

Race, Camp, and Transnational Stardom: Performing Latin American and Caribbean Cultures on Reality TV

Reality TV has become a global phenomenon, with shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *Project Runway*, and *The Amazing Race* reaching audiences around the world. These shows often feature contestants from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Latin America and the Caribbean. This article explores the racial politics and cultural dynamics of these shows, arguing that they both reinforce existing racial hierarchies while also providing a platform for marginalized voices and perspectives.



Creating Carmen Miranda: Race, Camp, and Transnational Stardom (Performing Latin American and Caribbean Identities) by Mel Rolfe

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Race and Representation on Reality TV

Reality TV shows have often been criticized for their lack of diversity. A 2016 study by the University of Southern California found that only 21% of

reality TV contestants were people of color. This lack of representation is particularly troubling given the fact that reality TV is often seen as a reflection of the real world. When people of color are underrepresented on reality TV, it sends the message that they are not as important or as worthy of attention as white people.

However, there are a growing number of reality TV shows that are featuring more diverse casts. These shows are providing a platform for people of color to share their stories and experiences. For example, *RuPaul's Drag Race* has featured a number of drag queens of color, including Bianca Del Rio, Bob the Drag Queen, and Sasha Velour. These queens have used their platform to speak out about issues such as racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Camp and Cultural Authenticity

Camp is a style of performance that is characterized by its exaggeration, irony, and artifice. It is often used to celebrate marginalized cultures and identities. On reality TV, camp can be used to create a sense of authenticity and community among contestants of color. For example, on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, drag queens often use camp to express their own unique identities and to celebrate the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community.

However, camp can also be used to reinforce racial stereotypes. For example, on shows like *The Amazing Race*, contestants of color are often portrayed as being more emotional, more expressive, and more flamboyant than white contestants. This can lead to viewers perceiving people of color as being less intelligent or less capable than white people.

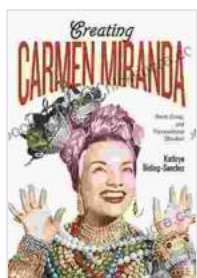
Transnational Stardom and the Politics of Visibility

Reality TV can provide a platform for transnational stardom. Contestants who appear on these shows can gain international recognition and fame. This can lead to opportunities for them to pursue careers in entertainment, fashion, and other industries. However, transnational stardom can also be a double-edged sword. Contestants of color who achieve transnational stardom may find themselves under pressure to represent their entire race or culture. They may also be exoticized or stereotyped by viewers.

For example, RuPaul's Drag Race has been praised for its diversity, but it has also been criticized for its focus on white drag queens. Some critics have argued that the show's producers favor white drag queens over drag queens of color. This has led to accusations of racism and tokenism.

Reality TV is a complex and contradictory phenomenon. It can both reinforce existing racial hierarchies and provide a platform for marginalized voices and perspectives. The racial politics and cultural dynamics of reality TV are constantly evolving, and it is important to be aware of the ways in which these shows can both empower and marginalize people of color.

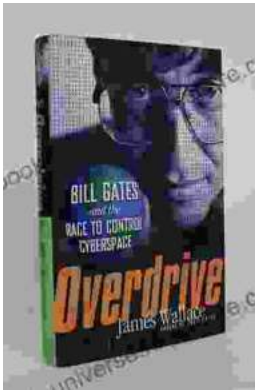
As reality TV continues to grow in popularity, it is important to demand more diverse representation and to challenge the racial stereotypes that are often perpetuated on these shows. We must also be aware of the ways in which transnational stardom can be both a source of empowerment and a source of exploitation for people of color.



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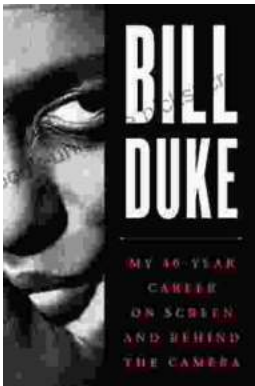
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