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Book Review: Beyond Glossy Covers: How Magazines Signify and Shape Identities

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Women's Magazines in Print and New Media. Noliwe Rooks, Victoria Rose Pass, Ayana K. Weekley (Eds.) Routledge, 2017. 254 pp. \$145 hardback, \$38.47 ebook.

The essays in *Women's Magazines in Print and New Media* represent an exciting collection that offers historical context and modern perspectives of magazines, from print publications to online periodicals and social media. An interdisciplinary effort, the book represents the work of scholars from diverse fields—including film and visual studies, journalism, critical race studies, history, and gender studies.

Unsurprisingly, the essays are far from uniform. For example, one piece juxtaposes the coverage of HIV and AIDS in *Essence* and *Cosmopolitan*, while a later chapter features an interview with Kimberly N. Foster, the founder and editor-in-chief of *For Harriet*, “a multiplatform digital community for Black women that reaches over 2 million visitors a month.” In form, the two pieces have little in common, but in substance both acknowledge the significance of gender and race. These concepts are central to all matters in *For Harriet* while in *Essence* race is—on the surface, at least—a secondary consideration to content that explicitly appears focused on women's fashion, lifestyles, and success.

The book's 13 chapters, hand-picked from papers presented at Cornell University's 2013 Women and Magazines conference, are organized into three sections: “Narrative Constructions of Race and Gender,” “Between Production and Reception,” and “From Creation to Cultural Analysis.” The array of analyzed periodicals is purposefully diverse. Some eschew explicit activism. For example, the opening essay is a historical take on the construction of middle-class womanhood in *Ladies' Home Journal*. The magazine, which once decried women's entry into college, later heralded this cultural shift as colleges domesticated their curricula to encourage middle-class white women's refinement in preparation for marriage. The next essay, about shaving ads in the quintessential mainstream publication, the *Saturday Evening Post*, helps us consider what we may well have overlooked: depictions of the “right” kind of man—a corporate, buttoned-down, middle-class, and, of course, clean-shaven professional.

Social justice and personal-political intersections, however, also have a strong presence. An interview with Tamara Lomax, co-founder and editor of *The Feminist Wire*, offers insight into how one's personal experiences can help shape journalistic pursuits. A chapter about Irving Penn's 1960s and '70s African photo essays in *Vogue* offers a counterpoint to mainstream magazines' long-standing habit of trivializing non-Western cultures. But do not rush in commending *Vogue* because that essay is preceded by one detailing the history of blackface, racialized representations in the same magazine.

Not all of the essays are about magazines as recognizable and self-identified brands producing content within the constraints of a routinized editorial process. Some of the chapters explore certain hazier and more magazine-like online reader communities. For example, an essay that explains and analyzes the hashtag wars between #TeamLightSkin and #TeamDarkSkin in the Black beauty blogosphere highlights the mediated division of color within the Black community. Another chapter, about “white trash” celebrities, focuses on celebrity gossip media but also, in part, on user-generated websites, such as online fan communities.

Scholars of magazine content, production, and cultural clout will delight in these fascinating examinations of gender, race, community, culture, and political activism. The essays offer new insights into magazine matters that we might have taken for granted or overlooked altogether. The collection also offers educators a wide array of possible reading material for various courses. The trick here is to select one or two to which students would be most likely to relate. Some of the essays are more accessible than others. Pick and choose, or read them all.