body, thereby highlighting both HBO’s innovative practices but also the overwhelming limitations of gay representation elsewhere on television.

Di Mattia’s essay is a fitting end to It’s Not TV, with its sophisticated integration of queer theory, postmodernism, and formal analysis and its manifold interrogation of the relation of HBO programming to television in general. As such, it also indicates a larger point: The Essential HBO Reader is a solid read for the HBO enthusiast, but It’s Not TV is really the essential HBO reader for academics.

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BOOK DATA: Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones (eds), The Essential HBO Reader, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009. $50.00 cloth; $25.00 paper.

MICHELE SCHREIBER

Interrogating Postfeminism:
Gender and the Politics of Culture
ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra

Perhaps because postfeminist popular culture is such a contested area despite numerous panels at academic conferences on the topic (including the one convened in 2004 at the University of East Anglia, U.K., by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, from which this resulting book takes its title), only two full-length books had addressed it through 2001. Tania Modelski’s Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a “Postfeminist” Era (1991) and Sarah Projansky’s Watching Rape: Film and Television in a Postfeminist Culture (New York University Press, 2001) were published ten years apart and Negra’s What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism (Routledge, 2009) is the only other specialist volume to have appeared since then. The paucity of scholarly literature is all the more surprising given that related nonacademic books such as Susan Faludi’s Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women (Crown, 1991) have been bestsellers. Thus Interrogating Postfeminism, a productive and diverse collection of articles, usefully helps to fill a gap in film and media studies literature.

What is postfeminism and what is its impact on popular culture? Tasker and Negra offer the following definition, which is worth quoting at length: “Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment. Assuming full economic freedom for women, postfeminist culture also (even insistently) enacts the possibility that women might choose to retreat from the public world of work . . . As this suggests, postfeminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self” (2). In the world of postfeminism, the struggles of the second wave of feminism—“the personal is political,” community activism, equality, reproductive rights—have withered away to such trivial forms of “empowerment” as plastic surgery and “cardio striptease” exercise classes.

Tasker and Negra contend that postfeminist media texts are intriguing because they rarely resist or critique feminism explicitly. Instead they undermine feminism by implying that its goals have been accomplished and so it is time to move on or, even, to enjoy the benefits. “The ‘taken into accountness’ permits an all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal” (28), as Angela McRobbie puts it in “Postfeminism and Popular Culture,” one of the anthology’s most illuminating articles. She goes on to discuss a quintessential postfeminist text, the 2001 film Bridget Jones’s Diary, arguing that it invokes feminism only to end up celebrating the most conservative of happy endings, the traditional marriage ceremony. Thus, according to McRobbie, “feminism is only invoked in order to be relegated to the past” (37).

Interrogating Postfeminism is not intended to be a comprehensive account of the topic. The editors state that the volume “speaks to an emerging body of work that . . . remains unsure about its material, limits, and theoretical territory” (11), though one of the most valuable parts of the book is the lengthy introduction itself. The territorial uncertainty is reflected in the anthology’s organization, which with its lack of subsections has no obvious trajectory and might be at risk of raising more questions than it answers, particularly for the reader who is new to the debate about postfeminism. However, this diversity is also a kind of strength as the anthology moves beyond postfeminism’s “greatest hits,” such as Sex and the City and Ally McBeal to include a wide array of texts, including Riot Grrrl music (Anna Feigenbaum, “Remapping the Resonances of Riot Grrrl”), the children’s show Dora the Explorer (Sarah Banet-Weiser, “What’s Your Flava?”), and even Quentin Tarantino’s films (Lisa Coulthard’s “Killing Bill: Film Feminism and Film Violence”).

Among the highlight contributions is Sarah Projansky’s “Mass Magazine Cover Girls,” in which the author summa-
izes an exhaustive analysis of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine cover stories since 1990. She argues that the magazines’ cover girls fall into two opposing but often overlapping categories: “at-risk” (in danger, needing to be saved) or “can-do” (fully capable and in charge of their future). Girls who fall between these two categories arouse cultural anxiety, uncovering “an uneasiness, ambigousness, and ambivalence about girlhood” (48). Projansky’s fascinating analysis has applicability for both postfeminism and what is becoming known as girls’ studies, and is particularly relevant in light of the recent wave of “tween” film and television texts, such as the *Hannah Montana* franchise. Another standout piece is Suzanne Leonard’s “I Hate My Job, I Hate Everybody Here,” which ventures into the previously underexplored intersection of independent cinema and class. Leonard’s analysis of *The Good Girl* (2002) in terms of its portrayal of the economic and social realities underlying women’s work provides a refreshing and enlightening contrast to the idea of work as some sort of “lifestyle choice.” Overall, feminist film and media studies, cultural studies and women’s studies graduate students and scholars should welcome *Interrogating Postfeminism*. The articles go beyond the expected and open up numerous avenues for further investigation. © 2010 Michele Schreiber

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RICHARD GRUPENHOFF

**Oscar Micheaux: The Great and Only—The Life of America’s First Black Filmmaker**

by Patrick McGilligan

Oscar Micheaux (1884–1951) was born in Metropolis, Illinois, the fifth of eleven children of former slaves. At sixteen he left the family farm to seek his fortune in Chicago, and for the next four years he worked at a variety of jobs: shoe-shine man, coal miner, stockyard worker, and Pullman porter. In 1904, at the age of twenty, he took his meager savings and purchased a homestead in South Dakota, determined to become a successful farmer. But ten years later, after his attempts at farming had failed, he took to writing about his experiences, and then turned to filmmaking. Between 1914 and 1919 Micheaux reinvented himself and, as Patrick McGilligan writes in this biography, “finally found the combination of autobiography, social criticism, fiction, and show business that was his natural calling” (128). A self-taught filmmaker, Micheaux wrote, produced, directed, edited, and distributed the first full-length feature film about the black experience, *The Homesteader*, in 1919. During the next thirty years he would produce more than forty other race movies, making him the most prolific African American filmmaker to date. McGilligan begins his book with the assertion that Micheaux “deserves to be considered in the same breath as the sainted D. W. Griffith” (2) and then spends the remainder of it attempting to justify this claim.

Micheaux and Griffith were contemporaries, born less than a decade apart, and they died within three years of each other. Griffith’s reputation is based primarily on his 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*, an aesthetic masterpiece for its time, but a racist diatribe nonetheless. Indeed, one of the reasons Micheaux and other African American filmmakers took up filmmaking was to counter Griffith by depicting African Americans in a positive light. In fact, Micheaux’s second film, *Within Our Gates*, made in 1920, was Micheaux’s response to *The Birth of a Nation*. But while Griffith had a large budget for production and advertising, Micheaux had very little money to back his film, and *Within Our Gates* was soon forgotten, and was lost for the next fifty years. Griffith became famous while Micheaux, like his film, was consigned to the margins of film history.

This is not to deny that over the years some have been aware of Micheaux’s significant place in film history; still, little has been known about his life until now. Even the basic facts are sketchy: Micheaux’s birth date, for example, remains a matter of conjecture and the true circumstances of his death have never been determined. But McGilligan has carefully pieced together information derived from previous scholarly research, newspaper articles, oral histories, legal records, and Micheaux’s own semi-autobiographical films and novels. Micheaux was an independent artist producing black-cast race movies on shoe-string budgets for a relatively small black audience. Couple these economic and social conditions with Micheaux’s deep-seated stubbornness and his prevarications, deceptions, and deliberate misdirections, and you have a complex life story that is a formidable task to reconstruct. Yet McGilligan does just that in this detailed and comprehensive narrative. It is well written and accessible to all, scholars and film buffs alike. Students new to the study of Micheaux are particularly well served by the valuable chapter notes, index, and filmography. The book also includes twenty-four high-quality photos.

According to McGilligan, there were many reasons why Micheaux was marginalized. First, of course, was his race. Making race movies was neither popular nor profitable. There was always the lack of money for production, the lack