



CELEBRITY NATION

How America Evolved Into a Culture of Fans and Followers

by [Landon Jones](#)

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Why the adulation of celebrities is a recipe for social decay.

One of the most eye-popping facts in this book is that Kim Kardashian has 326 million followers on Instagram as of September 2022. This simple data point shows the level that celebrity culture —i.e., being famous mainly for being famous—has reached in the U.S. and the world. Jones is a former editor of *People* magazine, a publication that played a role in building the celebrity machine, although now he has a jaundiced view of the whole business. The author identifies Elizabeth Taylor as one of the first to turn her life into a curated performance. After she stopped making movies, she generated millions of dollars in endorsements and eventually her own product line, which set a pattern for future generations. The big change, notes Jones, came with the social media revolution and the scale it provided. “The marriage of social media with celebrity culture was made in branding heaven,” he writes. “Just as the broad reach of television had once overshadowed the traditional legacy print media, so too did social media offer unparalleled reach, frequency, and intimacy, especially to younger consumers.” Paris Hilton was one of the first to grasp the potential of social media and understood that even the occasional scandal could be good for business. There were a host of imitators, and the formula worked best if it included a touch of vulnerability, which helped the manufactured image of authenticity. Jones points to surveys showing that many teenagers count being famous as their life goal, which underlines how celebrities have elbowed aside people of actual accomplishment. A few celebrities have used their profile and wealth for good works. Jones hopes that this will become more common, but he doesn’t sound convinced. However, the author provides a solid examination of how we got here.

A disquieting, well-researched exploration of the celebrity phenomenon and its consequences for our society.