist violence; yet, paradoxically, a certain racist *jouissance* occurs here—racist violence becomes a spectacle, akin to lynching (p. 83). In this chapter, Kelly rightly quotes Nathan Stormer's (2020) statement that one should "learn from Black pain, not to stare at its spectacle" (p. 80). Kelly's fourth and final chapter ("Access Hollywood and the Return of the Primal Father") goes one step further than the previous chapters, proposing that certain outbursts caught on tape can even transcend basic legal structures. His example here is the 2016 *Washington Post* video (of 2005 footage) of Donald Trump and Access Hollywood co-anchor Billy Bush. The sexist remarks here, dismissed by Trump as "locker room talk," ostensibly bolstered his campaign for president; it helped create a mythical figure, "an illusion of Trump, known affectionately to some as The Donald, as a figure of exception: singularly powerful and beyond the law" (p. 103).

Indeed, Kelly's Epilogue ("On Pointless Enjoyment") reinforces the book's timeliness—but also its perhaps lack of said timeliness, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner. "If you are reading this, you are too late," reads its opening line (p. 127). This is because "we" will nonetheless already have been "inundated" with many of the sexist and racist acts caught on tape already—and Kelly's warning may already be a moot point. This first-person, plural "we" is certainly striking, given the wide breadth of potential spectators of the already recorded acts. Are "we," then, all perpetrators in our capacity as spectators? Kelly moves back to the singular ("the spectator") in providing his response: "the spectator's enjoyment [is] predicated on continually and compulsively (re)discovering the very thing that produces their anxiety" (p. 127). Kelly then returns to the plural "we," albeit in a more a positive/optimistic manner than earlier—

"we" may be guilty, but "we" can also be part of solving the problem: "How do we help people unplug from the technological and culture circuitry of obscene enjoyment?" (p. 187).

Kelly signals Joe Biden's presidency as a potential turning point; yet, as reader in August 2024, in the thick of the presidential campaigns, matters have indeed changed here, certainly in light of Biden's choice to withdraw from the 2024 race, and Vice President Kamala Harris's subsequent nomination. In any case, the Trump presidency gave rise to a "repetitive assault on consensus reality," thus standing in opposition to a desired "return [to] normalcy" (p. 131). *Caught on Tape*, then, presupposes a continued relevancy, thus not existing in a vacuum in relation to figures like Trump. The problems that Kelly brilliantly foregrounds are much more deep-seated than one individual, or indeed one era of political extremism. Therefore, Kelly's book is perhaps *not* too late, given that he suggests public accountability and a potential solution—at least to mitigate the problem, not solve it. To put it another way, it is imperative that spectators "acknowledge the racist and misogynistic structures that reside within the rhetorical unconscious" (p. 139). At the level of the Symbolic, matters like misogyny and racism are so entrenched within cultural norms that recognition and holding one another accountable is a necessary first step. Accordingly, Kelly cites Natalia Molina's (2014) claim that "racism builds on past racial acts" (p. 23). In response to claims of "white innocence" (see Lacy, 2010), Kelly makes clear matters caught on tape highlight a "collective debt" propped up social and cultural norms (p. 138). Such rhetoric may sound pessimistic, but Kelly is sure to point out that his book can hopefully provide some solutions—at least in terms of providing a basic awareness of the problems at stake.

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