

South Carolina reality TV series raises eyebrows in polite society

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Whitney Sudler-Smith, Thomas Ravenel, Craig Conover, Cameran Eubanks, Jenna Lee King and William Shepard 'Shep' Rose III (L-R), the cast of 'Southern Charm', a new national reality television show on the Bravo channel about six wealthy, single, haCHARLESTON, March 3 — Bravo TV's new reality show "Southern Charm," set in Charleston's historic downtown among the moss-draped oaks and mansions on the South Carolina coast, promises to reveal "the Neverland of the South, where men don't want to grow up."

The show is raising eyebrows in the refined city ahead of its premier today night. It features a cast of six wealthy, single, hard-partying local "aristocrats," including Thomas Ravenel, a polo-playing former South Carolina politician and state treasurer.

A member of a prominent family that settled in the Lowcountry around Charleston in the late 1600s, Ravenel, 51, is the son of a former congressman and a self-made millionaire with a master's degree in business administration.

Some established Charleston families aren't happy about the show or Ravenel's role in it, and are worried the series will embarrass the city.

Prioleau Alexander, 51, a marketer and advertiser who lives in nearby Mount Pleasant and is an old school chum of Ravenel, said the show sounds like an exercise in narcissism.

Will people watch it?

"Yes, simply for the puke factor," he said.

Charleston, once home to colonial society and debutante balls, has evolved into a cosmopolitan city and international tourist destination.

"These guys are going to make Charleston look like a city full of drunken, promiscuous snobs and nothing could be further from the truth," said Alexander. "Of course we're a completely drunken city, but we don't get drunk on TV," he added.

“What we’re doing is not representative of every Charlestonian,” Ravenel contends. “I’m sure that the city will be portrayed as the beautiful, lovely city that it is,” he told Reuters in an interview from Florida, where he was laid up with broken ribs after a polo fall.

Known to his friends as T Rav, Ravenel owns a plantation on Edisto Island, south of Charleston, and is a member of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

His Bravo biography does not mention that he resigned from state office when he was indicted on cocaine charges and was sent to prison in 2008.

Bravo describes the cast as a mix of established political families and new money, comprised of “Southern bachelors who suffer from ‘Peter Pan Syndrome’ by refusing to settle down; and the women in their lives who challenge them to grow up.”

The series tracks the ups and downs of local politics and business, as well as love affairs, with family reputations at stake.

“In Charleston, you’re only as good as your last garden party and one social screw-up can taint generations to come,” Bravo says.

Some Charleston residents have taken to Facebook to express their mortification.

“There must be some way to stop this tripe,” wrote Charleston resident Kent Parker, who proposed disrupting shooting of the series in public places.

“I wish the ‘tight knit posh society’ would keep to themselves. They do not represent this town,” added Charlie James, a local radio personality and voice actor who lives in Mount Pleasant, on the outskirts of Charleston.

The Charleston City Paper, a weekly publication, is hosting a viewing party at a local pizza joint.

“You need a community with which to commiserate,” reporter Stephanie Barna wrote, inviting viewers to comment on Twitter using the keyword