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Authors

Chad Raphael, *Santa Clara University* (https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/do/search/?q=%28author%3A%22Chad%20Raphael%22%20AND%20bp_author_id%3A%5B%2A%20TO%20%2A%5D%29%20OR%20bp_author_id%3A%28%220e5d4355-618b-41b0-ae03-7a5eb0c2753d%22%29&start=0&context=7599519) Follow (<https://network.bepress.com/api/follow/subscribe?user=ZTlxNjM0OTc1YTI5ZDBmZQ%3D%3D&institution=MzRhZjg1MDNmNWVjZDAzYQ%3D%3D&format=html>)

Document Type

Book Chapter

Publication Date

2009

Publisher

New York University Press

Abstract

From the sea change in American television in the 1980s emerged a programming trend variously described as “infotainment,” “reality-based television,” “tabloid TV,” “crime-time television,” “trash TV,” and “on-scene shows.” The welter of terms created by television critics to describe these new programs masked their underlying connection as a response to economic restructuring within the industry. In this essay I offer a rough categorization of these programs, sketch the industrial context from which they emerged, and point to the economic problems they were meant to solve. I focus mostly on the distinctive conditions of prime-time series, putting aside made-for-TV docudramas and entire cable channels (such as Court TV) that may have similar production practices and genres.

Chapter of

Reality TV: remaking television culture (<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08301.0001.001>)

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Recommended Citation

Raphael, C. (2009). The political-economic origins of Reali-TV. In S. Murray & L. Ouellette (Eds.), Reality TV: remaking television culture, 2nd Edition. (pp. 123-140). New York: New York University Press.

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