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## Learning to Laugh at Obama

By AMY CHOZICK and JAMIN BROPHY-WARREN

Funny or not, comedians are learning to laugh at President-elect Barack Obama.

After much hand-wringing that the sure-footed, quirk-free Mr. Obama provided little fodder for mockery, the nation's comedians are starting to rise to the task, with conservative and black comics paving the way.

Ohio-based comedian Drew Hastings, who describes himself as a "drug-using conservative," voted for Republican John McCain and says now that Mr. Obama has been elected president, "all bets are off," in a comic sense.

At a recent standup show in Indiana, he opened with a dig at Mr. Obama's background as a community organizer on Chicago's South Side. "I've been through the South Side of Chicago and it didn't strike me as too organized," he said.

Black comics say racial jokes are fair game, especially if they commentate on the African-American community's reaction to an Obama administration.

"I poke fun at black people having a black president," says Bronx-born comic Rob Stapleton. "Black people act like we can all just stop by the White House at any point for cookies and juice just because a black man is president."

"People keep saying he's multiracial. He's black. If you saw Barack stealing your car, you wouldn't say, 'Stop that mixed guy.' And he'd be stealing a hybrid," says Donald Glover, a black writer for NBC's "30 Rock" television series.

Poking fun at the first black president is sensitive terrain. Many black comedians say racial jokes fall flat among white audiences in blue strongholds like New York and California. White audiences are sometimes hesitant to laugh at a racial jab, comedians say, while some black audiences feel protective of a president they overwhelmingly supported.

"White liberals are so humorless" about Mr. Obama, says Kurt Metzger, a white comedian. "It's like if you speak frankly about things, you touch on people's guilt."

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Race isn't the only barrier. Comedians say the president-elect just hasn't revealed as many flubs or personality quirks as President Bush, and before him Bill Clinton, partly because he hasn't been around long enough.

"We'll figure it out eventually," says Rajiv Satyal, a comedian who calls himself the "funny Indian."

"George Bush was like the one hot girl you date that then gives you way too high of a self esteem. He turned everybody into a great joke writer," he says.

Underscoring the difficulty for comedians impersonating the president-elect, Fred Armisen, who plays Mr. Obama on NBC's "Saturday Night Live," has faced a wave of criticism from viewers complaining that he doesn't get the impersonation right.

NBC declined to comment.

One area ripe for satire is Mr. Obama's earnestness and his perceived perfection, says comedian and satirist Andy Borowitz. Mr. Borowitz says he gets laughs on his satirical Web site, the Borowitz Report, with simple jokes that mock Mr. Obama's "awesomeness." One goes: "A horse walks into a bar. The bartender says 'Why the long face?' Barack Obama replies, 'His jockey just lost his health insurance, which should be the right of all Americans.' "

In a satirical online newscast the day after the election, the Onion poked fun at Mr. Obama's army of young supporters. "Today, they woke up to the cold realization that they have nothing to fill their pathetically empty lives," the commentator said. And the Onion recently used Mr. Obama's fund-raising heft against him in a story titled "International Con Man Barack Obama Leaves U.S. With \$85 Million in Campaign Fundraising."

Stephen Colbert, host of Comedy Central's "Colbert Report," often makes fun of the Obama campaign's message of hope. "He's passing his hope bong around the drum circle of young America," Mr. Colbert said in an interview on CNN's "Larry King Live."

"He's so positive that he can make rainbows appear magically. He has unicorns on his staff," says comedian Wayne Brady.

"Now I want him to reconfigure his goals so they're manageable. I want him to say, 'We have to get rid of poison ivy and phone calls at dinner.' You know, things that are doable," says Bob Odenkirk, co-creator of the HBO series "Mr. Show."

In one common joke, comedians compare an Obama administration to a Washington version of "The Cosby Show."

Bill Cosby says comedians need time to develop their Obama routines. "It's too soon," he says. "They're not finished with the last guy yet."

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