

# Reviving the Cult of Princess Diana

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Global Research, August 01, 2017

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Intelligence](#)

*Featured image: Diana, Princess of Wales while at The Leonardo Prize ceremony in 1995 (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))*

*There is no rational explanation for this, even after searching for the coded meanings culture throws up. A not very bright, propelled on a wave of the pre-Kardashian phenomenon of celebrity for its own meaning; a youthful flower, gathered by the Grim Reaper while speeding off with her lover in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel in Paris. That was the fate of the Princess of Wales.*

As Christopher Hitchens was to observe, the orgy of sentimentality and reaction to the death of Princess Diana in 1997 was excruciating, dangerous, and debilitating. It silenced dissent about the late princess, reconstituting Britain, however briefly, as a “one-party state” replete with emotive ridden foot soldiers.

It also supplied the new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, the material of naked publicity, a moment to peak ever higher in the opinion polls by feeding the Cult of Diana. New Labour, New Britain, New Sentiment.

Jonathan Freedland confessed on cringing in the aftermath of the princess’s death.

“It is our collective moment of madness, a week when somehow we lost our grip.”[1]

Outside Buckingham Palace were hundreds of thousands of cellophane protected bouquets.

The celebrity as pox syndrome persists in the context of the anniversary of Diana’s death, which has been spiced by the debate on whether Channel 4 should release video tape interviews drawn from encounters between the princess and her speech coach and actor Peter Settelen. (Settelen had been retained by Diana between 1992 and 1993.) These form the subject of yet another yawn inducing product of the Princess Industry, a documentary titled *Diana: In Her Own Words* set to be released on the twentieth anniversary of her death.

The Spencer family, led by Earl Spencer, was determined to assert control over the tapes and foil the use of the private conversations. They had initially found their way into the possession of Scotland Yard in 2001 after a raid on the home of former royal butler, Paul Burrell.

The American broadcaster NBC broadcasted teasing excerpts in 2004, but the BBC, which was considering a commemoration documentary ten years after the event, abandoned the

project. Channel 4's management felt otherwise, wanting to make some mileage on the insipid nature of the whole matter. The unconvincing view, nothing more of a sales pitch, was that the tapes "provide a unique insight".

Aggressive pots have been calling similarly aggressive kettles black. The original sinner, Burrell, felt that the channel's decision to broadcast the tapes was a "seedy" gesture akin to "raiding her diary".[2]

The seediness of his own less than noble history was lost on Burrell, who milked the cash cow of experience after Diana's death much to the consternation of Princes Harry and William. *A Royal Duty* (2003) went into the personal drawers and the details with relish. Burrell, in the true bravado of one who betrays, labelled his own effort a "tribute to their mother".

Rosa Monckton, another touted friend of the princess, tweeted that,

"Friend of Diana urges Channel 4 to scrap 'intrusive' documentary. If you agree with me, please write to Channel 4."[3]

To *The Guardian*, Monckton explained that the tapes did not belong to the public domain, featuring those silly confidences that Diana should never have parted with.

"It is a betrayal of her privacy and of the family's privacy."

The material is hardly incendiary, but accords with the worst tendencies of the pop-fluff market of reality television. (Diana, indeed, would have been a suitable pioneer in the cannibalising disgrace of a Big Brother Household.)

"He chatted me up - like a bad rash," notes Diana in describing her soon to be husband, Prince Charles - "he was all over me."



Prince Charles speaking at the 2015 United Nation Climate Change Conference - COP21

(Paris, Le Bourget) (Source:  
[Wikimedia Commons](#))

Charles had just lost his great uncle, Lord Louis Mountbatten, a high calibre casualty of the IRA. The prince needed companionship, comforting. The emotional raw spot drew sympathy from the Diana, but she had played a false stroke. Charles, sensing a chance “leapt upon me and started kissing me and everything”. How delightful.

The romps and travails of the House of Windsor have become the tabloid link via the people and the monarchy, a trashy reminder that flawed relationships transcend the straightjacket (apt, that) of class. This is vulgarity in its true meaning: the common, the vernacular, the dirt earthy. We can call be dysfunctional together.

For a country like Australia, whose head of state remains the Queen, interest piqued by such revelations remains. Anniversary issues are being released for readers of *The Herald* and *The Courier Mail*, if they indeed deserve the name, as issues to keep. Get your copy now! Expect, however, little by way of substance, critique or self-awareness.

The Cult of Diana may have been subjected to a more trenchant analysis in recent years, leaving aside the conspiracy pedlars at *The Express* who have blamed everybody from the French to aliens for her demise. But in an age of Trump, a revival is being prodded and fanned. As former royal spokesman Dickie Arbiter explained to the BBC’s Victoria Derbyshire, Channel 4 was “laughing all the way to the bank.”[4]

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Notes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/aug/13/britishidentity.monarchy>

[2] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4747468/Diana-s-ex-butler-Paul-Burrell-condemns-Channel-4.html>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/30/friend-of-diana-urges-channel-4-to-scrap-intrusive-documentary>

[4] <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40774810>

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