

The West Wing Weekly
7.08: "Undecideds"

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You are listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway and today we're talking about Episode 8 from Season 7. It's called "Undecideds."

JOSH: It was written by Debora Cahn, it was directed by Christopher Misiano and it first aired on December 4th, 2005.

HRISHI: In this episode there are three different challenges the characters are trying to manage. Congressman Santos is trying to manage the political response to the shooting of an African-American child by a Latino police officer. C.J. is trying to manage a crisis between China and Kazakhstan and Will Bailey is trying to manage a wedding between a reluctant First Daughter and her beau and the requirements of a White House. And Josh is trying to manage his relationship with Toby through an ill-advised visit to his house.

JOSH: Well-synopsized. What do you think of this episode?

HRISHI: When I think of this episode I can really only picture one thing, which is your cute butt [Josh laughs] sashaying away from me.

JOSH: Well if we are going to go there immediately...

HRISHI: Let's just save the best for first. Let's start with the best, the juiciest dare I say, part of this episode.

JOSH: I think if you are going to fashion an ass-specific shot, you need an actor with an ass. I've basically got like an ironing board. It's just flat, you know, I'm not better, worse. I don't feel body shamed or anything but I don't think, if I have any physical assets, I don't think my ass is among them. Baby's got board.

HRISHI: Aww. No. I think you're right, maybe it is not the biggest of booties but it's an ass-ette. [Both laugh] As you said.

JOSH: Yeah e-t-t-e meaning like a small dainty yeah

HRISHI: Yeah assette.

JOSH: I appreciated Mary McCormack's attempting to sell it but I felt a little embarrassed.

HRISHI: I also like that you used the phrase "fashion the shot" because again if you're gonna try and highlight a character's butt maybe putting him in loose fitting Dockers... [laughs]

JOSH: That's another thing, I know, you had to do this on casual Saturday?

HRISHI: [Laughs] Exactly.

JOSH: My God.

HRISHI: How about some nice, well-fitted, Hugo Boss pants there for you.

JOSH: Perhaps.

HRISHI: But nope.

JOSH: Help me out. I needed like the, whatever they have, don't they have some sort of prosthetic ass cheeks you can slip in a pair of loose Chinos? Help me out! [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: I thought it was great and I do think that Mary McCormack really did sell it, I loved her lingering look, [Josh laughs] her lingering look felt very real, though we often decry the objectification of characters on this show, in this case, because you are my co-host I was all for it.

JOSH: Alright, so be it. Otherwise how did you feel about this episode? Ass shots aside.

HRISHI: I thought that the issue that they were trying to address, with the central plotline was an interesting one. The struggle for Santos to present himself as a candidate who can transcend his race has come up a lot in the show in the past but there are these recurring instances, where he has to be faced with reality that he can't escape his ethnic background. And I really appreciate that. I think that's something that a lot of minorities face. Wanting to kind of have an existence that somehow can ignore the facts of their ethnicity, of their gender, of their sexual orientation and just sort of take it as matter of fact and then not have to have it be constantly like a topic of conversation. But when something like this happens there is no way for him to get away from it and he gets pulled in to that conversation. I thought that was a neat set-up and I thought it was a meaty premise. That being said, I think they could have gone further with it and maybe made it more complicated?

JOSH: Yeah, I agree with you. The word that kept flitting through my mind as I watched and re-watched this episode was "trappings" like this has the "trappings" "all the trappings" of a great *West Wing* episode and so why do I not feel like I'm watching a great episode of the *The West Wing*? And I feel like in all the threads that you opened the episode by outlining, things were either tepidly paid off or like you say there was a failure to kind of dig down deeper into what was going on. So first and foremost, I think, is the of course the A plot, and Santos and this police shooting and what it means for his schedule and what he's going to do and whether he's going to visit the family and whether he's going to address the church and what he's going to say and whether he has something to say. It was the build up for what could have been an epic or felt like it ought to have been an epic final scene and I had to re-watch that final speech to the church a couple of times to kind of get the gist of what he was saying and it's a little bit tepid. Ultimately what he's saying is just some sort of, first of all I think the conflict, or history of tensions between the African-American community and the Latino community was not greatly explored altogether. There was sort of a weak, what's the Bram word you came up with when Bram kind of creates a moment of exposition for us?

HRISHI: Ah, a tellabrama.

JOSH: Oh, that's right tellabrama. Which reminds me that a couple people wrote in including Nora Goldenmorakawa to suggest that instead of tellabrama it should just be telebram like a singing telegram.

HRISHI: Ah ha ha ha. Very nice.

JOSH: It was right there. It was right there in front of us.

HRISHI: I went too far to be too close to the thing that we already had.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: That's much better, telebram, so good.

JOSH: 'Cause there is a telebram. Early in the episode with his, I guess we find that he's of Venezuelan descent.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

EDIE: A little black-brown friction in the 'hood, if you haven't noticed.

BRAM: Hasn't been my experience.

EDIE: Yeah, you're a Venezuelan from Princeton.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He kind of tees up the moment for some sort of greater look at tension between the two communities. And with a little Googling around, I could see what was going on in California around those times and there was tension, there was a question of their socio-economic factors or questions of competition between those two communities. There were things happening in California schools. There were a couple fights between African-American and Latino students that really exploded into major confrontations. And I don't know, we just could have gotten a little bit more of that rather than just hearing "Oh Bram", "you're naïve, you don't know there is tension."

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I mean it never really goes beyond that, in terms of any kind of exploration of what those tensions or the conflict is about and then the ultimate resolution of it, where we kind of we even see the candidate throw a prepared speech into the garbage and then he has a kind of a desperate moment with his wife saying "I don't know, I don't know that I have anything to say."

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

SANTOS: They want me to make sense out of all of this and you know what? Helen. I got nothin'. Why the hell do they shoot a kid who is trying to surrender? There is some guy...[fades out]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And then he finds it in the moment. Then what he ultimately says kind of is like, "I don't know, let's not blame, let's be more positive." It's just kind of as undifferentiated and unspecific as.

HRISHI: Whatever was probably on that speech.

JOSH: Yeah exactly. I think so.

HRISHI: There was a line that felt like it should be the opening to a very long discussion that never happened.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

LESTER: That's just a way of saying Blacks hate Latinos and Latinos hate Blacks.

EDIE: Which is kind of true, but shouldn't be said.

LESTER: It's not true.

EDIE: Yeah, it's a little true.

LESTER: Perhaps some of the folks are a little riled about the coming in and taking of the jobs?

EDIE: Well, who do you know that wanted an avocado-picking job? Do you know how hot it is out there?

LESTER: Yeah. We had about enough of picking with the cotton.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's an enormous statement to make in a TV show like *The West Wing* and then taken for granted without having any kind of dramatized or even expository backup.

JOSH: I agree. That's a broad brushstroke. The deepest exploration into the conflict that we get then is that couplet of conversation about avocado picking.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: I mean that's the sum total of digging down as it were in to [cross talk] the conflict.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: Yeah between Edie and Lester. So, there is an invocation of slavery, but how that reinforces this idea that these two communities hate each other isn't ever really backed up in a way that felt satisfying or in a way that felt like responsible, I guess.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. One of the things I thought that was interesting is from the moment that Donna informs the Santos campaign that there has been this shooting and a 12 year old African-American kid has been killed by a police officer and then soon after we learn that it's by a Latino police officer, it's and this I kind of thought was interesting, there's never really a moment, even an inhalation of "Oh, what a loss, what a horrible thing." It's immediately analyzed from the political point-of-view and optics and what they're gonna do which probably is or it may well be, realistic. We may be slightly disappointed in our heroes like wow they didn't even have the moment of like "Oof, what a horrible thing." It's immediately...

HRISHI: Right, the humanity of the actual situation gets passed aside.

JOSH: Right. And then it never subsequently really is. Even the kind of final speech by Santos which we understand is a bit of a hit because the applause builds and eventually, he kind of walks off to this sort of exultant clapping from the church audience. That felt as sort of cynically political as everything else in the discussion.

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean, in some ways the part that I liked most was the most sort of blatant flat-footed attempt to do something political around it which is when they go to visit the mother of the victim. You know, it's a terrible idea and it works out terribly. At first actually when I watching it, I was like I was so uncomfortable when Santos is talking to the mother.

JOSH: I thought actually she was particularly good in a tiny little brief turn.

HRISHI: Yeah. She was being too nice to him. Like it felt so much like a photo op and it felt so fake but she seemed so compassionate and just like "Yeah, that's ok, you're nice." She says:

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

BRENDA: Thank you. You're sweet to come.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, are they really gonna let? Like is this how the story is gonna play out? That he's gonna get away with having this like kind of shallow photo op but it's gonna work out? But then of course that's not what happens.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

AGENT: Please, step back, sir.

SANTOS: I'm Matthew Santos. I'm so sorry for your...

MAN: I know who you are. You need to take your people out of here and get your cars off the streets so her sister can get up the block and into this house. The family needs to be here, you do not!

SANTOS: Sir I just wanted...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That is actually my favorite part of this whole storyline where it's like yeah, you can't just go in there, swoop in, have a little mini-crisis of politics and identity and then just have it all work out. I wanted more of that, I wanted more of that mess.

JOSH: Yeah. I agree, that said I kind of liked the way it was handled where the mother sort of unexpectedly seems to have this kind of quiet compassion and will accept it at face value. You know "Thanks for paying your respects" kind of thing and then on the way out there's this sort of moment of tension and kind of the maybe conflict you were expecting.

HRISHI: Yeah. Totally. And Shelley Robertson is the woman who plays Brenda Burke.

JOSH: She was terrific.

HRISHI: Yeah. I want to give another shout out to a guest actor in this episode Cress Williams...

JOSH: As Lester.

HRISHI: Plays Lester. Which was awesome. Cress Williams is in so many great things but I saw him first I think in Sports Night. He played Steve who is the sports caster in "Dana Get Your Gun" trying to get back together over the newscast. Which is great.

JOSH: That's right. So he's a mighty Sorkin player. Even though I guess he's in post-Sorkin *West Wing*.

HRISHI: That's true.

JOSH: And I also liked the sort of just straight on acknowledgement of the role he plays in the campaign. Not that it's the entirety of his role. But he says at one point:

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

LESTER: You can't put me on a plane every time he's going to talk to a black person.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: He gets that there are certain situations where he can be helpful to the campaign just by his presence, but, they're also asking for his experience and his knowledge and what he

thinks and his opinion but he also gets that he's a presence in a room that can be helpful but like, it's not the solution to their issues.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's an interesting position to be in. I feel like I've had similar things [cross talk] in the past myself, where among people who I like and respect and I know who respect me but they there's still like a moment where I need to fulfil some kind of role as a person of color. Like that is representing something and it's just like "Yeah, ok, I mean the fact is yeah I am on board here and yes sure."

JOSH: [cross talk] Really?

JOSH: That's funny. I've had a small taste of that where I feel like I know that I've had friends occasionally say "Is it ok to say this?" about something that involves Jews, for the Jewish community. So it's really not my presence that is validating something but kind of trying to get my verbal imprimatur if that's the word for...

HRISHI: Right right.

JOSH: Like this is ok right? This is isn't anti-Semitic?

HRISHI: Yeah exactly. Josh, I need to call an exterminator 'cause I have bedbugs, is that ok?

JOSH: Hm. Well there you go.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: Ooh. That while Brad Stevens thing is unreal.

HRISHI: Oh my God. You hate to see it and yet the same time...

JOSH: Well the best thing about the Brad Stevens thing is he clearly just did what I often do which is just search for my name...

HRISHI: Oh no Josh! [laughter]

JOSH: On Twi... no I will, I want to see what people are saying. But when it's something negative I don't then respond to them and go "Hey, [expletive deleted]-hole", I get a kick out of whatever...

HRISHI: No, you reserve those for the people who actually do tag you in the tweet.

JOSH: Right exactly, have the respect to [expletive deleted] on my face.

[Both laugh]

JOSH: Maybe that's a bad way to put it. But yeah I love that basically he ego-searched found [cross talk] a negative reference to him that apparently it had 9 likes and no retweets and exploded it in to a much huger affair ultimately, likening it to The Holocaust. It was just like, someone else tweeted and I thought it was brilliant "To have an internet fiasco like this in the course of a day and a half that invokes The Streisand Effect and the, what's the mentioning the Gold?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Ego-searched, that's a good term.

HRISHI: Godwin's, Godwin's Law.

JOSH: And, Godwin's Law.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: In the course of a day and a half is astounding. An astounding self-destruction.

HRISHI: And should we just refresh people on Godwin's Law and The Streisand Effect?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: The Streisand Effect is just, there were there were photos of Barbra Streisand's house as part of this like coastal erosion research, which by the way there was something in *The West Wing* remember when there was this spy plane they tried to claim that it was just taking photos of coastal erosion which it actually was doing...

JOSH: [laughs] That's funny.

HRISHI: But it was actually also a spy plane. Here it was just coastal erosion. There were aerial photographs, but one of the photographs included Barbra Streisand's house as part of the Malibu coastline and she tried to get that photo suppressed and what ended up happening is this photo which was part of a project that was otherwise completely unknown by people, blew up and so many people ended up looking at this photo of Barbra Streisand's house instead.

JOSH: Of course. Right. Much like Brad Stevens brought on international attention to a tweet that had garnered no retweets and 9 likes.

HRISHI: He he, yeah.

JOSH: And then there's Godwin's Law which suggest that...

HRISHI: As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one.

JOSH: [Both laugh] Yes. So here and here's the tweet: It was Emily M. Farris, whose Twitter handle is @EMayFarris, "You have to be pretty spectacularly bad at the internet to be the new example of both The Streisand Effect and Godwin's Law in one week." [Hrishi laughs] Which I thought was kind of brilliant.

HRISHI: That's pretty good. Ok, back to our episode. But you know we had coastal erosion in there, there was a tie in.

JOSH: That's right. And James Brolin played Ritchie.

HRISHI: That's true. Oh, actually one other thing about Cress Williams, [cross talk] I said I was getting back to the episode but, one aside, about another role of Cress Williams, he played Wallace's dad in *Veronica Mars* which is a good excuse for me to mention that our friend Helen Zaltzman of *The Allusionist* has a brand new podcast with another friend of mine, Jenny Owen Youngs, where they're doing an episode by episode discussion of *Veronica Mars*.

JOSH: [cross talk] Sure.

JOSH: Oh, no kidding!

HRISHI: Yeah! And uh, it's on PRX, and you should go listen to that, they've put out two episodes so far. By the time this comes out they will have put out more. And it's really fun. They recorded a couple of them here at my place and even if you don't know the show, it's a good excuse to start watching just to listen to these two delightful ladies.

JOSH: What is their podcast called?

HRISHI: It's called *Veronica Mars Investigations*.

JOSH: Hmm. Very nice.

HRISHI: And you can find it at VMlPod everywhere.

JOSH: Right on.

HRISHI: Let's go to the Josh/Toby storyline. Speaking of politically myopic moves, just "Hi, showing up at your house."

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

TOBY: What kind of a stupid move you even coming here? Some reporter could have followed you.

JOSH: They didn't.

TOBY: They're pretty sly.

JOSH: I checked.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: When did Josh learn counter surveillance manoeuvres to know that nobody followed him or saw him going to Toby's house?

JOSH: Yeah. I was not instilled with confidence that Josh is so sure that he alluded observation.

HRISHI: But I love that Toby's not getting convinced at all...

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

JOSH: I checked.

TOBY: He checked. That's great. [phone rings]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. This seems rather high stakes for Josh to even ponder a visit to Toby.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I mean he's running the campaign of the Democratic candidate for President it could be the end of his association with Santos if he's caught right? Plus, also where's the ring of reporters? Like how did he possibly get, forget about being followed like [cross talk] where are the people who are camped out outside of Toby's who are curious to see who's coming in and out to speak to him.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. We were just hanging out.

HRISHI: Yeah exactly.

JOSH: Or to try to catch a quote from Toby himself in case he leaves his premises.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah, it's an enormous story and to think that he can just sort of waltz in and out, is crazy. But it also really betrays the whole reason why Toby ended up confessing in the first place. Right like the reason why Toby, who had been holding on to this, ended up

confessing was because of the ring of fire that was closing in on Leo and what it would do to Leo and the campaign, to Santos' campaign and sort of all of the ramifications that were about to hit if the grand jury investigated Leo and when he got subpoenaed. And Josh is like "Baah! Forget all that."

JOSH: "Eh, [expletive deleted] it." Yeah good point.

HRISHI: Let's tie us really closely together. How about a telephone?

JOSH: That seems much safer to have placed a call. And even then, I might have been concerned that his phones were tapped.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: That somebody might have been listening but far safer than just showing up just strolling in through the front door.

HRISHI: Send a telegram to Toby.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: Something. That being said, if we are willing to buy all of that, I did like that he came back the second time.

JOSH: Yeah, I did too. Because I had that moment, I had a moment where I thought "Was this the last time they're ever going to speak? Or ever see each other?" Like it felt like potentially terminal in terms of their relationship.

HRISHI: Yes. Yeah.

JOSH: I was happy that he came back and it also seemed characteristic of Josh both to do the enormously stupid thing that he did the first time and walked through the front door a second time but also it was just kind of sticking in his craw like "you don't think my guy is the guy!" and "Let's have this conversation." It's kind of it's like he just can't resist.

HRISHI: Yeah. I really liked it. But yeah that line that Josh has:

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

JOSH: I am constantly amazed at your ability to continue to be a bastard.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Is really the worst thing that I think anybody has said to anybody on *The West Wing*. Is that possibly true?

JOSH: Ha! Well I had that moment too where I thought that this is one of the areas where post-Sorkin years just give us new stuff that you wouldn't have had [cross talk] with Aaron. You would never have had this kind of conflict between two of the original core characters like this and they have, whatever else you think of the storylines and the plotlines, the relationship has grown and evolved and devolved [cross talk] in a believable way that's been interesting and kind of painful to watch.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean certainly people are mean to each other during the Sorkin years and people have incredibly sharp things to say to each other, but I think there's an ad hominem

level to this piece of dialog that feels different. And yet [cross talk] it also feels like a de-escalation of them getting into a frickin' fistfight.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: Which has also happened you know and I guess like if we're past that then yes this is ok, but it really, it's still it gave me a little bit of a gasp.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: But despite that yeah it seems like "Ok, well this is it. That's the end of their relationship." But no, he comes right back and I really like that. What I didn't like so much was Toby's reasons for not believing in Santos as "The Guy". Toby says that he does not seem Presidential and the reason why is because he was reluctant to run for President.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

JOSH: When presented with the opportunity...

TOBY: Men in that job shouldn't have to be presented with anything! It's for someone who grabs it and holds on to it! For someone who, who, who thinks the gods have conspired to bring him to this place! That destiny demands of him this service! You don't have that kind of drive, that hubris, how in the hell are you gonna make the kind of decisions that stump every other person in this country? How in the hell are you gonna hold that kind of power in your hands?

JOSH: You don't know he not that [fades out]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What about Bartlet?!

HRISHI: Yeah. Exactly. It's like once Josh Brolin, I was just thinking about Thanos holding that kind of power in his hand, but yeah, what about the guy that he helped get elected? What about the last 8 years of his life? I don't understand how that part is being conveniently forgotten.

JOSH: Yeah. I agree. Both that and just also the general message where Toby is essentially saying you have to be a power mad, ego-driven maniac in order to be President. Which I think there is an actually a kernel of truth to, I mean outside of *The West Wing* universe like I always think, a lot of the times we wind up with the politicians we get because you have to be a little bit mad and you know, to take the abuse and everything you're gonna have to live through. And there has to be this really really sort of sense that "I deserve this." Or just ego driven lust for power that attracts these kinds of candidates.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's the same reason why that study about CEOs showed that 1 in 5 CEOs have the same traits as psychopaths.

JOSH: Hhm. Yeah. But you would think Toby would recognize other qualities in a potential candidate because he once did.

HRISHI: Right. That he might feel the opposite. That someone who wants to be President, someone like Russell for example who clearly was ready to make his moves and Toby had so many issues with, is exactly the kind of person who fits this description and in fact the

kind of person who doesn't fit the description is by that quality somebody who actually would be a better President.

JOSH: Yeah. I had kind of hoped that Josh might go there in his response.

HRISHI: Right. But actually, he looks away. He blinks first, whatever, in this stare-down.

JOSH: Hm hm.

HRISHI: And Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

TOBY: Look me in the eye and tell me that you know. Without a shadow of a doubt. You know.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Josh isn't able to do that and Toby takes that as a sign that he's right and but I don't know...

JOSH: Also knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt seems rather, that's rather strict, a rather strict criterion for signing on to a campaign.

HRISHI: Exactly. That's the thing I was like, besides what you said, that Josh should make his impassioned defence about all of Santos' qualities and why he should be President that are genuinely felt by Josh as we've come to recognize. This idea that like 'Oh there's without a shadow of doubt.' Who has been without a shadow of a doubt? Can Toby say that about the President? Obviously not. He friggin' [crosstalk] leaked military secrets because he didn't think that he could trust the President's judgement to do the right thing. I mean it [crosstalk] seems hypocritical or forgetful.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Very good point.

JOSH: That said I'm pleased that it looks like post-prison Toby's going to have a robust speaking career.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: He's apparently getting offers already.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And we feel a little bit better about him. He'll be able to help support the kids.

HRISHI: I just, you just have to look at somebody like Oliver North to know that people who've been at that level land on their feet really regardless of what they've done.

JOSH: Yes. There's every reason to believe that Toby Ziegler will be on a subsequent season of *Dancing with the Stars*.

HRISHI: [laughs] Exactly.

HRISHI: I want to briefly touch on the China/Kazakhstan plotline and the reason why I say briefly is because I feel like it didn't even happen [laughs] in the episode. I know I watched scenes dedicated to it.

JOSH: Well that was another one that fell into my 'trappings' theory which is that here's a potentially is an international plotline that threatens literally to go nuclear and it's kind of like 'eh', it doesn't really 'eh' I don't know. Doesn't really take off. We don't really dig in again. We get finally I think the first credible mention of mini-golf in the series. [Hrishi laughs] I believe that Kate was playing mini-golf.

HRISHI: I see. I know. I was too stupid to live, I get it.

[West Wing Weekly Episode 3:10 H. Con-172 excerpt]

JOSH: So, you're actually taking it at face value. [laughing] I took it as a joke.

[both laughing hard]

JOSH: God you are cute. You think they actually went...

HRISHI: ...Oh, I'm so dumb. [laughing] I'm so dumb...

JOSH: Oh. We'll see. We'll throw this out to people as well. I could be wrong in this too.

HRISHI: No. You're right. You're right. You're right.

JOSH: I think she's making a joke. And he's playing along.

HRISHI: She's playing a joke, and he's just a good sport and goes with it.

JOSH: But now I like the image.

HRISHI: Oh, my God, I'm so dumb. [laughing]

[West Wing Episode 4.05 excerpt]

DONNA: I'm too stupid to live!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Charlie's caddying, carrying a bag with a single putter in it. "Mr. President".

HRISHI: [laughing] Wow.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: But yeah that doesn't amount to much. It's more, more than anything it feels like a pretext to get C.J. out of the wedding planning so we can stick Will in and that's yet another subplot that I feel like doesn't quite pay off on the comic potential that we're promised.

HRISHI: Yes. I think you're right. I think that was the idea. I was gonna say I don't know what the point of all those scenes are but I think it is supposed to be comic relief.

JOSH: I think so. And I perhaps I should blame myself. I kept watching it thinking like "Should I be funnier? Or is just that like the material isn't that funny?" Like it's, it feels like it's teeing up what should be brilliant like "Oh this fish out of water look at Will is gonna help plan this wedding!" But it's kind of mildly humorous at best.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah.

JOSH: Yes, he's short and he's holding two big dresses.

HRISHI: Yeah. I felt like Will really was given a too little credit in this episode in terms of not understanding, one, what an empire waistline is when he's holding the dresses. I mean Will would, that's not that obscure. I know what an empire waist is.

JOSH: I wanted him to say I say um-peer. But instead he's just like "I don't even know what we're talking about."

HRISHI: But the part about "no soft cheeses and no swordfish" you know for the [crosstalk] for the wedding, and Ron Canada has to say:

JOSH: [cross talk] Because she's pregnant.

[West Wing Episode 7:08 excerpt]

Under Secretary of State Ted Barrow: Swordfish, tuna, soft cheeses. Am I the only one in the room with kids?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I don't have children.

JOSH: [sings] Ron Canada!

HRISHI: I understand the reason. I understand what that means when you have to leave it off the menu.

JOSH: Yeah. I wanted Bram to walk in and say "What is with the cheese and the fish?"

HRISHI: [laughs] "I've never had a problem with it."

JOSH: Yeah. It was weak. There was a lot of there was a fair amount of weak sauce.

HRISHI: And not just Will. It's Will and C.J. in there with Ron Canada as Barrow and C.J.'s like "Oh. Oh she is pregnant." Come on. You know who has a great episode though? In this one?

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

C.J.: Margaret!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: She's reliable.

HRISHI: This is a great one for Margaret. Margaret pushing the trout.

JOSH: It's always great.

HRISHI: She understands why.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

MARGARET: I'm asking you to take my word for it because you're a busy woman and sometimes you don't need any more information than I give you.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love it. I love that. Margaret is a great gatekeeper.

JOSH: Hmm hm. Am I mistaken or is there just like one shot of Kristin Chenoweth as Annabeth in the background of the church and that's the sum total of her contribution to this episode?

HRISHI: Is that right?

JOSH: Yeah, she's in the opening credits and then I think there's just one little shot where you see her sitting in the church presumably because she accompanied Leo to the church and that's it.

HRISHI: You know, I didn't even see her in there.

JOSH: Well I could be wrong but I don't think I am. I'll try to find the still and we'll put it up.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah.

JOSH: And I thought 'Wow! They actually made her come to work.' But she has no dialogue, I think. That is a very, very highly paid background actor.

HRISHI: You're right. Annabeth does not have any lines. One of my other favorite parts of this episode is the song that gets performed in the church.

[West Wing Episode 7:08 excerpt – song "Oyaheya"]

Music Plays

Singer: Oyaheya, Hallelujah, Oyaheya.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Both before and after.

HRISHI: Yes. Exactly.

JOSH: The soloist before Santos steps up is pretty incredible.

HRISHI: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

Singer: I am listenin', to the music, of the holy, holy spirit, oh what a song...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This is one of those instances where getting to do this podcast has given me access to just like the dream *West Wing* fan experience.

JOSH: Experience?

HRISHI: Yeah. Because I now have courtesy of music supervisor Ann Kline, I now have the full recording from the episode, without dialogue or anything like that, of this song "Oyaheya" that was made for this episode. I wrote to Ann to ask her about it and she sent me the actual recording and it's so good.

JOSH: Are we allowed to share it?

HRISHI: I don't think so.

JOSH: Oh. Too bad.

HRISHI: Yeah. But I asked her how that this song ended up being chosen for the episode and she said that it was still a little foggy for her but she remembered that Chris Misiano wanted something unexpected and so she started doing some research and she found the Agape Choir and that's who performed it. But if you wanna listen to the song it's called "Oyaheya" it's by Rickie Byars Beckwith and we'll put a link up to it on our website and you can find versions of it on Spotify.

JOSH: And you can listen to “Oyaheya” in its entirety.

HRISHI: Excuse me. Were you just doing, me?

JOSH: Yeah. That’s right.

HRISHI: Just then.

JOSH: That’s right.

HRISHI: Anybody else do a good Hriway out there?

[West Wing Episode 4.05 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Were you doing me just then?

SAM: I was offering an answer.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: You were doing me.

SAM: I may have slipped into it. Yes.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Anybody else do a pretty good Bartlet? It’s talent night here at Debate Camp. Anybody wanna do a little skit?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That song title’s also the answer to ah what’s that OutKast song? Oh yeah. “Hey Ya!”

HRISHI: [Laughs] No.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: Well let me ask you this.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: How complicated was it to plan your own wedding?

JOSH: I would say it was not super complicated to plan my wedding. My wife Melissa and I had a great time planning it. It was pure fun. We had kind of a dream wedding.

HRISHI: Were there a lot of people there? I wouldn’t know because I wasn’t invited.

JOSH: That’s true. But in fairness I hadn’t met you yet.

HRISHI: Chhh. Like that’s an excuse.

JOSH: And also you were in third grade.

HRISHI: I went to weddings in third grade!

JOSH: I can’t even remember how many people were at my wedding, but not a lot.

HRISHI: You don’t need to spare my feelings. At this point it’s in the past so you can just be honest. Everybody else was invited.

JOSH: That’s true. Everybody else that I had met before or was yet to meet.

HRISHI: Hm hm.

JOSH: Ok. This is a conversational dead end. What else we got? How was your wedding?

HRISHI: Actually, I related to this scene when they're going through the entire list of all the people that need to be invited because we faced something similar...

JOSH: Oh.

HRISHI: When trying to figure out our wedding plans because my family obligations are so immense, not just actual family but family friends, Indian people that I grew up with that my parents are friends with and my now wife Lindsey has such a small family in comparison [crosstalk] that you know? She had listed every single person she was related to in the world and I had a list that was about 6 times as long and I had only gotten to the people who I knew my parents would want to invite from Massachusetts.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Ah.

JOSH: Oy vey [laughs]

HRISHI: And the place we were getting married was not very big. We were only able to probably hold about 100 people or so and my list alone was, I was a hundred and sixty as I was just winging it, just off the top of my head, ok all these people. So, when they're going through the fourth page of names and Ellie and Mr. Ellie are looking shell-shocked, I saw a similar kind of look on Lindsey's face. So, we ended up having to do something completely in the end and divide our wedding into sort of two events. One that was smaller and just our really like core mutual friends. And then a separate reception that my parents held for us that was [crosstalk] and we kind of gave them carte blanche and we said you can invite whoever you want and we'll sit and we'll do whatever you need us to do but we needed to just sort of separate the two.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Oh.

JOSH: Good solution.

HRISHI: As I was thinking that maybe these two could elope and have the wedding that they actually want and then have a sort of more ceremonial wedding at The White House.

JOSH: Not a terrible idea.

HRISHI: Doesn't seem like "Fruit Fly Guy" is gonna come up with that plan though.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: Actually this was a plan that was suggested to me by a friend of mine, illustrator Susy Garmany, who is a fantastic artist, and had a similar kind of dynamic with her husband who has a very small family and she has a very large Persian family and extended family and so anybody else who's sort of facing this situation I highly recommend splitting it up. Let your parents have a day for themselves. All you have to do is give them that day and then you can have the wedding that you want separately.

JOSH: Good advice.

HRISHI: If you have any other any other marital questions or dating questions, feel free to send them to memos at *The West Wing Weekly* and Josh and I will answer them as they come in.

JOSH: We'll take a crack at it.

HRISHI: Any kind of advice really at all.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: We're here for you. The episode takes place on a Saturday. Much like this recording.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: I see you and I have both sort of made the unwritten joint decision to also dress casually today.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: You don't know this, that I have I have a separate webcam just pointed at your behind.

JOSH: I was gonna say, "How does my ass look?" You beat me to it.

HRISHI: Talking to you here on FaceTime I also have another second camera "Butt Time".

JOSH: "Ass Time".

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: I liked the production design and just the realization of where Toby lives.

JOSH: Yes. I do too.

HRISHI: He doesn't have the dream house and he doesn't live with his family.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: And I like seeing him in that space. For a character who we've known for so many years it was nice to get something in this episode that felt like it flushed out his character even further.

JOSH: Yeah, right. For a guy who kind of lives his job, it was interesting to see him at home.

HRISHI: Yeah. His house is nice.

JOSH: Yeah. It seemed nice enough.

HRISHI: I mean you could have also imagined a place that was very spartan and more depressing.

JOSH: That's true. Yeah. That's true, it felt lived in and homey.

HRISHI: Yeah. But I think that's an impressive feat to be able to add more dimension to a character who has already been so fully and deeply inhabited by an actor over 140 episodes or whatever it's been.

JOSH: Yeah. It's true. We should have we should get in touch with Richard and ask him how long it took to design and build that set.

HRISHI: According to his specifications. [laughs]

JOSH: According to his specifications, exactly.

HRISHI: Do you wanna talk about the fact that *The West Wing* Writers' Room was I believe entirely white this season?

JOSH: Hm. Do we know that for a fact?

HRISHI: Just going through the list. Debora Cahn, Eli Attie, Lawrence O'Donnell, Alex Graves, Peter Noah, Josh Singer, Bradley Whitford, Lauren Schmidt, John Wells.

JOSH: That's a whole lotta white.

HRISHI: That's it. That's everybody who wrote an episode of *The West Wing* in Season 7. Maybe there were other people in the Writers' Room? I don't know.

JOSH: I think they would have [laughs] never mind...

HRISHI: Like Lester.

JOSH: Lester. Exactly. I was gonna say I think Cress Williams I think they...

HRISHI: They would have put that writer in the credits here.

JOSH: Hmm. Well.

HRISHI: It's certainly not to say that a writer can only write about matters of race that directly pertain to them, but it is something when you got a show this big with this kind of a budget and this kind of reach to take on an episode like this, take on this kind of storyline.

JOSH: Well maybe that's why it didn't delve deeper. I mean it's...

HRISHI: Yeah. That's what that's what I'm sayin'. Yeah. Ok. So, I think the part I liked about Santos' speech the most...

JOSH: Sure...

HRISHI: Was the beginning of it. Before he kind of builds into the...

JOSH: Platitudinous generalities?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: In the very beginning it feels...

HRISHI: He gets kind of a slow clap in fact.

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: They're like a (makes 3 or 4 clap sounds getter faster and louder) Yeah, ok.

JOSH: Wait a minute. He is right. We should work together. Yeah. No. Early on in the very beginning moments of his speech it feels dangerous.

HRISHI: Yes. Exactly.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

SANTOS: My prayers are with Ronnie Burke's family today. I know yours are too. My prayers are with Officer Rafael Martinez and his family, they are not ...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I thought that was gonna lead him to a more explicit conversation about what happened in that it's not entirely clear and we shouldn't jump to, I don't know I thought he was gonna kind of explore the sort of messiness of situations like these and speak to, I don't know, reserving judgement or allowing more information to come. I don't know. I didn't. I thought he was just going somewhere else other than, quickly he sort of went from... And then he said actually something that I thought was more, provocative than I expected, he

said something about the all the different people that he blames [crosstalk] including the kids' parents.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Yes.

HRISHI: And the kid! I mean I liked all of that, that's the part that also felt dangerous too. I include that in that beginning section where I felt like 'Oh, something's gonna happen here.'

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

SANTOS: I blame the kid. He stole a car. I blame the parents. Why couldn't they teach him better? I blame the cop. Did he need to fire? I blame everyone I can think of and I am filled with rage.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But the he did sort of like the opposite, the inverse of Godwin's Law where it's like you can't talk about some tragedy without invoking... The longer you talk about some tragedy in a political context the probability of you invoking Martin Luther King becomes closer to one.

JOSH: Hmm. There you go. Yeah, well said. Yeah, he went from this dangerous place to a sort of generally unspecific, sanitized statement.

[West Wing Episode 7.08 excerpt]

SANTOS: And we will walk together. And work together.

CROWD: Yes. Uh-uh.

SANTOS: And slowly, slowly, too slowly, things will get better.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: YEAH!

HRISHI: Slow clap!

JOSH: Yeah. I like, let's clap together, slowly. And before too long it'll just sound like general applause.

HRISHI: And in closing, choir, what was the name of that OutKast song?

JOSH: Oh yeah, "Hey ya!"

HRISHI: And on that note.

JOSH: Thanks for listening to another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*.

HRISHI: Thanks to Margaret Miller, Nick Song and Zach McNees for their help making this episode.

JOSH: You can follow us on all manner of social media and really, seven seasons into this thing how have you not done that already?

HRISHI: People have sent us messages like, 'Oh we're gonna miss you all when the podcast ends.' and I thought well you could follow us on social media and then it'll feel like we're still connected.

JOSH: That's right. So, get in now.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Radiotopia, the podcast network that we are a part of along with so many great podcasts. Check them all out at Radiotopia.FM. Also check out *Veronica Mars Investigations* at VMIPod.com.

JOSH: Why not?

HRISHI: We're coming up on the 20th anniversary of *The West Wing's* debut.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: So, set a thing in your calendar so you can tweet about it if you're on Twitter. September 22nd 2019 will be the 20th anniversary.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

BOTH: What's next.

[Outro Music]