

# INTERVIEW DR. SOPHIA A. MCCLENNEN

Director of the Center for Global Studies,  
Professor of International Affairs and Comparative Literature  
at Pennsylvania State University

*“Even though our gut instinct is to say that satire is not healthy for democracy, my research proves that it played a valuable role defending democracy before and during the Trump years... and that it continues to have a vital place in our society today”*

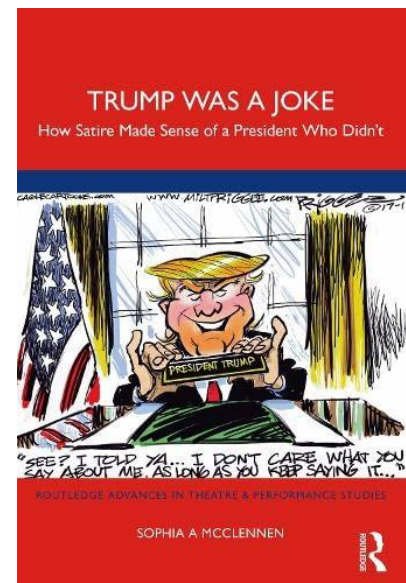
- Dr. Sophia A. McClennen

## ABOUT THE BOOK

### *Trump Was a Joke: How Satire Made Sense of a President Who Didn't*

Written by one of the nation's foremost satire and politics scholars, Dr. Sophia A. McClennen, and featuring a foreword by award-winning filmmaker, satirist, and activist Michael Moore, *Trump Was a Joke* [Routledge – March 24, 2023] explains why satire is an exceptional foil for absurd political times and why it did a particularly good job of making sense of the Trump presidency.

Covering a range of comedic interventions, *Trump Was a Joke* shows why political satire is surprisingly effective at keeping us sane when politics is making us crazy. The book highlights the unique power of political satire to encourage critical thinking, foster civic action, and further rational debate in moments of political hubris and hysteria, and builds on McClennen's in-depth research proving the crucial role of comedy in sharpening non-violent political movements. *Trump Was a Joke* has been endorsed by Bassem Youssef, who has been referred to as the “Jon Stewart of Egypt,” and Srdja Popovic, author of *Blueprint for Revolution*, who used satirical activism to bring down Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic.



*Trump Was a Joke* will be of interest to readers who follow politics and enjoy political comedy and provides valuable insights that will appeal to individuals involved in communications, comedy studies, media studies, political science, rhetoric, and cultural studies.

## MEET Dr. SOPHIA A. MCCLENNEN



Dr. **Sophia A. McClennen** is author of *Trump Was a Joke: How Satire Made Sense of a President That Didn't* [Routledge – March 24, 2023]. She is also part of a research team that has proven the political power of satirical activism—referred to as laughtivism—in advancing social change. Frequently featured as an expert in national media, Sophia has appeared on CNN's 6-part series, "The Story of Late Night," on Neil de Grasse Tyson's National Geographic show "Startalk," and in a top performing [Vox video](#). She is also a regular columnist for Salon.com.

Dr. McClennen is Professor of international affairs and comparative literature at Pennsylvania State University and founding director of the Center for Global Studies, where she has raised over \$6 million in funding. At Penn State she teaches courses on human rights culture, culture and globalization, media studies, global cinema, the cultures of displaced peoples, cross-cultural conflict resolution, political satire and critical theory. Dr. McClennen works on the intersections of culture, politics and society, and her books focus on cultural responses to complex social change, such as satire and contemporary politics or the power of storytelling in advancing human rights. She studied philosophy at Harvard University, where she worked on *The Harvard Lampoon*, and did her graduate work in Latin American cultural studies at Duke University.

Dr. McClennen has published thirteen books with two currently in process, including a project that advances the work done in *Pranksters Vs. Autocrats: Why Dilemma Actions Advance Democracy* (Cornell 2020), co-authored with Serbian activist, Srdja Popovic. A co-edited volume with Jeffrey DiLeo called *Left Theory and the Alt-Right* is forthcoming from Routledge in 2023. She is also working on a book on the global impact of political satire: *The Revolution Will Be Satirized*.

## Dr. Sophia A. McClennen is available for interviews and articles on topics including:

- The fascinating research proving the valuable role satire played in defending democracy before and during the Trump years
- How social movements that use satire in their tactics are more likely to succeed
- 5 ways satire helps to improve civic engagement and political knowledge, and creates better, more informed citizens
- How satire helped people make sense of Trump, how it helps people cope with stress related to politics, and how it is tied to more sophisticated critical thinking
- How satirists often offer better “news” coverage than traditional media
- The ways in which Trump changed satire, and satire changed Trump
- What we can expect from satirists as Trump positions himself to run for President again in 2024
- Common misconceptions about satire: that it’s bad for democracy, that it undermines important institutions, that it’s only aim is to distract and entertain, and more
- What makes Trump satire different from earlier examples of comedians mocking Presidents
- How satire makes people smarter and helps them navigate media disinformation
- What the increasing power and presence of satire says about our society as a whole

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## PRAISE FOR *TRUMP WAS A JOKE* & DR. SOPHIA A. MCCLENNEN

*“This book explains the various ways that satire stepped up and helped us make sense of the most confounding and catastrophic president of all time. It shows us how satire builds communities, keeps us from falling into a catatonic state of depression, and helps us think in more advanced ways about how to handle crises. It even shows us how satire can work to defend democracy when politicians and the media don’t. I’ve learned a lot from this book and hope you will too.” - Michael Moore, award-winning filmmaker, author, and activist*

*"Sophia McClennen's new book is a fantastically readable analysis of why ironic comedy has become so important in politics today. It confirms what I witnessed myself as a political comedian in Egypt during the Arab Spring: The crazier the politicians get; the more valuable political comedy becomes for the public. As I learned myself and as this book proves, when absurd politicians take power, it is hard to use reason against them, but it can be easy to use satire. McClennen convincingly shows how satirical comedy helps reason triumph over political repression. Even better, Trump Was a Joke reminds us that when you're laughing, you can't be afraid." - Bassem Youssef, the "Jon Stewart of Egypt" and author of *Revolution for Dummies: Laughing Through the Arab Spring**

*"Trump Was a Joke offers the best, most-comprehensive guide yet to the power of political satire in shaping public opinion during turbulent political times. It is a must-read account of how political satire has come to play such a dominant role in contemporary politics, especially in the era of populist leaders and the global war on truth. It does an excellent job of explaining how being seriously funny can have serious impact on keeping us sane and it shows us how satire can work as a powerful political tactic." - Srdja Popovic, author of *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World**

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To learn more about Dr. Sophia A. McClennen:  
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