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**Review of Television in Black-and-White America: Race and  
National Identity, by Alan Nadel**

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*Television in Black-and-White: Race and National Identity.* By Alan Nadel. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005. xii, 224 pp. \$29.95, ISBN 0-7006-1398-6.)

In *Television in Black-and-White America*, Alan Nadel offers analysis of segregated fifties and sixties television by way of artful analogies to the small screen—including that of the homogenizing influence of post-World War II interstate superhighways that replaced old roads and dissected and ignored communities of color. Employing the example of an older roadway in the book's conclusion, Nadel writes, "the actual Route 66, like its television series namesake, no longer exists" (p. 182).

However, as fan clubs, historians, and even southern California commuters will readily attest, that highway is not gone. Route 66 does indeed exist—in bits and pieces, broken fragments, and relatively long, unpopulated stretches that are still very much a part of the nation's landscape. The point is not to chastise Nadel for a small overstatement, but to say that it is emblematic of this book's larger problem, namely that *Television in Black-and-White America* works so intently to rearticulate a now-familiar argument—that Cold War era television helped "codify and deploy whiteness as the norm"—that it overlooks the details, moments, and counternarratives that would productively complicate, and thus further, this history of commercial television (p. 3). Rather than examining differences in the social activities that constitute daily "television," Nadel constructs a tidy television programming totality. He does so in part by making generalized arguments about decades of television while substantively scrutinizing relatively few programs and relying too heavily on narrative analysis of selected television episodes. Such an approach has been previously criticized as underreading "the complex relationships between texts" deploying whiteness norms "and the televisual fields (organized by flow, genre and historical moment) that surround them" (Sasha Torres, *Black, White, and in Color*, 2003, p. 4). For those reasons, among others, students of television and popular commercial culture will most likely find this work more promising than satisfying.

The last half of this volume is the most focused and interesting, as Nadel's focus moves to a more specific study of the "adult westerns" that dominated network prime-time lineups during the late fifties and early sixties (p. 86). The author demonstrates his considerable skills as a textual analyst when he examines, for example, specific episodes of *Rawhide* and *Wagon Train*, and links those programs to popularized mythologies reproduced by the Disney Corporation as well as other commercial industry interests. In chapters 4 and 5, Nadel employs narrative analysis to persuasively demonstrate how adult westerns "relentlessly erased the is-sue of race" while attesting to the supremacy of whiteness, becoming "the idealized projection of Cold War norms" (p. 129).

In the end, I wished that Nadel had focused his entire book on popular television's negotiation of western and new "frontiers" (such as space) during the period in question. And I was hungry for more discussion of how western and new frontier projects and their contexts reflected, as Herman Gray has put it, "that the hegemonic racial order is continually contested, renewed, and realigned in commercial popular culture, [but also] that television itself constitutes and expresses contradictions of and contestation to that order" (*Watching Race*, 1995, p. 8).

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