

ALL JOKES ASIDE

Standup Comedy Is a Phunny Business

By Raymond Lambert with Chris Bournea

Foreword by Chris Gardner

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"As a black man, you must work twice as hard for twice as long for half as much" (41), author Raymond Lambert's father taught him. Lambert heeded many mentors, read voraciously, earned degrees, worked on Wall Street, nurtured relationships, stayed out of trouble, and along the way, built All Jokes Aside (Chicago, 1991–1998) into "the place to see headlining standup comedians of color with national reputations" (147). Chris Rock, Bernie Mac, Steve Harvey, Mo'Nique, and dozens more killed it at Lambert and partner James Alexander's club. *All Jokes Aside*, the book, operates on four levels: it is a family legacy, a love letter to the black community, a history of the comedy industry, and a sea of pearls for the aspiring entrepreneur. With a front-row seat, the reader watches Lambert navigate economic booms and busts and Chicago politics; innovate (using audience scorecards); and learn by trial-and-error (fining comedians who disregard the cue to end their set). Without any spoilers (such as, the 2012 documentary or the Starz network position), the through line is excellence. Full disclosure: The author and I could have crossed paths in Atlanta—he arrived at Morehouse as I was leaving for Sarah Lawrence. Decades later, we finally did meet—as neighbors in Chicago. Culturally specific, morally courageous, and impeccably tailored, *All Jokes Aside: Standup Comedy Is a Phunny Business* is a deeply satisfying read ripe for a curtain-call. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 27 June 2019