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EEX 5051

Media Journal – SNL Skit Summary/Reflection

SUMMARY

Saturday Night Live – Weekend Update, Thursday, September 24, 2009

(Governor Paterson Impersonation)

During this episode of Saturday Night Live – Weekend Update, there is a four minute skit during which comedian/actor, Fred Armisen impersonates New York State Governor, David Paterson. Paterson is blind and Armisen makes this an obvious target for laughs.

At the beginning of the skit, Armisen, impersonating Governor Paterson gets introduced by the Weekend Update hosts and makes his entrance to the set by “wheeling” out in an office chair in a rather disoriented fashion, quickly wheeling right past the hosts. He appears to be fumbling onto the set and the hosts of Weekend Update, both of them smirking, push him into the spot where he is supposed to be sitting for the interview. The audience is laughing. Once he is settled into position, Armisen continually makes awkward facial expressions mocking Governor Paterson as he responds to questions from the Weekend Update hosts. At one point in the interview, Armisen, imitating Governor Paterson says he would like to go to Washington, DC where he can be seen “walking zig-zag up the capitol steps;” “shaking hands with humans and statues;” and “trying to put his ATM card into the Vietnam Memorial.” The audience bursts with laughter at each of the remarks and the hosts of Weekend Update are clearly amused.

REFLECTION

This skit on SNL is blatantly making fun of a person’s disability which in this case is Governor Paterson’s blindness. The portrayal of Governor Paterson as fumbling and scattered and unable to manage simple tasks on his own fosters and legitimizes stereotypes that are held about people who are blind. I admit that I laughed when I watched the skit on television in part because of the political humor but also because of the impersonation of the disability, though I did find it offensive and “crossing the line.” I felt bad about it after the show and even now that I am writing about it. I know that I would yell at my children if they EVER laughed at someone for behavior associated with a disability. I wonder why it is so natural in society to laugh at people for inappropriate reasons, especially disabilities. I think we have a long way to go in society to be truly accepting of differences. Making fun of people with disabilities is a “cheap” way to get laughs.