

10D

REGICIDE

SNAPSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE COLLECTION OF ROBERT E. JACKSON

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The Tramp was born in the wardrobe department of Keystone Studios, in Los Angeles. The year was 1914, and Charlie Chaplin happened to be standing nearby Mack Sennett, who needed some funny business on a scene he was shooting, and ordered Chaplin to put on comedy makeup-- “anything will do.” On his way to wardrobe, Chaplin decided that everything should be a contradiction: a coat and hat that were too small, pants and shoes that were too big. He performed the scene, and the Tramp was launched on his brilliant career.

“You know this fellow is many-sided,” Chaplin later explained the character, “a tramp, a gentleman, a poet, a dreamer, a lonely fellow, always hopeful of romance and adventure. He would have you believe he is a scientist, a musician, a duke, a polo player.” He was an everyman, a silent reprieve trading in innocuous incongruity.

Contradiction is at the heart of comedy, and what could be more incongruous than the male phallus? In Freudian theory, men desire nothing more than to seduce their mothers, while women spend their lives grappling with quiet envy of the male sex organ. An instrument employed historically with pomp and violence as a means towards projects of social control, population manipulation, and cultural disruption, the phallus has been used to justify abuse and subjugation, division and derision. Yet it is simultaneously soft in flesh and fickle in spirit; naive in youth and unreliable in anguish. Perhaps there’s nothing funny about that, yet some of the oldest recorded jokes on record are dick jokes, and millennia later not much has changed: the first clip ever uploaded to YouTube, “Me at the zoo,” was a dick joke.

At first glance, the car is not even being washed. Framed by foliage, a man in slacks and a work shirt stands in front of its back wheel, sleeves rolled up past his biceps, hands firmly planted at his crotch clutching a hose through which water pours. The stream is directed onto the car door, down which it cascades, a waterfall into the grass below. Or at least, this is implied: the car door has been over-exposed, now a haze of white. It’s as if the hose has spewed with such vehemence that the photo itself was damaged, the end of the water’s arc disappearing in a cloud that obscures the entire left side of the photograph. With a broad, proud smile, the man apes for the camera. His photo has been printed and cornered into a photo album, with “WHAT A MAN” inscribed above.

The four images featured in REGICIDE, selected from the preeminent snapshot collection of Robert E. Jackson, feature mid-century white American men engaged in vernacular visual play with gender and sexuality tropes. Is the dick joke here just another under-handed, over-beaten attempt to assert the power of the phallus, a projection that only someone confident of their penis would wield it for humor, ennobling its interlocutor with the social capital of charisma? Or is it a timeless linguistic tradition, that most elusive plot device which can be re-interpreted ad infinitum, picking up the spirit of its age in the process?

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Photographer unknown
Private First Class, c. 1940s
Silver gelatin print
3 x 4 in. (7.62 x 10.16 cm)

10D



Photographer unknown

Keep Off Ass, c. 1947

Silver gelatin print

3 x 3 in. (7.62 x 7.62 cm)

10D



ALAN K Loud SR

Photographer unknown
Alan K. Loud SR, c. 1940s
Silver gelatin print
3 x 3 in. (7.62 x 7.62 cm)

WHAT A MAN



10D

Photographer unknown

What a Man, c. 1940s

Silver gelatin print

4 x 3 in. (10.16 x 7.62 cm)



KEEP OFF MASS

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