



# Working to Laugh: Assembling Difference in American Stand-Up Comedy Venues

*James M. Thomas Assistant Professor of Sociology University of Mississippi*

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For decades, stand-up comedy has been central to the imbrication of popular culture and political discourse, reshaping the margins of political critique, and often within the contexts of urban nightlife entertainment. In *Working to Laugh: Assembling Difference in American Stand-Up Comedy Venues*, James M. Thomas (JT) provides an ethnographic analysis of urban nightlife sites where this popular form of entertainment occurs. Examining the relationship between the performance, the venue, and the social actors who participate in these scenes, JT demonstrates how stand-up venues function as both enablers and constrainers of social difference, including race, class, gender, and heteronormativity, within the larger urban nightlife environment. JT's analysis of a professional comedy club and a sub-cultural bar that hosts a weekly comedy show illuminates the full range of stand-up comedy in the American cultural milieu, from the highly organized, routinized, and predictable format of the professional venue, to the more unpredictable, and in some cases, cutting edge format of the amateur show.

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