

Celebrity Privilege and Modern Decadence

By [Dr. Gary Null](#)

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I usually try to avoid watching television award ceremonies and their regalia of visual spectacles sanctifying celebrities in the film and music industries.

Today's award ceremonies are clearly representative of the decay in American consumer culture. And over the years award ceremonies' visuals have become more inane and grotesque. Therefore when award-winning journalist Celia Farber recently wrote that singer Sam Smith's 2023 Grammy awards looked like a "satanic ritual," I was compelled to watch the clip. Indeed, the hell-themed performance should have been deeply offensive to most Americans, certainly for the majority of Americans who continue to have religious sensibilities.

The only reason for watching award ceremonies is to be better educated about hypocrisy.

Last year's Academy Awards had the highlight of Will Smith jumping on stage to slap Chris Rock, only later to receive a standing applause after receiving the Oscar for Best Actor. Yet there was no audience boos for his earlier non-acting performance to humiliate Rock. There was no policing or effort to escort Smith out of the theater for unprovoked physical assault.

Similarly, celebrity narcissism was exhibited at the 2009 MTV video awards when Kanye West jumped on stage to disrupt Taylor Swift's acceptance speech for the Best Female Video Award. Again, there were only crickets in the theater audience, no boos, no notable reaction. West would go on to become a multi-billionaire, and in the eyes of his fans and corporate partners he had no limits to inappropriate behavior.

It would seem there are no limits to some creative and artistic personalities' freedom to act out as they please and comatose fans that fail to recognize they are simply human beings with all the same foibles as themselves.

What we are witnessing in the larger community is a behavioral cancer metastasizing through society. It now permeates sports, Wall Street, the business community and our body politic. Its mantra is that owning more is always better.

Whatever a person achieves in life is never enough. Those who reach the apex of personal achievement rarely use the freedom their success bestows to continue to develop themselves in areas of their lives where they are deficient — to become a more grounded, compassionate and humble human being. True authentic humility is rarely found in highly successful people. Instead living an extreme lifestyle of competing to be at the center of the spotlight is the acceptable norm.

Admittedly, there are the few who are not similarly afflicted. There are notable exceptions in the celebrity class who use their successes to help others but this is not newsworthy for the paparazzi's headlines.

Yet there is nothing particularly new except for the fashion of the day in this cyclic trend. It was pervasive in Weimar Germany when Berlin was the capital of European decadence. Celebrity exceptionalism has been part of Hollywood's DNA since the beginning. The entertainment world, which thrives on the creation of illusions, and often deranged hallucinations, perceive themselves as exceptional, wealthy and powerful, while their paying audiences are not.

The psychology of hedonic impulses and addictions are based upon how we engage with pleasure in our lives. At one end of the spectrum are the simple pleasures that bring satisfaction to our lives: a nice meal, a roof over our heads, friends and family. Some hedonic pleasures can be awe inspiring such as experiencing a vibrant sunset and appreciating its momentary beauty which overwhelms our senses.

But the all-pervading hedonic pleasures of postmodern America are the need to prove our relevance in the eyes of others, even after we have achieved a high degree of success. Competition among the rich and famous is more intense than the average social media addicted person who devotes an extraordinary amount of wasted time to increase their "likes" and emojis on TikTok and Facebook.

On the other hand, for the high achievers it is a crass Darwinian struggle for the preservation of fame as to whether a person will walk the red carpet or appear on the cover of Vogue and other imbecilic magazines. In the perverted Darwinian scheme of superficial plastic Western culture, once a person is possessed with the illusion they are uniquely different, gifted and talented beyond measure, the simple pleasures in life are no longer satisfying and sufficient.

Rather personal indulgence, often at the expense of others' well-being is a permissive goal to pursue.

Decadent hedonic pleasures, boorish sexual appetites, drugs and the objectification of people as props to be exploited are part of the inner sanctum in every profession's culture of a "deep elite".

These smaller communities within the larger professions are the basilicas built with the bricks of greed and egoic ignorance upon which the Will Smiths, Kanye Wests and Jeffrey Epsteins of society believe they have earned the divine right to act and say as they please. They view their behavior as wholly acceptable by the clique of deep elite.

Will Smith would never attend a Carnegie Hall performance and rush to the stage to smack a ballerina or the lead violinist. He would not be in his zone; he would be outside

Hollywood's inner sanctum where his admirers would turn a blind eye. For Kanye West, his sense of being exalted to freely attack Jews led to his losing \$2 billion in commercial endorsements and business deals. Despite stepping out of his comfort zone, he remained unapologetic. We witnessed this indecent behavior staged at the Grammy's followed by the ecstatic cheers of support by an audience who hold membership to Hollywood's inner sanctum. It was not simply decadent but repulsive and demeaning.

In a recent Bill Maher commentary he suggested that the reason why as a collective we do not care for the preservation of the environment and efforts to reduce our carbon footprint is because everyone would fly in a private jet if they could afford it. His conclusion is that we are fundamentally not good people and therefore nothing fundamental will change. We will continue en masse towards our own self-destruction because we are incapable of surrendering our egoic cravings that fuel bad habits. Yes, many people, especially those who regard themselves exceptional, are grossly selfish and deep down insecure because they live superficial lives that feed off of others admiration. However, there are far more people who do not need to find personal fulfillment and satisfaction in what they simply have or earned. They don't engage in extreme exhibitionism in order to project themselves as relevant to the world. They simply live normal lives and find deep satisfaction and meaning by doing so.

For this reason, I don't watch award shows, whether it is the Oscars, Emmys, Golden Globe or Grammys. They don't represent the ideals of our civilization nor the original values it was owned upon.

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Dr. Gary Null is host of the nation's longest running public radio program on alternative and nutritional health and a multi-award-winning documentary film director, including his recent Last Call to Tomorrow. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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