

Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture

John Strausbaugh

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A refreshingly clearheaded and taboo-breaking look at race relations reveals that American culture is neither Black nor White nor Other, but a mix-a mongrel.

Black Like You is an erudite and entertaining exploration of race relations in American popular culture. Particularly compelling is Strausbaugh's eagerness to tackle blackface-a strange, often scandalous, and now taboo entertainment. Although blackface performance came to be denounced as purely racist mockery, and shamefacedly erased from most modern accounts of American cultural history, Black Like You shows that the impact of blackface on American culture was deep and long-lasting. Its influence can be seen in rock and hiphop; in vaudeville, Broadway, and gay drag performances; in Mark Twain and "gangsta lit"; in the earliest filmstrips and the 2004 movie White Chicks; on radio and television; in advertising and product marketing; and even in the way Americans speak.

Strausbaugh enlivens themes that are rarely discussed in public, let alone with such candor and vision:

- American culture neither conforms to knee-jerk racism nor to knee-jerk political correctness. It is neither Black nor White nor Other, but a mix-a mongrel.
- No history is best forgotten, however uncomfortable it may be to remember. The power of blackface to engender mortification and rage in Americans to this day is reason enough to examine what it tells us about our culture and ourselves. Blackface is still alive. Its impact and descendants-including Black performers in "whiteface"-can be seen all around us today.



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