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Authenticating Whiteness: Karens, Selfies, and Pop Stars

Allison Faix
Coastal Carolina University

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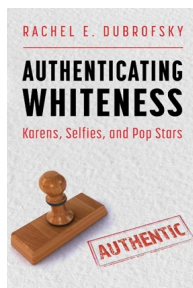
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REVIEWS

Authenticating Whiteness: Karens, Selfies, and Pop Stars



Rachel E. Dubrofsky
Jackson: University Press
of Mississippi, 2022
ISBN: 9781496843326
184 p. \$99.00 (Hbk)

Authenticating Whiteness provides a scholarly analysis of the ways in which authenticity is portrayed as a strategy of whiteness in popular media sources. The author uses close readings of a wide variety of popular media types to show how authenticity—the quality of seeming spontaneous and unable to suppress one’s true feelings or emotions—is frequently portrayed in popular media as a positive trait of white people, particularly white women – a.k.a. Karens. Because authenticity is depicted as such an admirable quality, it can create sympathy in viewers that works to excuse or obscure the perception of any harm caused by the person’s behaviors—they might be seen, for example, as having been so overwhelmed by their emotions that they can’t be faulted for their actions, even when those actions were hurtful in serious, consequential ways.

Each chapter in the book focuses on analyzing examples of authenticity and how it works from a wide range of media sources, including musicians (Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift), television series (UnReal), media coverage of Donald Trump, and examples drawn from viral internet content (a tweeted-out selfie, trending YouTube videos). The book also examines the pervasiveness of surveillance in culture, and the relationship between close scrutiny and authenticity. It asks questions about how authenticity works in a culture where so much of everyone’s lives are so often under some sort of surveillance, and looks at the performance of authenticity, where behavior that is seen by viewers as spontaneous may sometimes really be a carefully planned performance of au-

thenticity, created for an audience predisposed to value spontaneity and realism.

The author of the book, Rachel Dubrofsky, is a professor of Communication at the University of South Florida. She has published articles in Communication Studies journals including *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Surveillance & Society*, and *Communication Theory* and has also edited a book-length collection of essays, *Feminist Surveillance Studies*. Well-known for her scholarly expertise in reality television, she is frequently consulted by magazines and other media sites about topics related to the portrayal of gender and race on popular reality television shows. This book is a continuation of the research she has conducted throughout her career.

Although the book looks at popular topics like television shows and social media trends, it is a thoroughly academic study that is grounded in theory and well-documented. The topics are attention-getting, but the analysis is serious and asks important questions about who gets to be authentic, and why, and why the answers matter. The final chapter in the book examines how authenticity can get in the way of the work of antiracism, and how recognizing and addressing this problem is important.

Better suited for academic libraries because of its scholarly nature, this book would be a good addition to libraries with collections related to communication studies, media studies, and race relations. There are very few other books listed with the same set of subject headings in WorldCat at the time of this review, so this book should complement other works by adding a new consideration of these topics.

Allison Faix, Coastal Carolina University

Dreams in the New Century: Instant Cities Shattered Hopes and Florida's Turning Point

Gary R. Mormino
Gainesville: University Press
of Florida, 2022
ISBN: 9780813069340
548 p. \$34.95 (Hbk)

