BBC Sign in Q Worklife Travel Future Search NEWS World US & Canada UK Business Tech Science Stories Entertainment & Arts Health More ▼ **ADVERTISEMENT** You could earn 24x more with Make The Switch Vanguard's Prime Money Market Fund.* **Vanguard**° *Important Information Magazine A Point of View: A disease called fame **Top Stories** I want immediate impeachment Share ① 28 March 2014 trial, says Trump The president is almost certain to be acquitted in the Senate and Democrats have delayed the start. ① 1 hour ago A US state divided by impeachment (1) 19 December 2019 Australia PM apologises for US holiday amid fires 3 hours ago **ADVERTISEMENT** You could earn 24x more with Vanguard's Prime Money Market Fund.* THINKSTOCK Make The Switch Vanguard* Ours is a fame-obsessed culture, writes Sarah Previously in A Dunant, but is it really a goal worth chasing? **Point of View** Years ago, when I was mildly famous for presenting a Features television arts programme, I was asked to do one of Does violence on screen make society more those instant magazine interviews, giving snappy violent? answers to a mix of trivial and profound questions. I don't remember much of what I said. But one 'How I stopped being response sticks in my mind: In an alternative life what intolerant of food would I have been? My answer - a backing singer for intolerance' Bob Dylan. Can we ever find a bit of quiet time? Like many dreams, it was a poignant one. Dylan A US state divided by usually only employs black singers and anyway I When does borrowing impeachment can't hold a note. from other cultures become wrong? I was reminded of this last week when I watched 20 Feet From Stardom, the film that just scooped best documentary at the Oscars. As the title implies, it celebrates the men and women but mostly women and nearly all black - whose voices and musical talent were a vital ingredient in the creation of the greatest popular music of the last half century, but who as backing singers were never the stars. The women who finished Rita's **ADVERTISEMENT** quilt **Getting justice for rape victims** inRead invented by Teads The huge economic cost of Some of the names you will know. Darlene Love was the voice for many of the **Australia's bushfires** Crystals hits. Judith Hill sang at Michael Jackson's funeral. Others will be familiar only to aficionados - Merry Clayton, Claudia Lennear, Lisa Fischer. But anyone who's seen the Rolling Stones play over the years will remember the vocal chemistry between Clayton, Lennear, Fischer and Mick Jagger - that shiver-downthe-spine sound of Gimme Shelter ("Rape, murder... its just a shot away"). BBC Many of these women had voices as fine as any lead singer, and some went on to try solo careers. In most
Find out more cases it didn't work. Not surprisingly given the No sex, no suspense - Trump v moment, there were issues of gender and race. "Seems there was only room for one Aretha Clinton Franklin," says Love. Others accept that they didn't have the character to handle the pressure, the endless self-promotion: "If I'd been a star I wouldn't be here now talking to you." ВВС Sarah Dunant is a writer, But the viciousness of the business was not the only broadcaster and critic reason. As Lisa Fischer says, "some people will do A Point of View is usually anything to become famous. Others just want to broadcast on Fridays on sing." The firebrand cleric who could Radio 4 at 20:50 BST and calm Iraq repeated Sundays, 08:50 The film will go down in the annals of music. But it's a BST comment on cultural history in another way. For many years now we have been living in the grip of a **Listen to A Point of View** disease called Fame - the idea that whoever you are, on the iPlayer whatever is, or is not, your talent, the greatest BBC achievement in life you can aspire to is to become **BBC Podcasts - A Point** famous. A star. A celebrity. And that in our culture that of View is somehow not only desirable, but possible. Andy Warhol, with his 15 minutes of fame, has turned out India uses draconian law against to be a prophet as much as an artist. protesters BBC Quiz of the Year, part one: Remember this? BBC Oscar-winning film 20 Feet From Stardom highlights the work of backing singers HK's model neighbour that stays loyal to China Of course, the music business played its part here. Before the '60s, the main road to stardom was Hollywood and the movies - looks, talent, luck, (we could argue about the order). But while few were called, even fewer were chosen. With the new PAID AND PRESENTED BY **₩** HUAWEI buying power of youth, and the explosion of rock'n'roll, all that changed - especially in Britain. If you were young, could afford a guitar and were happy to lock yourself in your room for years listening to records and practising, you could form a band and regardless of class, upbringing, education, you might find yourself en route not just to success, but superstardom. Some managed it. The majority didn't. Now, however, it seems that for many of us only the spotlight will do. How did this happen? Well, the ingredients are Is there anybody out fascinating. Over the years a growing economy and there who really believes an aspirational culture has perfected ways of selling that celebrity culture us things - both things we need and increasingly hasn't done more things we don't. The techniques differ from "Only this Scaling a start-up in China: damage than good? can make you attractive/happy" to "Because you're Risking it all worth it, you deserve it". It was, in effect, a way of marketing dreams. And stardom - with its promise of wealth, attention and admiration - is surely the greatest dream of all. Elsewhere on the BBC As popular media expanded, what had once been limited to the few, suddenly seemed a possibility for the many. By the early '90s, the music business had taken Football phrases to manufacturing as much as finding stars (and yes, I do think The Spice Girls were ВВС 15 sayings from around the beginning of the end here). Then television weighed in. the world Most Read Flooding brings travel disruption across South East of England Andrew Bailey appointed as 2 new Bank of England governor Miss America 2020: Biochemist 3 wins crown after on-stage experiment Trump impeachment: President demands immediate Senate trial **GETTY IMAGES** The Spice Girls: The beginning of the end for the music business? Brexit vote: MPs debate Boris 5 Johnson's deal Trumpeted by its apologists as anti-elitist, reality TV hit the culture like a freight Brexit: MPs to vote on Boris 6 train. It coincided with deregulation, which brought more competition and many Johnson's deal more hours to fill. Reality TV was cheap, populist and very soon everywhere. Where once, through the likes of game shows, a tiny fraction of people might have London stabbings: Two dead had their five minutes of attention, now - as long as you didn't mind your behaviour and two injured being edited to ratchet up the conflict (reality - never has a word been so misused) you might find yourself instantly famous - talked about at the watercooler and at the Australia fires: PM Morrison 8 pub, your picture in the paper. apologises for US holiday amid crisis Big Brother - Orwell's vision of a future was a boot stamping on the human face forever. You can decide for yourself how far the TV show was aptly named. Then Newspaper headlines: 'Golden 9 there were the talent shows - so you wanna be the next top model, singer, age' promises and 'extreme businessman, chef - whatever. The Faustian pact was largely the same - you want Brexit' fears fame, we want ratings, which means larger-than-life characters, nasty judges, the adrenaline of competition, tantrums, tears and a dose of humiliation - all on camera. Claudine Auger: French actress 10 Those who made it, joined a growing community of sporting and entertainment known for James Bond role dies aged 78 figures whose public lives were becoming our off-screen soap operas. **ADVERTISEMENT** These 2020 SUVS Are Incredible 2020 Crossover Suvs Open **GETTY IMAGES** Reality TV star Rylan Clarke wins Celebrity Big Brother 2013 Along the way some good programmes were made and some genuinely talented people discovered. But is there anybody out there who really believes that celebrity culture hasn't done more damage than good? That it hasn't made us a crueller, more voyeuristic, more self-obsessed society? For the celebrities themselves, the oxygen of publicity - a necessity to stay in the public eye - comes at a price. Once in the news, they become the news, fodder for a growing freebee press. In lieu of a private life there's either Hello platitudes about a new house or a new relationship, or at the lower end, the cruelty of endless paparazzi shots and gossip - too fat, too thin, new breasts, exploding lips, trouble with sex, trouble with drugs, trouble with life. And when there are too many celebrities, we cull them by pitting them against each other, sending them into the jungle to eat worms. Proof, if ever it was needed, that they are a subspecies - like us, but not us. As captive animals in the media zoo, they are there for our entertainment, so we can enjoy their pain, as well as their triumph. Celebrity culture has made train-wreck watchers of us all. Meanwhile, at the same time as we were all being Thoughts on fame sold dreams, we were also being deprived of the way to pay for them. It's telling that the beginnings of and celebrity celebrity culture coincide with the period when real wages start to stagnate against the cost of living, and "Celebrity is a mask that to make sure we still had money to keep on buying, eats into the face" John we had to be sold something else. Credit. Or rather Updike debt. From a new bedroom to shots of Botox whatever you wanted but couldn't afford, you went I always want to say to into debt to get it. Back to that word "reality" and how people who want to be little we seem to be in contact with it. rich and famous: 'Try being rich first'. See if that But it's not just about money. One of the most doesn't cover most of it.' powerful things to come out of 20 Feet From Bill Murray Stardom is that there is more to life than being "Fame is like a river, that famous. Almost every one of these astonishing beareth up things light women says the same thing. In the end they did what and swollen, and drowns they did, not because of any chance of stardom, but things weighty and solid." because they were born with a talent and a passion and it was the most exquisite pleasure - indeed almost a duty - to use it. To quote Lisa Fischer: "I love the reaction on people's faces - the artist and the audience. I'm there to bring joy to all of them. And that brings joy to me." Her comment brings back my early teenage years - the hours spent ironing my hair, walking up and down the landing in bare feet, murdering Sandie Shaw tracks, while the boys stood strumming tennis rackets in front of wardrobe mirrors, the shaving mirror perched on the side to catch the TV close-ups. While it was fun being wannabes, most of us knew deep down that we didn't have what it took to make it. But, oh my God, it was just so wonderful to be part of the moment, the musical revolution around us. In the end being the fan or in the audience was more than enough. GETTY IMAGES In a world where everyone wants to be the lead singer, who is left to swell the sound? Or more importantly to appreciate it? I know you're expecting me to end with a Dylan quote. I leave you instead with a mangled and misquoted bit of John Milton: "They also serve who only stand and listen." A Point of View is broadcast on Friday on Radio 4 at 20:50 GMT and repeated on Sunday at 08:50 GMT. Catch up on BBC iPlayer Follow @BBCNewsMagazine on Twitter and on Facebook Share this story About sharing ☐ f P in **Previously in A Point of View** 'How I stopped being intolerant of food Does violence on screen make society more violent? intolerance' 1 April 2016 25 March 2016 Can we ever find a bit of quiet time? 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