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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Reader,

I'm writing to tell you about *ALL JOKES ASIDE: Stand-Up Comedy Is a Phunny Business* (Agate Bolden, January 12, 2016, 978-1-932841-95-4, \$16) by Raymond Lambert and Chris Bournea. Based on Lambert's critically acclaimed 2012 Showtime documentary *Phunny Business*, this uproarious and insightful memoir provides an even deeper look into Lambert's successes, failures, and lessons learned from running All Jokes Aside, America's one-time preeminent black comedy showcase.

In the late 1980s, Raymond Lambert was earning a six-figure salary in a promising financial career. He was being mentored by legendary investment banker Chris Gardner, who was famously portrayed by Will Smith in *The Pursuit of Happyness*. Despite this success, young Lambert felt unfulfilled, so he quit his job, and on August 9, 1991, with zero experience, he and a partner borrowed money from his partner's mother and opened All Jokes Aside on Chicago's Near South Side.

Lambert channeled lessons from the cutthroat financial industry into founding and running what would become one of the most legendary black comedy clubs in America. For a decade, All Jokes Aside was a "star factory" that played a formative role in the early careers of several huge stars who today are major figures in film and television. Lambert's small Chicago comedy club gave crucial early exposure to Jamie Foxx, Mo'Nique, Chris Rock, Steve Harvey, and Dave Chappelle, among many, many others.

All Jokes Aside is the wildly entertaining story of Lambert's journey, a behind-the-scenes look at the world of show business, and an inspiring tale for any dreamer and would-be entrepreneur. Chock-full of cautionary tales both humorous and dramatic, intimate details on the early careers of top performers, and tangible guidance on how to build a business from the ground up, *All Jokes Aside* is a much-needed recent history of black entertainment and an uplifting personal memoir of entrepreneurial success.

I hope you will consider this title for a review or feature. Author Raymond Lambert is also available for interviews. For more information, please contact Jacqueline Jarik, Agate's marketing and publicity assistant, at 847-475-4457 ext. 4# or at jarik@agatepublishing.com.

Yours,

Doug Seibold

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Praise for Raymond Lambert's award-winning documentary *Phunny Business*:

“Full of history and context and has a sense of humor befitting its subject matter.”

—**Neil Genzlinger**, *The New York Times*

“[One of] the best documentaries of the year.”

—**Roger Ebert**

“A wonderfully entertaining documentary about the club where it all began for many of today's top comic talents.”

—**Todd McCarthy**, *The Hollywood Reporter*

“This is one documentary that comedy fans won't want to miss.”

—*The Huffington Post*

“Breezy, vivid, funny, star-studded and delightful valentine to comedy, entrepreneurship and the All-American impulse to make something out of nothing. . . isn't just a great Chicago story and a great comedy story: it's a flat-out great story, lovingly and engagingly told.”

—**Nathan Rabin**, head writer at The Onion/A.V. Club

“A gem! A funny, insightful, honest knockout winner of a film about the serious business of comedy. A film that's an absolute must see movie. Four stars!”

—**Sergio Mims**, *EbonyJET Online*

“An invaluable look back at an all-too-brief but shining and important moment in the history of comedy.”

—**Richard Roper**, *Chicago Sun-Times*

“The heartwarming and ultimately heartbreaking hidden history of south side Chicago's premiere Black comedy club. Inspirational, motivational, hilarious.”

—**David Rensin**, author and contributor editor at *Playboy*

Praise for All Jokes Aside, Raymond Lambert's iconic Chicago comedy club:

“I did a show at All Jokes Aside, and I got about four standing ovations. . . it was about the best show I had at that particular time in my career.”

—**Bernie Mac**

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“All Jokes Aside was a mecca; when you went there to perform, you saw black folk running a comedy club the way a comedy club should be run. Ray Lambert took it to the next level.”

—**Steve Harvey**

“If you can get booked here, be a headliner at All Jokes Aside, you knew that, you know, you were considered in the upper echelon of comedians working at that time.”

—**Cedric the Entertainer**

“If you went over the roster of comics that played All Jokes Aside, it would be a who’s who of comedy.”

—**D.L. Hughley**

“Whenever anybody asks me how I got my start, I don’t hesitate to mention All Jokes.”

—**Craig Robinson**

“You couldn’t just be Black, you had to Black and funny and good at All Jokes Aside.”

—**Sheryl Underwood**

“[All Jokes Aside] developed a discipline in those of us that were there that you carried with you through the rest of your career.”

—**Don D.C. Curry**

“All Jokes Aside was the one club where you didn’t feel that sexism. I experienced equality with my fellow male comedians.”

—**Laura Hayes**

“Not only was the club a great Black comedy club, it was a great comedy club. . .period.”

—**Mike Epps**

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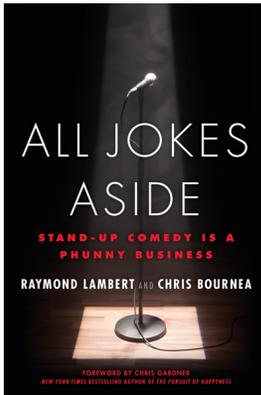
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ALL JOKES ASIDE

Stand-Up Comedy Is a Phunny Business

By Raymond Lambert and Chris Bournea; Foreword by Chris Gardner

Hook: Based on the critically acclaimed documentary *Phunny Business*, this memoir details the journey of a successful businessman who leaves a promising career on Wall Street to open the legendary Chicago comedy club All Jokes Aside on the city's South Side, which helped launch the careers of many major African-American film and TV stars.



This uplifting, entertaining, and instructive memoir explores how investment banker Raymond Lambert used his experience in the financial sector to open All Jokes Aside, a Chicago comedy club that catapulted some of the biggest names in the business to the national stage: Jamie Foxx, Mo'Nique, Chris Rock, and Steve Harvey, among others.

This book provides a deeper look at the stories in *Phunny Business*, the filmed documentary that aired on Showtime in 2012. *All Jokes Aside* explores Lambert's successes and failures—and the many, many lessons he learned from running what at one time was America's top black comedy showcase.

In addition to offering practical advice to would-be entrepreneurs, Lambert also provides a behind-the-scenes look at the early careers of today's star performers—not to mention a history of black entertainment that has been long overdue.

With an introduction by Lambert's mentor Chris Gardner—the investment banker who inspired *The Pursuit of Happiness* and Will Smith's Oscar-nominated performance—*All Jokes Aside* is funny, insightful, and brutally honest.

Raymond Lambert is an entrepreneur, independent producer, and adjunct professor at Columbia College. He wrote and produced the award-winning documentary film *Phunny Business*, and is executive producer on *Maya Angelou: The People's Poet*. He is the founder of the comedy club All Jokes Aside. **Chris Bournea** is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. He is a contributing writer for the *Columbus Dispatch*, *This Week Community News*, and the *Call and Post Newspaper*, Ohio's oldest and largest African-American newspaper.

***All Jokes Aside*, Trade Paper, Agate Bolden,
January 12, 2016, 978-1-932841-95-4, 6 x 9, 240 pp,
Humor/Business & Professional/African-American Studies, \$16**

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Q. & A. with Raymond Lambert, author of *All Jokes Aside*

Why did you decide to write this book after already having produced a successful documentary about *All Jokes Aside*?

It is virtually impossible to compress 10 years of history into an 85-minute documentary. You simply have to leave a lot of the good stuff literally on the cutting room floor. I would get questions at every stop while screening the film about my background: What else happened during the heyday? What did you do after *All Jokes Aside*? What are you doing now? So I felt that a book offered the opportunity to dig deeper, share more details of my journey before, during, and after *All Jokes Aside*. And there is a lot more to share, but I needed the right collaborator(s). Then I met Chris Bournea, and later Agate's Doug Seibold. Here we go.

You spent the beginning of your career as an investment banker on Wall Street. How did your experience in the financial sector inform the decisions you made as a comedy club owner?

I worked in sales and trading, which is charged with providing liquidity in the capital markets, the marketplace where stocks or bonds are bought and sold. This liquidity allows a company to raise the capital needed to launch and grow its businesses. But before I sold or bought anything, I had to study the company—its business, management, financial data, annual reports, etc. I became very good at analyzing data. So from the beginning when my business partner and I were evaluating the opportunity to launch a comedy business, I used the same analytical skills that I had learned in business school and on Wall Street to determine if the idea appeared legit. Just as important, if not more so, is that fact that this training also gave me the framework for monitoring our progress and keeping things under control as we jumped in, grew, and expanded.

When you opened *All Jokes Aside*, you had no direct experience running a comedy club. How long did it take you to feel comfortable in this new career?

I have a history of starting things for which I have no direct experience, so it was not unusual for me to open a comedy club with no prior experience. In fact, I have had little to no experience in practically every job that I have ever had. Youth and inexperience are bliss. But humbly speaking, I have always felt that if it has been done before, I can do it also. A wise man once said, "If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it." I believe that.

Chris Gardner mentored you. Which of the lessons he taught you proved most beneficial as you navigated your way through this uncharted territory?

Chris was not very happy with me when I decided to leave his firm. He had big plans for me, and like a recalcitrant kid, I decided to throw it all away and join the circus. He

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didn't speak to me for several years. But one thing that he and I have always agreed on is the idea that you must claim ownership of your dreams and relentlessly pursue them. You may disappoint others along the way in that pursuit, but you must be unreasonably willing to pursue them. Flash forward twenty years, our visions once again align, and now we are business partners on a slate of new exciting projects.

What advice do you have for young MBA-holders who are unsure of what sort of career path to follow?

I joke that I have never had a career: I've had a series of jobs. All jokes aside, George Bernard Shaw said that nothing great is ever accomplished by a reasonable man. Be unreasonable. Find what you are not only passionate about, but obsessed with, and find a way to make a living from it. And whatever you do, don't compare yourself to your classmates. It's not an easy thing to do, but comparison is lethal to contentment.

Do you have a favorite act that performed at All Jokes Aside? What was it?

I am asked this question all the time, and it's like asking a parent who's your favorite child. I have had the good fortune to work with some of the greatest stand-up comedians in history. It is impossible to choose. That said, if it were my last meal of jokes, and I could only see one act that I have worked with. . . I am forever indebted to Steve Harvey. He saved our lives and taught me the comedy business. Then there is George Willborn, who was the heart and soul of All Jokes Aside. But before I met Steve and George, I witnessed Bernie Mac. After seeing him perform for the first time, I had all the confidence I needed to jump into the stand-up comedy game. I recall thinking that if I had cats like that in my own backyard, then there must be dozens of cats around the country at least half as good. And that's pretty damn good.

What's next for you?

My primary interests are in social entrepreneurship, entertainment, strategic consulting, and fatherhood. With respect to social entrepreneurship, I want to use my entrepreneurial skills and apply them to solving social problems that plague our society. Hunger. Homelessness. Disease. Pay Day Lenders. In entertainment, my motivation is essentially the same: how can we collectively use our talents as artist, comedians, musicians, and filmmakers to address these same social ills? And I want to work closely with result-driven organizations by consulting with them on affecting social change. Last but not least, my most important job is to be the best father that I am capable of being. For now, that's enough to keep me busy.