**The American InstaDream---Fame over Talent? Mich Cardin *The Blog* 11/12/2014**

I was recently listening to Lisa Kudrow and Bill Maher chat on his show, Real Time. The discussion of fame came up, and I remember Lisa making a comment about how fascinated she was with the amount of talentless people who were famous, or who were desperately seeking fame.

First stop -- the Kardashians. They've really become the mascots for the famed and talentless. I think it's because there are so many members in their clan and their cumulative recognition and finances have reached such a massive level that it's tough not to reference them when speaking about the downside of American culture. Of course, referencing them makes them all the more famous and being the ambitious business minds that they are (is that a talent?) they most likely welcome the part love/part bashing, because fame is fame, right? And what about that? Is it better to be void of all talent but be famous, than be full of talent and an unknown? In America, the answer is yes. Or at least that's what society teaches us.

Simply having a successful Instagram account can lead to Instafame, possibly real life fame. A viral YouTube video, despite the content -- but the sexier, the better -- will get your name launched and could lead to a reality show. And if you're already a reality star you can expect a book deal, a clothing line and possibly even a follow up show complete with stalkings from the paparazzi and daily headlines on the top news sites -- all without being good at a single thing, except maybe looking hot. We'll settle for cute, even.

Of course there are still the super talented turned famous. But it seems this is an older tribe -- one who took many years of pounding the pavement with their craft, sacrificing and sometimes nearly starving before getting their big break. It seems we are losing those people daily (R.I.P. Robin Williams) and they are being replaced with the Instafamous. As for those newbies who are talented, like Jennifer Lawrence, we embarrassingly cling to them like we would a deity, for fear another may not come around.If JLaws are one in a million and the Kardashians are a dime a dozen who are paid handsomely, then why bother with the whole talent thing?

I'm a writer in NYC, which is a constant uphill battle. I'm surrounded by exceptionally talented people in various fields -- dancers, actors, artists, designers, novelists, fitness and finance gurus, agents and entrepreneurs -- all hard working and idealistic that this city will make them. But all knowing there are easier ways to get a break, most of which do not include the passion they've spent their entire life working on. What keeps us from trading it all in? For one, we weren't raised on the notion of Instafame and while it consumes our generation now, it didn't shape our early perceptions of talent. (We are all in the Kim K. age range, keep in mind.)

I grew up in an unconventional family. It was a somewhat privileged one, but that was never bragged about. I was pushed to read books and be involved in a numerous activities. When I narrowed those passions down, I was taught the value of rigorous practice and to focus on those talents more than focusing on my aesthetics or my family's money or the quickest way to fame. While I realize I was lucky to be able to afford lessons and good schools, I have many friends who were not and they compensated by embedding themselves in the corner of the library or taking free dance classes and various sports lessons at local rec centers. Or they simply locked themselves in their bedrooms and painted. (This doesn't help the case of the Instafamous born into money, who had the ability to cultivate numerous passions but seemingly did not.)The idea of being a celebrity was coveted, but it seemed like a long road to get there.

Today, that's no longer the case and that cocktail of advanced social media mixed with our obsession of beauty and fame (more so, fame, as we saw with Honey Boo Boo) has set the tone for a new American dream -- wake up to two million followers and you're a celebrity. Put down those books. Quit your day job. Game over.

So do we blame this shift on the daily increase of social media and other tech advances? On capitalism? On corporate-funded media networks and the multi-billion dollar beauty industry? I think it's all of the above and an addiction to instant gratification that Americans are already notorious for. Of course, America still values real talent, hard work and integrity. We worship Beyoncé and Adele, as we should. They've spent their lives cultivating their talent through preparation and hustling and can bring any room to its feet with their live performances.

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