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Crossing Over: Hybridity and Hegemony in the Popular Media

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Abstract

In this essay, I assess how the threat of “hybridity,” as represented in the mediated construction of Jennifer Lopez, is negotiated and contained in the context of contemporary popular culture. I argue that, in this case, hybridity is shored up against a narrative of authentic “otherness,” secured via a particularly gendered and sexualized discourse of excess, in ways that implicitly address a crisis of racial/ethnic integrity and ultimately serve to preserve whiteness. This case study of the contemporary cultural management of hybridity provides meaningful insight as to the contenance of whiteness in a (post)modern age as well as to how its borders are marshaled.

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Notes

A version of this essay was presented at the 2003 annual conference of the National Communication Association, in Miami Beach, Florida.

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exotically). The specter of transnational hybridity signifies that gender is a complex intersection of race/ethnicity, class, and other factors. Molina Guzmán and Valdivia, 214. Similar dynamics of hybridity and/or panethnicity have characterized other celebrities (especially actors) historically, including Delores Del Rio, Raquel Welch, Rita Hayworth, and Anthony Quinn, for instance, as well as, more recently, Cameron Diaz, although those dynamics play out differently in each case, and both are distinct from the case of Jennifer Lopez, as well. In many of these cases (Welch, Hayworth, and Diaz), ethnicity was—is—effectively erased or ignored (see, e.g., Valdivia, "Geographies of Latinidad"). In other cases (especially Del Rio), her hybridity was almost exclusively manifest in the homogenization of Latin identities, broadly construed (e.g., she was cast as Mexican, Brazilian, Spanish, and even

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