

Celebrity in Chief: A History of the Presidents and the Culture of Stardom

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This history of presidential fame and how it has shaped American progress is relevant to the digital age and is a fascinating examination of the power of popularity.

Highlighting an increasing trend toward American leaders with a media presence, *Celebrity in Chief* examines sitting presidents in light of their personal appeal to the American people.

Examining the promise and pitfalls of presidential celebrity status, the book ultimately makes the point that a strong media and cultural presence represents a leadership resource for American heads of state. Several examples, from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama, illustrate the extra influence that culturally savvy presidents enjoy. However, the book makes it clear that celebrity can turn on a president, as when the media-saturated Bill Clinton unwisely answered a question about his underwear, and can even serve as a scant bandage for unpopular decisions. Barack Obama's example here is particularly fascinating, especially since the president, who has famously appeared on BuzzFeed and "Between Two Ferns," has enjoyed relatively low approval ratings despite his aggressive courting of the media.

Admirably, *Celebrity in Chief* avoids partaking in partisanship while still managing to examine the relationship between the cultural popularity of a president and his political bent. The book points out, for example, how George W. Bush's loss of the support of the Dixie Chicks, bastions of the notoriously conservative country-and-western music scene, represented the severity of his public-image problems.

The previous example also illustrates a problem with *Celebrity in Chief*, namely that the connection between celebrity and presidential success isn't always clear. After all, even after that 2003 incident with the Dixie Chicks, Bush won reelection. Though examples of presidents in the spotlight are educational, further analysis would go far in making a point. The book also repeats several stories and examples, often not producing any new conclusions.

Young people for whom Twitter and LinkedIn are givens may instinctively grasp the importance of media friendliness in a leader. However, the history of presidential fame and how it has shaped American political progress is not only relevant to the digital age but a fascinating examination of the power of popularity.

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