

The Free American.

A Brief Explanation & Summary

Every weekday morning, from 10 to 12 EST, Clayton Randall Douglas hosts his Internet radio show, *The Free American*. It's a total train wreck from an informational (or production) standpoint, but serves as an incredible petri dish for comedy, spawning some of the most ridiculous antics available on-air today, in any medium.

Clay is incredibly profane, virulently anti-Semitic and homophobic, breathtakingly arrogant, delusional, and 100% incapable of handling any sort of broadcast, let alone going solo for two hours. His odd syntax and funny voice – a mush-mouthed, stroked out, and/or drunk-sounding drawl – only compound his struggles and add to the show's unintentional hilarity. The format varies, but usually is broken down as follows:

- **~70 minutes of bizarre YouTube clips:** (topics include: shape-shifters, aliens, the “inner earth,” chemtrails, and discussion of various conspiracy theories). Due to their, to put it kindly, “fringe” nature, these clips are rarely well-produced to begin with, but Clay ‘plays’ them on air by holding his telephone up to his laptop speakers, further reducing their quality. After passing through BlogTalk's horrible hosting interface and reaching the listeners, they usually unintelligible.
- **~40 minutes of interactions with callers:** though some may play nice at first, I have yet, in four months of listening to the show, to hear a single serious caller. The pranksters fill the host's queue at every moment the show is on air, despite Clay's attempts to clear the lines, or otherwise screen his calls. A sizeable chunk of the callers claim Jewish faith, homosexual orientation, or a combination thereof, which rarely goes over well, resulting in blow-ups along the lines of “Auschwitz was a ****ing COUNTRY CLUB!” or “Homosexuals should be put back in the closet; I'll bring my own hammer, AND NAIL IT SHUT!” If the pranks are less ideologically charged, Clay usually slaps the offender with his catchphrase, “DUMB MOTHER****ER” before closing the connection.
- **~10 minutes of shouting at the show's chat room:** in between clips or calls, Clay angrily addresses the “trolls” in his BlogTalk online chat room, cursing and kicking them out, sometimes shouting another trademark phrase, “BEWM!” upon doing so. When he's especially annoyed, the show gets derailed completely. Adding to the fun, “troll” forums run simultaneously on both Discord¹ and Reddit²; Clay monitors both but, having no power therein, can only stew as he is openly mocked.

To add a little more color as to what the various pranksters are working with, Clay:

- Has quite a unique look – he's tall, fat, and crazy-eyed, with a ponytail and stereotypical biker garb.
- Spent several years in prison due to a marijuana conviction. The search-and-seizure was illegal, but Clay represented himself and lost anyways. His appeal, that “he did not have effective assistance of competent counsel in the trial court,” was summarily rejected, and is now oft-studied case law.³ Clay, who was born William Horace Helms, Jr., changed his name as a result.
- Used to publish a smutty, horrible motorcycle magazine, and has written several horrible PDF ‘books’ that read like an 8th grader's wet dream (*Trevor Cameron: Terrorist Hunter*, etc.).
- Now has a website⁴ that's even more poorly put together (and insane) than his show.
- Lives in a trailer, yet brags about his a ‘160 IQ’ and ability to read “1000 words a minute, with 90% comprehension.” Tells totally unbelievable stories about his physical (and sexual) prowess as well. Also believes that Wi-Fi outages in said trailer park are the result of government operatives.
- Represents himself as a “Vietnam-Era” vet with a Special Forces background and claims that only a near-death experience in training prevented deployment. A FOIA request revealed that he washed out of basic training in less than 3 months.⁵ Also leverages “Vietnam Vet” hat to get free meals even though he spent the war stateside (and discharged), selling anti-war merchandise.
- Claims to have been the target of CIA, and Mossad plots and assassination attempts, yet constantly calls the local FBI office, local PD, etc. to complain about the pranks.
- Has aided in the formation of several ‘militias,’ been kicked out of several bikers gangs, and run out of several towns. 3 wives have also divorced him.
- His girlfriend, Kandi Clanton, owns a business called Kandi's Klasic Komputers. Seriously.

¹ <https://discord.gg/29ZxvFf>

² <https://www.reddit.com/r/ClayDouglas/>

³ <https://www.courtlistener.com/opinion/2408087/helms-v-state/>

⁴ <http://freeamerican.com/>

⁵ Several “Stolen Valor” websites have profiled Clay, and he usually can be found melting down in the comment sections, attempting to defend himself.

Frequent callers to the show include:

- 1) **Richard “Scumley” Shumley:** a frequent caller from the pre-Stern prank era and perhaps the original “troll,” Scumley would blast Clay on-air, accusing him (and equally insane guests such as white supremacist John De Nugent) of being pro-Jewish, etc. Though he hasn’t called in months, Scumley lives rent-free in Clay’s head to this day; any time a guest mentions Scumley’s name, or uses his catchphrase, (“lardo”), Clay becomes even more unhinged.
- 2) **Robert:** the show’s greatest vocal talent, if not its all-time greatest “troll,” Robert called daily for almost all of 2017 as a litany of characters. His titular moniker, an “investigative researcher,” would call to claim possession of evidence that Clay had not taken an oath at the onset of his brief military service — rather, he was in Acapulco, in a yellow speedo and drunk on margaritas, engaging in sex acts with the local gay population. He also called in as “Leroy,” a BLM operative, “Demetria,” a black transvestite claiming on-air to be in an open relationship with Clay and send him lewd pictures of ‘herself’ off it, and hundreds of other one-off callers who’d get under Clay’s skin. Most incredibly, Robert would repeatedly impersonate infamous UFO conspiracy theorist Deborah Tavares, fooling Clay for entire segments, being found (and cursed) out, and getting back on-air weeks later with the exact same, exaggerated voice.
- 3) **Steve ‘Brandano’:** a chipper fellow calling from Colorado, Steve claims to be the show’s producer. On-air and in his ‘official capacity,’ he offers production advice to Clay, addresses the audience, promotes fictitious events, and claims to sell advertising slots. Clay does not take any of this well, and frequently threatens Steve with physical violence or offers awards for information leading to his capture.
- 4) **Barry Schwartz:** A gay, Jewish florist calling daily from the St. Louis area, Barry broke into the scene claiming to have purchased advertising from Steve, and then demanding a refund since his commercials were not being played. Since his debut, Barry has become embroiled in several other sagas that have played out on Clay’s airwaves. Though Clay has sworn for several months to never take another call from the “609” as a result, Barry still gets several minutes of airtime basically every episode, and has recently announced plans to undergo a sex-change operation.
- 5) **Jeff in the Charlotte-Raleigh-Winston-Salem-Greensboro area:** The quintessential comedic straight man, Jeff usually plays nice, but gets on Clay’s nerves by mentioning Caitlyn Jenner, ‘accidentally’ promoting *YourFreeAmerican.com*⁶, or suggesting that Confederate soldiers were cowardly, gay, or transsexual. Jeff occasionally co-hosts a *Free American*-themed “Wrap-Up Show” on BlogTalk, styled after Howard Stern’s post-show programming.
- 6) **Doug Dannager:** Proudly announcing himself as “Doug Dannager, gay man and gay journalist,” Doug calls in to interview Clay and to promote his farcical ‘coverage’⁷ (fake interviews, fake pictures, etc.) of all things *The Free American*. Clay does not take well to Doug’s confident persona, stentorian timbre, or overt orientation, but begrudgingly keeps him on air, as he often believes Doug has info that will allow him to finally apprehend and punish his tormentors.
- 7) **Professor Dumbledore:** A posh-sounding, ‘tenured professor’ from the University of Texas, Dumbledore calls in to challenge Clay to debates, attack his research bonafides, etc. Clay has called UTA to complain (and even now knows of the obvious Harry Potter connection), but still cannot help but engage in pitched battles on the air whenever the professor calls to make war. Hasn’t called in for some time, but Clay still gets an unnaturally high number of British callers as a result of Professor Dumbledore’s influence.
- 8) **Dr. Joshua Higgins:** A “Professor of Jewish and Homosexuality Studies at DeVry,” Joshua Higgins calls in as several more minor characters as well, but mainly gets on Clay’s bad side by exposing his myriad lies, and by posting (and monetizing) Clay’s shows on YouTube. Dr. Higgins also co-hosts the Wrap-Up show with Jeff, where he frequently convinces Clay to join him on-air.
- 9) **Johnny Longfeather:** An “Indigent American” (borrowing Clay’s pronunciation of “indigenous”), Johnny hails from “Seymour Indiana, home of John Mellencamp.” He calls in to provide updates on his whacky, ill-conceived protests for “indigent” rights, and to complain about his neighbors’ inability to appreciate his adherence to Lakota traditions.
- 10) **Michael Fratto:** An employee at a printing business local to Clay (Big Spring, Texas), Michael calls in to inform Clay that ‘his’ (or Steve’s) various orders (banners, posters, etc.) have been completed, and to demand payment. Michael has fallen even further from Clay’s good graces, as he recently admitted to printing 18,000 copies (translated into Hebrew) of Clay’s various books, which somehow ended up in Juarez, Mexico, before they were ‘stolen’ by Barry.

(Several of the above characters correspond extensively with Clay off-air, adding to the machinations)

The prank calls, however, are not just your run-of-the-mill nonsense. While many guests do simply call in with one-off jokes, a majority of the calls feed into intricate, interconnected storylines, and could far more accurately be described as hardcore gaslighting. Frequent and lesser-known callers work together to construct insane, hilarious narratives that are accepted as truth by the conspiracy-minded Clay.

⁶ YourFreeAmerican.com was a fake site started by the pranksters that purports to be Clay’s official domain. It offers fake advertising, classifieds, a “gay dating central,” and more. Callers frequently reference having bought books, made donations, etc. on this site, much to Clay’s dismay.

⁷ <https://www.reddit.com/r/ClayDouglas/comments/7go9wu>

Some storyline highlights:

- 1) **Advertising:** Soon after Steve pronounced himself the show's producer, other callers began to bombard the show, telling Clay they had bought advertising from Steve and demanding to know when their "30 second spots" would be played. Several local businesses' 'owners,' most notably the manger of Dell's Café (Clay's favorite restaurant), began to angrily demand refunds. Clay responded by putting disclaimers on his website, and opening every show with some variation of "I do not have a manager, and I do not sell advertising," but this only emboldened his callers. *YourFreeAmerican.com* was established and heavily promoted during the month or so over which this narrative took place, further adding to Clay's fury, with Steve called in daily to admit to having taken advertng dollars and to claim to have directly deposited all proceeds into Clay's bank account. Callers identifying themselves as local police, city council members, and copyright lawyers also weighed in on-air, adding to the fun. Clay visited several of the aforementioned local businesses, whose proprietors told him they had never heard of Steve. Yet despite this, Clay still firmly believes Steve and his affiliates to be scamming other enterprises using *The Free American's* good name and reputation.
- 2) **The Meet & Greet:** In celebration of the successful advertising campaign, Steve and Co. began promoting a show "Meet & Greet" at Dell's Café, where fans could meet up, have Clay "sign their PDFs of his book," and more. Other listeners contributed promotional posters, ads on the Internet, doctored audio promotions (with Clay's real voice), etc. As a result, Clay was hammered with nonstop calls about the 'event,' with listeners RSVP-ing, asking him for VIP upgrades, posing clarifying questions, demanding refunds, etc. Clay began adding a "there is no Meet and Greet!" disclaimer to his show opening, and even staked out Dell's Café on the Saturday of Veteran's Day (the cheekily-chosen day of the event), lying in wait at a nearby parking lot with nunchucks and pair of binoculars. The "trolls," however, were one step ahead. By the time Monday rolled around, Doug Dannager's recap of the weekend⁸ was published to *YourFreeAmerican.com*, and a bevy of callers (Steve, Barry, and Doug included) informed Clay that the event had been moved to the nearby Casa Blanca Mexican restaurant, where it had gone off without a hitch, even convincing the real Clay that an imposter had been there in his stead, delivering a pro-LGBTQ+ address. In the three days that followed, more callers verified this version of the events; most famously, Jose, a purported employee of the venue, called in to complain about the homosexual acts committing during the event ("used condoms in the toilets, horrible things done with the taquitos"), demand recompense for damages done to the restaurant as a result of the "man-pile" and "dunk tank," and offer Clay security footage of what transpired. Ever happy to believe a conspiracy, Clay quickly convinced himself that the "trolls" were too afraid to show up to Dell's (and too stupid to recognize an imposter), and bought the entire narrative, reporting Barry, Steve, etc. to the police before heading over to the restaurant to collect the non-existent footage.
- 3) **The Counterfeited Books:** Michael Fratto claimed to have (with help from prominent, Jewish scholars) translated all of Clay's books into Hebrew and printed 18,000 copies. When Clay demanded the unauthorized copies be returned to him, Michael admitted that he had also accidentally sent the books to the wrong address, to Mexico rather than Israel. With Michael playing along, a 'Mexican farmer' began jerking Clay around, claiming that the books were stored in his barn (and providing photos). Then, just before said farmer was able to ship them back (as Clay refused to travel to Mexico to pick them up), the books were reported stolen. At this point, listeners began to call in, telling Clay they had bought the copies online. The 'Mexican Consulate' also began to call Clay, informing him that one of Barry Schwartz's vans was found outside the purported crime scene. Clay was sent extensive evidentiary photos, etc. from those involved, and attempted to involve the FBI, Big Spring PD, and the State Dept.
- 4) **Gay Dating Site Signups:** After a caller informed Clay that he had posted his profile to several popular gay dating and hookup sites, Clay began to receive a barrage of calls from 'interested' men,⁹ each listing their height, weight, and biographical information calmly as he exploded in anger.

⁸ <https://www.reddit.com/r/ClayDouglas/comments/7cdl4y>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwVzMV6UseM>