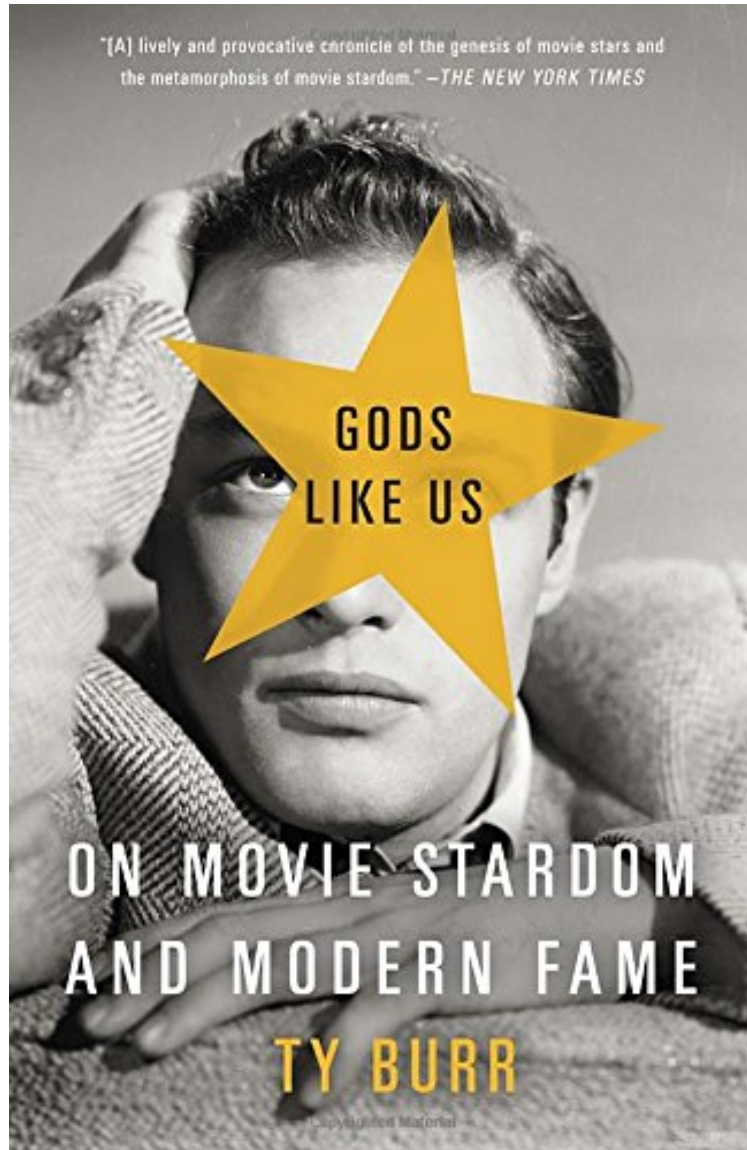


(Read now) Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame

Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame

Ty Burr

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Ty Burr : Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Much more than an examination of stardom; a philosophical examination of identityBy Alan L. ChaseI love Ty Burr's writing and his deep insights. So when I learned that he had written "Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame" I immediately ordered the book. When it arrived, I placed it in the queue on my "To Be Read" shelf, and there it sat for far too long. Each time I would reach for it,

another title near Burr's book would whisper to me: "Shouldn't you be reading something IMPORTANT - history, biography, a classic novel, a business book?" I finally pulled the book from its place on my shelf and dove in. I am sorry that I waited so long. This book is IMPORTANT. It is not a fluff piece about Hollywood, but a reasoned examination of the arc of stardom and fame from the Silent Film era to the era of Selfies and Twitter. It is also a very well thought-out philosophical examination of the nature of identity. As always, Mr. Burr writes with artistry and clarity. His prose is beautiful and provocative. Here is a sample to help to convince you of the truth of what I aver: "Here, in the end, is the revelation that all of stardom works to deny, the dirtiest and most unfathomable secret . . . It's that identity itself is the grandest illusion of all. What if the sum of who we are is not a magical inner seed that only fame or self-actualization can cause to bloom? What if we're not all the things we wish for or blog or project, but simply the actions we take for ourselves and for others - our marks upon the waking world? What if we are what we do, not the other way around? Stardom is the best dream we've yet invented, a luxurious fantasy of the fixed self. The question we need to ask ourselves is how long we want to keep sleeping, and what we'll dare to do when we finally wake up." (Page 352)

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. *Gods Like Us* is a perceptive study of the nature of stardom in film, radio, television and modern media. By C. M. Mills. Ty Burr is the movie critic for the Boston Globe. Burr has watched thousands of movies over his long career. He writes with entertaining insight on the popular genres of film, music and home entertainment in the 21st century. The book: a. Burr gives us a mini-history of the birth of the movies and stars who emerged in the silent era from Florence Lawrence in the very beginning of the industry to such silent icons as Charlie Chaplin; Gloria Swanson; Rudolph Valentino; Norma Talmadge and many more. The movies were begun by corporate executives who came from Central European backgrounds. They were mainly Jewish (with the exception of Zanuck) but created the studio system. Major studios emerged in the golden age. MGM; Paramount; RKO; Twentieth Century Fox and Warners were the leaders. b. Burr examines several of the great films and stars of the early sound era such as Clark Gable, John Wayne, William Powell and such femme fatales as Greta Garbo, Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford and Betty Davis. c. The most fascinating part of the book for this reviewer was Burr's study of post World War II film and music. He traces the emergence of Marlon Brando, a more realistic actor and graduate of the Actors Studio. We see the rise of Elvis Presley and the impact of rock music on our culture. Television is explored with such early stars as Milton Berle, Lucille Ball and the TV situation comedy. d. Burr describes the careers of such modern stars as Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks and Harrison Ford. Our culture today is one in which we ourselves can become stars through the use of Facebook, YouTube and other modern innovations. This is a fascinating book for movie lovers which will both teach and entertain the reader. Well done!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. *Persona in the Internet Age* By Paula Alvarado. The first and major idea worth taking from this book is the concept of celebrities as personas. I thought this was very interesting, and it has completely changed the way I see not only famous people but even pairs who have received some kind of recognition. When developing this concept through history the book drags a bit, it could have been shorter. But the chapter on internet and the way it has allowed everyone to experience something similar to being a celebrity is so interesting it paid for the whole book. Someone said in another review that the question of why we care about celebrities is not explained, but I thought it was well explained in that chapter. "What draws us to other people's fame is the hope of discovering a self that never dies." (I don't think I'm spoiling anything by quoting that since you have to read what comes before and after to fully understand it.) A great read for people curious about the sociological aspect of fame and the way the concept is changing, even disappearing to leave place for something else.

With 8 Pages of Black-and-White Photographs In this captivating history of stardom, Boston Globe film critic Ty Burr traces our obsession with fame from the dawn of cinema through the age of the Internet. Why do we obsess over the individuals we come to call stars? How has both the image of stardom and our stars' images changed over the past hundred years? What does celebrity mean if people can now become famous simply for being famous? With brilliant insight and entertaining examples, Burr reveals the blessings and the curses of celebrity for the star and the stargazer alike. From Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin, to Archie Leach (a.k.a. Cary Grant), Tom Cruise, and Julia Roberts, to such no-cal stars of today as the Kardashians and the new online celebrity, *Gods Like Us* is a journey through the fame game at its flashiest, most indulgent, occasionally most tragic, and ultimately it's most culturally revealing.

Praise for Ty Burr's *Gods Like Us*: A penetrating, lively cultural history of movie stardom. . . . [Burr] has a witty, readable style, but don't let that pop facade fool you. There is substance here, as he dissects how each period in American history finds or creates stars to serve its needs. *The New York Times Book Review* [A] lively and provocative chronicle of the genesis of movie stars and the metamorphosis of movie stardom. . . . Any Hollywood history can describe a star's X factor. But not many film historians can see the whole equation as Ty Burr does in *Gods Like Us*. . . . He offers original thinking about the audience factor. *The New York Times* *Gods Like Us* is a standout, as enjoyable as it is informative, when it comes to the astrology of public entertainment. *The Wall Street Journal* Wide-ranging. . . . Superb. . . . Capacious and thought-provoking. . . . Burr presents a fresh take on the medium's history, eschewing the standard roll call of moguls and filmmakers, preferring to understand the triumph of Hollywood as a carefully

orchestrated harnessing of the ferocious power of celebrity. The Boston Globe Superb. . . . One of the great books of its kind. . . . A brilliant and even profound history of stardom. The Buffalo News David Thomson, watch out! In the pithy new book *Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame*, Boston Globe film critic Ty Burr delivers thoughtfully epigrammatic descriptions of movie stars, actors, and celebrities. He wittily traces the progression of these characters from the early days of film to their current incarnations on the internet, from the young Frank Sinatra, who looked like a freshly hatched ostrich but his singing voice promised a slowly crested big-band orgasm, to Harrison Ford, who is able to make grumpiness seem sexy. . . . *Gods Like Us* soars when it meditates on individual stars and their personae. . . . The whole book is worth guzzling for the golden nuggets on movie stars and celebrity sprinkled throughout. IndieWire A lively anecdotal history of stardom, with all its blessings and curses for star and stargazer alike. From Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin to Archie Leach (a.k.a. Cary Grant) and Marion Morrison (a.k.a. John Wayne), from Tom Cruise and Julia Roberts to today's instant celebs famous for being famous, Burr takes us on an insightful and entertaining journey through the modern fame game at its flashiest, most indulgent, most revealing and, occasionally, most tragic. The Huffington Post Burr is an ever-witty presence on the page (see: Clara Bow, with her blat of raw sexual energy, or Arnold Schwarzenegger, this slab of Black Forest ham). A terrific writer, then, yes, but also an astute reader of history, as in his near-breathless analysis of three midcentury seismic shifts: the emergence of Marlon Brando, television, and rock roll. Burr gives each subject a good chew. Austin Chronicle Burr's *Gods Like Us* is a constantly interpretive history of and idiosyncratic meditation on stardom. . . . It is an important work, precisely because it is such a difficult task that is all too rarely undertaken. The Daily Beast Straightforwardly chronological, tracing an unbroken line through more than a century of celluloid heroes, eventually landing on a truth: The success of these silver-screen idols says just as much about us as it does about them. Entertainment Weekly *Gods Like Us* is an entertaining, wide-ranging account of the way movies created a new kind of fame, and changed the world in the process. Ty Burr's encyclopedic history of movie stardom is gossip (in the best of sense of the word) and insightful, and his cultural analysis is as provocative as it is persuasive. Tom Perrotta, author of *Little Children* and *The Leftovers* The sharp, illuminating *Gods Like Us* is as enjoyable and addictive as the greatest bucket of movie popcorn you've ever had. For anyone who loves cinema, this is a must own book. Dennis Lehane, author of *Live by Night* and *Mystic River* [A] solid analysis of celebrity. . . . In this fascinating cultural study, film critic Burr explores the rise of stars in the early film industry. . . . Burr chronicles the star systems: silents, talkies, movie factories, postwar studios while citing factors such as television (evoked not glamour, but ordinariness), music (Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, Madonna), MTV, HBO, and YouTube (teenagers have at their disposal the fundamental moviemaking facilities of a Hollywood studio in the 1930s). Publishers Weekly Burr has both a fan's and scholar's grasp of the history of film, and he travels along a celluloid highway that extends from the early days of Thomas Edison to Zac Efron. Of greatest interest to the author is our evolving notion of celebrity: of what celebrities mean. . . . A focused history of films. Kirkus s About the Author Ty Burr is the film critic for The Boston Globe. For more than a decade he wrote about movies for Entertainment Weekly, and he has also served in the film acquisitions department of HBO. He estimates that after thirty years of serious movie-watching, he has seen on the order of 10,680 films. On a good day, he remembers 7,000 of them. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introduction: The Faces in the Mirror What are the stars really like? That question is not the subject of this book. The subject of this book is why we ask the question in the first place. Still, people want to know. In my day job, I'm a professional film critic for a major metropolitan daily newspaper and throughout the 1990s I wrote reviews and articles for a national weekly entertainment magazine. Over the years, I've interviewed a number of actors and directors, ingenués and legends, and often the first question I'm asked by people is just that: What are they really like? The answers always disappoint. Always. They range from Pretty much what you see on the screen to Not all that interesting sometimes to Pleasantly professional to an unspoken Why do you care? When pressed (and I'm usually pressed), I'll allow that Keira Knightley and I had a lovely chat once and Lauren Bacall was nastier than she needed to be to a young reporter just starting out. That Laura Linney seemed graciously guarded, Steve Carell centered and sincere, Kevin Spacey cagey and smart. I once took the young Elijah Wood to a Hollywood burger joint while interviewing him for the magazine. He was a kid who really liked that burger, no more and no less. They are, in short, working actors, life-sized and fallible. There is no mystery here. But this is not what you want to hear, is it? If there's nothing genuinely special about movie stars, why do we give them our money? Why do we pay for cheaper and cheaper substitutes: reality stars, hotel heiresses, the Kardashians? Are we interested in the actual person behind the star facade, or just desperate to believe the magic has a basis in reality? In truth, the relationship between persona and person can be problematic. Of all the celebrity encounters I've experienced, the one that sticks with me is the briefest, most random, possibly the saddest. Early one morning, many years ago, I came out of my apartment building on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and got ready to go for a run. As I breathed the spring air, the door to the adjoining building opened and another jogger emerged. We started stretching our hamstrings side by side, and I glanced over and acknowledged the other man with a friendly nod. Three almost invisible things happened in rapid succession. First, he nodded back with a pleasant smile. Second, I realized that he was Robin Williams. Third, he realized that I realized he was Robin Williams, and his eyes went dead. Not just dead: empty. It was as if the storefront to his face had been shuttered, cutting off any possibility of interaction.

There -wasnt anything rude about this, and I respected his privacy, honoring the code observed by all New Yorkers who know they can potentially cross paths with an A-list name at any corner deli. Or was it his celebrity I was respecting? Whichever, a very small moment of human connection between two people had been squelched by the appearance of a third, not-quite-real person: the movie star. The second I recognized who the other jogger was, his persona got in the way. I -couldnt not see him as Robin Williams. And he knew it. This happens dozens of times in any well-known persons day. Its why Williamss eyes shut down so completely; its why I left him alone and went for my run. I felt bad for the man, even if I hadnt actually done anything. Because people do, in fact, do things. Think of all those fans who meet movie stars and insist on being photographed with them, the snapshot serving as both proof and relic. Think, too, of the man who shot and killed John Lennon but made sure to get his autograph first. Why a history of movie stardom? To celebrate, interrogate, and marvel over where weve been, and to weigh where we are now. As the twenty-first century settles into its second decade, we are more than ever a culture that worships images and shrinks from realities. Once those images were graven; now they are projected, broadcast, podcast, blogged, and streamed. There is not a public space that doesnt have a screen to distract us from our lives, nor is there a corner of our private existence that doesnt offer an interface, wireless or not, with the Omniverse, that roiling sea of infotainment we jack into from multiple access points a hundred times a day. The Omniverse isnt real, but its never turned off. You cant touch it, but you cant escape from it. And its most common unit of exchange, the thing that attracts so many people in the hopes of becoming it, is celebrity. Famous people. Stars. Or what weve traditionally called stars, which traditionally arose from a place called the movies. As originally conceived during the heyday of the Hollywood studio system, movie stars were bigger and more beautiful than they are now, domestic gods who looked like us but with our imperfections removed (or, in some cases, gorgeously heightened). Our feelings about them were mixed. We wanted to be these people, and we were jealous of them too. We paid to see them in the stories the movie factories packaged for us, but we were just as fascinated more fascinated, really with the stories we believed happened offscreen, to the people the stars seemed to be. Not many of us remember those days. Moreover, few are interested in connecting the dots between what we want from movie stars now and what we wanted from them then and the then before that, and the then before that, all the way back to the first flickering images in Thomas Edisons laboratory. The desires have changed, but so has the intensity. Mass media fame, a cultural concept that arose a century ago as a side effect of a new technology called moving pictures, now not only drives the popular culture of America (and, by extension, much of the world), but has become for many people a central goal and measure of self-worth. When we were content to gaze up at movie stars on a screen that seemed bigger than life, the exchange was fairly simple. We paid money to watch our daily dilemmas acted out on a dreamlike stage, with ourselves recast as people who were prettier, smarter, tougher, or just not as scared. The stories illustrated the dangers of ambition, the ecstasies of falling in love, the sheer delight of song and dance. Because certain people embodied uniquely charismatic variations on how to react in certain situations Bogarts street smarts, Kate Hepburns gumption, Jimmy Stewarts bruised decency, Bette Daviss refusal ever to budge we wanted to see them over and over again. We wanted to be them. Why else would women have bought knockoffs of Joan Crawfords white organdy dress in -1932s Letty Lynton (half a million sold through Macys) or men have chosen to go without an undershirt like Clark Gable in 1934s It Happened One Night? On an even deeper level, we also burned with resentment at the stars presumption to set themselves up as gods when our egos told us we were the ones deserving of attention. Behind every adoring fan letter is the urge to murder and replace. An image that reoccurs time and again in the pages that follow is that of a star out in public, surrounded by a mob that grabs and tears, ripping off buttons, chunks of clothing, as if to simultaneously absorb and obliterate the object of affection. There is love there and also a powerful, inarticulate rage. We want the stars, but we want what they have even more. The strange part is that we got it, and the book in your hands hopes to show how that happened. The history of modern stardom isnt just a roll call of icons but a narrative of how those icons affected the people and society that watched them, what psychic and cultural needs each star answered, and how that has changed over time. Its an -ever--evolving story of industrial consolidation intertwined with technological advancement, each wondrous new machine bringing the dream tantalizingly closer to the control of the dreamersto us. The early cinema, for instance, allowed audiences to see actors close up, which rendered them both more specific and more archetypal than the players of the stage. The arrival of sound then let us hear the new stars voices. Radio brought those voices into our homes; TV brought the rest of the performer, repackaged for fresh rules of engagement. Home video let us own the stars and watch them when we wanted; video cameras allowed us to play at being stars ourselves. The Internet has merely completed the process by providing an instant worldwide distribution and exhibition platform for our new star-selves, however many of them we want to manufacture. In addition, an extremely profit-driven group of entertainment conglomerates now keeps the popular culture rapt in a feedback loop of movie stars, TV stars, pop stars, rap stars, tweener stars, reality stars, and Internet stars, all mutable, all modeling ways in which consumers can alter their own homemade identities for maximum appeal to friends and strangers. The revolution is complete. One hundred years ago, Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and a handful of others became the very first living human beings to be simultaneously recognizable to, in theory, everyone on earth. Today, a twelve-year-old child can achieve the same status with an afternoon, a digital camera, and a YouTube account. We have built the mirror we always dreamed

about, and we cannot look away. Part of the original impulse behind this book was to fashion a memorial for the old ways for a cultural coin that had such worth for so long and that still retains value. The classic star system as created by the Hollywood studios in the teens and twenties and sustained through the 1960s and, although much diminished, into the present day was modern humanity's Rorschach test. We looked at those inkblots on the screen and saw what we needed: proof of discrete, individual, desirable human types. The system evolved, with stars falling away and new ones rising as necessary to the cultural demands of the time. Marlon Brando would have been unthinkable before World War II, and yet postwar Hollywood would be unthinkable without him. Each era has its own yearnings, pop star responses, and technological developments that change how the machine works, and each is a further step toward where we are now. Where are we now? A way station, I believe, on the way to some place very different, more truthful in some aspects, profoundly less so in others. A century of mass media and the concept of stardom have changed human society in ways we can barely encompass, but the one constant has been an urge - toward personal fulfillment and freedom of identity that would have seemed perverse, if not sacrilegious, to our grandparents.

Centuries ago, the common man's worth was marked primarily by duty: how hard he worked and how hard he prayed. The notion of ego, of something unique within each individual person that needed to be expressed, was alien. What stars there were tended to be generals and kings, religious leaders and charlatans, and you didn't aspire to be like them. You simply followed where they led, or you kept your head down and worked the farm. The movies helped change that. (All votes for movable type, the Enlightenment, the decline of the agrarian state, Sigmund Freud, and the rise of constitutional self-government will be counted.) The new medium tricked us, though, because it turned flesh-and-blood actors into dreamlike phantoms writ large on a wall. They didn't speak at first, either, so you could impose upon them any voice, any meaning, you wished. The stars thus became better versions of ourselves, idealized role models who literally acted out the things we wanted to do but - didn't dare. If they died, as Cagney always seemed to, we still got safely up and went home. Somewhere along the line, after many decades, we learned not to trust these role models anymore. Technology is inextricable in this, because each new medium effectively disproves the one preceding it. TV is somehow better than the movies, video and cable are better than network TV, the Internet is better than five hundred channels of Comcast. Better means less restricted in location and time, more portable, and more directly serving the immediate needs of you and me. We plug into star culture and its discontents on our cell phones now. The latest slice of the Lindsay Lohan/Mel Gibson/Charlie Sheen Meltdown Show is right there any time we want it. When a specific medium is put out to pasture, so are its most representative figures, as the stars of the silent era would be the first to tell you. At the same time, that primal ache has never gone away. If anything, it has gotten stronger, because each wave of technology doesn't always make our lives better. Busier, yes, and faster. More than anything else, it just brings us closer to the mirror in which we reflect ourselves to the world. We still each in our own way ache to be somebody, to make our mark, to stand out from the crowd, to be seen. Otherwise, who are we? What's life for? Uniqueness of identity is the promise movie stars hold out to us; if they're able to separate themselves from the swarm of humanity, so might we. I wonder what Marlene Dietrich would make of all this. There was a woman who knew from desire and who trusted a cameraman to keep her secret that the magnificently shadowed creature of all those early-30s classics was an ordinary German girl with bedroom eyes. Or the other Hollywood gods: what would they think? Archie Leach and Ruby Stevens, Frances Gumm and Marion Morrison and Norma Jean Mortenson. Who? Well, yes, you know them as Cary Grant and Barbara Stanwyck, Judy Garland and John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe. Those original names were left in the closet, along with Roy Scherer's excuse me, Rock Hudson's homosexuality. Entire pasts were abridged or erased because they didn't jibe with the luxuriant beauty onscreen, the gorgeous lie. The movie moguls kept the secrets, and the press played along because they understood that, really, we didn't want to know. With some exceptions, though, the mystery that surrounded movie stars for the better part of a century is now highly suspect. Indeed, many pop consumers consider it their duty to pull down the idols and pass their dirty secrets around the Web. How can we trust Tom Cruise the movie star when we can Google the real one bouncing on Oprah's couch? We now have as much control over the idea of celebrity as the studio publicity departments once did, and is it any wonder that movie stars are ruthlessly mocked while our own sweet selves are headlining on YouTube? Is this something like revenge? Or is it just the evolution of a species gradually conditioned to narcissism? For a century we accepted stardom as a blessing visited on those more gifted than we, a state of grace to which you and I in our drabness could not, and should not, aspire. We knew our place, and it was in the fifth row of the Bijou, worshiping as MGM chief Louis B. Mayer handed out the communion wafers. In 1919, when Chaplin and Pickford joined with Douglas Fairbanks and D. W. Griffith in creating United Artists, the first movie studio run by the talent, the other movie moguls complained that the inmates had taken over the asylum. If only they knew. Sometime in the past two decades, between video and pay cable and the rise of the World Wide Web, the walls were breached and the masses poured in. The asylum is now ours. You could see it coming a long way off, actually since the late 1960s, with their anarchic overturning of the old ways. (Or maybe even further back, when Elvis arrived an outsider who didn't need a new name.) The acknowledged motto of the new star order is Andy Warhol's much-abused announcement in the catalog of a 1968 Swedish art show that in the future everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes. A better, more concise variation came a year later, when Sly Stone recorded the number one pop hit Everybody Is a Star. The songs

title was offered in a spirit of blissful hippie democracy, a counterculture version of the same promise that had lured tens of thousands of men and women to California and the entertainment industry over the decades. That promise said that you are the center of the universe, if only you can get the rest of the world to see it. Sly tweaked it enough to take the desperate edge off. Stay home, the song advises, and take heart. You are already your own star. Technology would eventually prove Stone correct. In effect, he predicted the Internet down to the size of a bloggers bedroom. What happens to stardom, then, when we at last become stars ourselves? It mutates and spreads in a thousand directions. From our new perch we can now ridicule stars like Cruise, Gibson, Christian Bale, disseminating their audiovisual missteps to the world at large. We can lightly or wholly fictionalize our existence on Facebook or Second Life, developing plot threads, heroes, villains as we go: life not lived but shaped and produced. The new rules have also helped establish the half-lit world of reality TV, with its stars who are not stars because they are us (or less), as well as grotesque mash-ups of fame-mongering like *I Want a Famous Face!*, the 2004 MTV series that featured regular folks who volunteered to undergo surgery to look like their favorite celebrity. One wonders what these people felt when they came out of anesthesia and found they were still the same inside. It is a long and fractured line from Charlie Chaplin to *I Want a Famous Face!*, but it is a line, and this book will try to trace it. I propose a cultural biography of modern stardom, a journey through the permutations of celebrity as it began with the founding of the first global delivery system for fame a hundred years ago, all the way to the early twenty-first century, when stardom means something very different and not wholly understood. We'll see how the very concept of the movie star was an audience urge forced upon the first movie producers against their wills, and we'll see how that urge formed the transactional base, the primary unit of value for an immense industrial system of production and consumption from the 1920s through the post-World War II era and, with various modifications, up to the present. Some of those early figures are now forgotten would you believe it if I told you that Norma Talmadge meant as much to women of the 1920s as Anne Hathaway or Natalie Portman mean to our daughters? but they're crucial to an understanding of those who followed. The silent stars fashioned the original archetypes of Good Girl, Bad Boy, Action Hero, and Drama Queen, and it is their DNA that has been passed down from generation to generation, crossing mediums and mutating as necessary. Can one fully appreciate how Angelina Jolie functions in our popular culture, as a figure of both iconic power and tabloid absurdity, without understanding her person's roots in the movie's original man-eater, Theda Bara? Probably, but it's so much more instructive, not to mention fun, to do the math. So the first generation of superstar—the Pickfords and Valentinos, Chaplins and Swansons, Gishes and —Gilberts—take up a good-size chunk of the early chapters. You need to know these people if you want to understand their children and grandchildren. You need to know their parents, as well as the movie studios and the men who ran them, crudely brilliant businessmen who mastered the paradoxical art of mass-producing unique personalities. I've tried to trace how changes in technology, whether affecting the production, distribution, or exhibition of entertainment, gradually changed what kinds of stars audiences wanted, usually before the executives themselves figured it out. There's a fair amount of industry history here—the initial scrambles for dominance, the crisis of the talkies and the rise of the great studio factories, their decline and absorption into the towering corporate colossi that decree what we see and hear and buy today. These are the necessary girders that have supported a century-long system of celebrity. This is what lies on the other side of the screen. Nor is this book solely about the movies. As we move forward through the decades, the gates open to different kinds of stars, TV tailoring celebrity for the small screen, pop music becoming the primary locus of new personae during the 1950s and 60s, and the Internet brokering fresh relationships between fame and real life. You can't discuss the 1950s without Elvis and Lucille Ball, the 1960s without the Beatles, or the new millennium without *lonelygirl15*. That said, I've had to draw the line somewhere. Athletes and aviators are out, despite what Charles Lindbergh meant to the 1920s. (And yet I've broken my own rules, since the changes in African American star persona in the 1960s are inconceivable without Muhammad Ali.) Socialites, too: this will not be the place to speculate on the cultural meanings of Barbara Hutton or Paris Hilton. I haven't been able to give hip-hop and its slow-growing conquest of the music industry (and, to a large extent, the entire entertainment business) the space or analysis its performers deserve. In fact, your favorite star may well not be in here. Given the span of time and scope of inquiry, drive-bys are inevitable. The details can be fascinating, but the larger journey is the point. That journey could be defined as one from distant adoration to engaged self-actualization. Alternately, it could be described as a long trek from grand illusion to functional delusion. If there's a thematic through-line, it's in the ways the gods and goddesses of Hollywood were yanked off their thrones over the years as audiences increasingly demanded stars who looked and acted like them—i.e., people who seemed real rather than fake—and as the industry got better at the job of providing those stars. In 1949, Marlon Brando made every other Hollywood actor look like a fraud; twenty years later, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Nicholson, and Robert De Niro served as the new benchmarks in realism. Today it's the cast of *Jersey Shore* who are signifiers of actuality at its most extreme—a realness that makes us feel better about our own. Yet the classic movie star lives on—has to live on, if only to give us something better to aspire to than Snooki and the Situation. We still have a varied buffet of star types before us, from the impenetrable Hollywood gloss of Jolie and Brad Pitt to the scruffy approachability of recent arrivals like Ellen Page and Joseph Gordon-Levitt. Younger audiences respond to those last two because they speak and act in ways that resonate with how people their age actually see themselves, as Hoffman did in the 1960s, as Mickey Rooney did in the

1930s. We want performers who reflect our reality who seem to order that reality, comment on it, laugh at it, blow it up. The ones who do so with an appealing consistency of persona across a range of movies or other forms of media are those we call stars. A distinction can and should be made between stars and actors. All stars are actors one way or another; not all actors are stars. Great actors—the true master craftsmen and women—transform themselves in role after role, and if the projects are successful and the actor is celebrated enough, that changeability becomes his or her persona, whether it's Lon Chaney in the silent era, Alec Guinness after World War II, Meryl Streep in the 1980s, or Cate Blanchett today. Stars, by contrast, don't hide themselves. On the contrary, the great movie stars each construct an image that is bigger than their individual films even as it connects those films in a narrative of unfolding personality. This is important. A concept we'll return to over and over in this book is that every successful star creates a persona and within that persona is an idea. The films are merely variations on the idea. The idea can be expressed as action or as attitude or simply as an unstated philosophy of how to live and behave in this world (or how not to live and how not to behave) that the player embodies in charismatic, two-dimensional human form. You could call it identity, too, but its identity so contained, defined, and appealing that moviegoers grasp at it in an attempt to define their own senses of self. Bette Davis acts out an ongoing drama of difficult women in a constraining society. Clint Eastwood shows time and again how macho toughness is affected by the stress-fractures of morality, even tenderness. Jimmy Stewart and Tom Hanks represent good men in an unkind world, but where the former responds with troubled decency, the latter wields ease and bonhomie. The idea can be as simple as Angelina Jolie = Queen, or Tom Cruise = Action Hero. It can be as complex as Johnny Depp, who projects shyness, mercurial daring, rebellion, eccentricity, and old-fashioned sex appeal, and whose persona can probably be best expressed as maverick idol. There are many performers who don't convey an idea at all, whose star identity remains in flux. Matt Damon is an ambitious, well-liked actor who makes interesting choices in roles and has been rewarded with box office hits and critical approval, yet he doesn't convey a persona outside the movies other than as a smart, hardworking guy. In a sense, Damon's lack of persona is his persona, one that 2001's *Ocean's Eleven* and its sequels had great fun with by making his character the butt of jokes from Brad Pitt and George Clooney, two genuine stars who project, respectively, surfer-dude poise and devilish charm tempered by gravitas. Again: each star is an idea of how we could be or should be or might want to be. The other important concept to keep in mind as you read this book is that each star-idea often has little to do with the person acting it out. James Cagney played bastards onscreen, but he was known and loved as one of the nicest guys in the movie business. Cary Grant, the studio system's Perfect Man, privately raged against the Academy for not giving him an Oscar and experimented extensively with LSD. Read between the lines of their existing biographies and the mythic love affair of Kate Hepburn and Spencer Tracy turns into a problematic tale of alcoholism, enablement, and emotional cruelty. I'm pretty sure Tom Hanks picks his nose. In other words, these are human beings whose flaws we in the audience suspect and ignore, torn as we are between venerating the larger projection and wanting to pull down the screen. Even the stars themselves had mixed feelings about what they had created. Bogart's a helluva nice guy until 11 p.m.; after that, he thinks he's Bogart, said a Hollywood restaurateur who knew the star well. But most famous actors recognize the size of the gap between person and persona. The ongoing mistake of the moviegoing public is to confuse the two and to ascribe great psycho-mythic power where there is usually only very good playacting. This is the mistake that fuels fan mail, Web shrines, and celebrity stalkers alike—that the star is exactly who we see and it masks the ignored but necessary pleasures of the ordinary. Remember the ordinary? It's pass right now, in our brave wired world of enabled fantasy. Maybe it's headed for extinction. Still, it's worth asking: What's so terribly wrong with us that we need to be someone else? This isn't a question that concerned our ancestors in the same way. If you asked a ten-year-old in nineteenth-century America what she or he wanted to grow up to be, the answers would doubtless have revealed the limits of cultural expectations and the immediate horizon: farmer, merchant, teacher, tradesman, soldier, mother, cop. Maybe a preacher or a rabbi. The adventurous ones dreamed of cowboys and explorers. Ask a modern ten-year-old the same question, and you'll hear pop singer, athlete, actress, model, star. All variations on being noticed. On that level, this book isn't a history or a pop celebration or an anthropological thumbsucker. It is an inquiry and, in its later chapters, an intervention. It wants to know how we got here from there, who was important on the way, where we are now, and why that matters. It hopes to honor those performers and personas who really do seem indelible and who live on in the culture long after their physical deaths. And it suggests that for a great many people, fame—the act of seeing, the desire to be seen—has come to matter most of all, that culture is now hostage to celebrity, and that a massive, profit-driven corporate oligarchy considers it very good business to keep it that way. Some of the questions we need to ask ourselves are the same as they've been for decades. Why does a particular star speak to one era but not another? How much of any celebrity is his or her own invention and how much our projection? Other questions are vastly different from those of a century, half a century, even a decade ago. Why do we pay to see famous actors in a movie theater, then go home and make fun of them on the Web? Why do we still need Hollywood's manufactured identities when we can create them for ourselves? Am I my Facebook page, or the other way around? Why, oh Lord, do we Google ourselves? And how are we supposed to stop when it feels so good? If there are answers, they begin with Florence Lawrence.