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Mediated Moral Populism: What's Left of Social Justice?

Susan Boyle's appearances on *Britain's Got Talent* inspired an outpouring of online commentary extolling the triumph of the underdog, decrying power inequities and discrimination based on sex, age, weight, ableness, innocence, and amateurism. This popular impulse to social justice affirms current arguments about the facilitation of moral populism by the interactive infrastructure at the juncture of reality TV and internet fandom. One can see the Boyle spectacle as the fruition of a Simon Cowell marketing strategy, another example of commodifying dissent (Frank); as the way the participative moral narrative of the contest show embeds an illusion of equity and access that encourages such a collective impulse (Jenkins); as an artifact of the mechanisms of participation and the collective appetite for authenticity embedded within the codes of reality TV and online viewer interaction (Andrejevic). But do these explanations politically eviscerate the historical impulse to social justice?