

Even *Women's Wear Daily* acknowledged the celebrity push behind the green movement, writing that "green giants" like DiCaprio were using "their celebrity status to keep the environment high on everyone's agenda."¹⁰

AND CONS

But not all that's Tinsel turns to gold. Not everyone is impressed when a major Hollywood star speaks out on a social issue.

And, sure enough, the sniping about celebrities started almost immediately upon the publication of *Vanity Fair's* green issues. Some questioned the celebrities' true motivation, believing it to be publicity-driven, while others suggested that celebrities say one thing and do another. In October 2006, celebrity news Web site TMZ.com featured a story titled "Celebs who claim they're green but guzzle gas."¹¹ Julia Roberts recycles plastic bags and drinks from a reusable coffee cup? George Clooney drives an electric car? That's not enough!

A green-inspired Internet poster on the *Grist* environmental news site called this particular celebrity cause "superficial greenness."¹² A contributor to the *Washington Times* went further, suggesting that the "cute faces" of DiCaprio and the polar cub merely covered "enough journalistic toxic waste to put Love Canal to shame."¹³ The *National Review* called DiCaprio an "eco-porn centerfold," and wondered if the cover shot had "more to do with celebrity and *V.F.'s* own corporate desire for profit" than environmentalism.¹⁴

Not only are journalists skeptical, even the general public seems wary of the "fakeness factor." After all, they don't call Hollywood "Silicone Valley" (a pun on Silicon Valley) for nothing. In June 2007, the *Washington Post* asked its readers, "Do Hollywood star-activists help bring attention to global problems, or do they get in the way of those who know what they're doing?"¹⁵ While most readers were somewhat supportive and found such celebrity work mostly harmless, others responded that they viewed celebrity causes with great skepticism, writing that they rolled their eyes after hearing about celebrities' new causes. Some found them "comical" or wondered about the true motivation behind a celebrity's philanthropic work.

This brings us back to the photograph on the cover of the second *Vanity Fair* green issue, featuring Leonardo DiCaprio and the little polar bear cub. It turns out that the cover itself is not what it seems. As *Vanity Fair* editors explained in the magazine's short "On the Cover" feature (p. 18): "Knut, the cub on our cover, was born in the Berlin Zoo. We brought him together with Leonardo DiCaprio the only way we could, in a photomontage." *Vanity*

Fair then acknowledged that "there are no polar bears in Iceland" where Annie Leibovitz shot the pictures of DiCaprio on melting ice, but, it warned, in a seemingly desperate attempt to link polar bear and celebrity, that "[i]f current trends continue, there won't be any [polar bears left] in Canada either."

SCIENCE AND CELEBRITY: A HAPPY ENDING?

Not as many commentators took smirking advantage of this photomontage as one might think, and that in itself may forecast a coming change in the way some skeptics view celebrity environmentalism. Could it be that the old Hollywood adage that any publicity is good publicity also applies to problems that scientists care about?

Reverend Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals is credited in the first *Vanity Fair* green issue with turning the religious right on to global warming concerns through Biblical references.¹⁶ Cizik told the *Los Angeles Times* that many celebrities are now rightly moving beyond partisan politics and are, instead, "reaching out to tell a vital story." He suggested that even skeptical conservatives will listen to those stories.¹⁷

In the end, celebrities probably won't play a particularly powerful role in Earth's future. They can only do so much, with limited scientific knowledge and typical Hollywood shooting schedules. But they may influence many others to care, and that could lead to powerful changes.

Just about the time the second *Vanity Fair* green issue hit mailboxes and newsstands, a poll taken by the *Washington Post*, *ABC News*, and Stanford University showed that one-third of Americans believe that global warming is the most important environmental problem facing the world today, more than double from the year before, and that seven people out of ten surveyed believe that the federal government should take more action to help sustain the environment.¹⁸

Whether this change in opinion is due to the diligent and careful work of scientists, to Al Gore and *An Inconvenient Truth*, or to input from Tinseltown stars remains an intriguing question. But it cannot be bad that this awareness is happening. The movement just may continue if those movie stars who support the environment can stay out of the tabloids and move their greenness into publications that reach a wider audience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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¹⁰Groves, E., Cool to care. April 10, 2007: *Women's Wear Daily*, Supplement, p. 6.

¹¹Celebrities who claim they're green but guzzle gas. 18 October 2006: TMZ.com, www.tMZ.com/2006/10/18/celebs-who-claim-theyre-green-but-guzzle-gas.

¹²Zarconi, Green Fad, posted 12 April 2007, in response to van Schagen, S., *Vanity Fair's* green issue, part deux. 11 April 2007: *Grist*, Environmental News and Commentary: Gristmill, <http://gristmill.grist.org/story/2007/4/10/175348/588>.

¹³Gainor, D., Commentary: Green issues the place to be. 22 April 2007: *Washington Times*, p. B3.

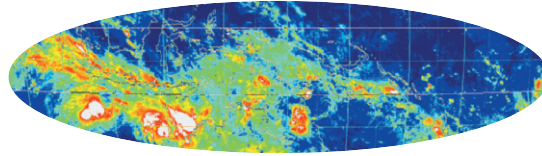
¹⁴Spencer, R., A green vanity affair. 10 April 2007: *National Review Online*, <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=YTE0MTc3ZGFkYWVhN2Q5Y2NhYzRkMDM2ZTUwYTBN2I=>.

¹⁵Igantius, D., F. Zakaria, and N. Ahn, Celebrities help or hurt global causes? posted 11 June 2007: www.washingtonpost.com, PostGlobal, http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/postglobal/2007/06/celebrities_help_or_hurt_global/.

¹⁶The Good Reverend. May 2006: *Vanity Fair*, p. 194.

¹⁷Goldstein, P., Believers preach gospel of green. 10 October 2006: *Los Angeles Times*, p. E1.

¹⁸Eilperin, J., and J. Cohen, Growing number of Americans see warming as leading threat. 20 April 2007: *The Washington Post*, p. A20. Poll results: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/polls/postpoll_environment_042007.html.



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