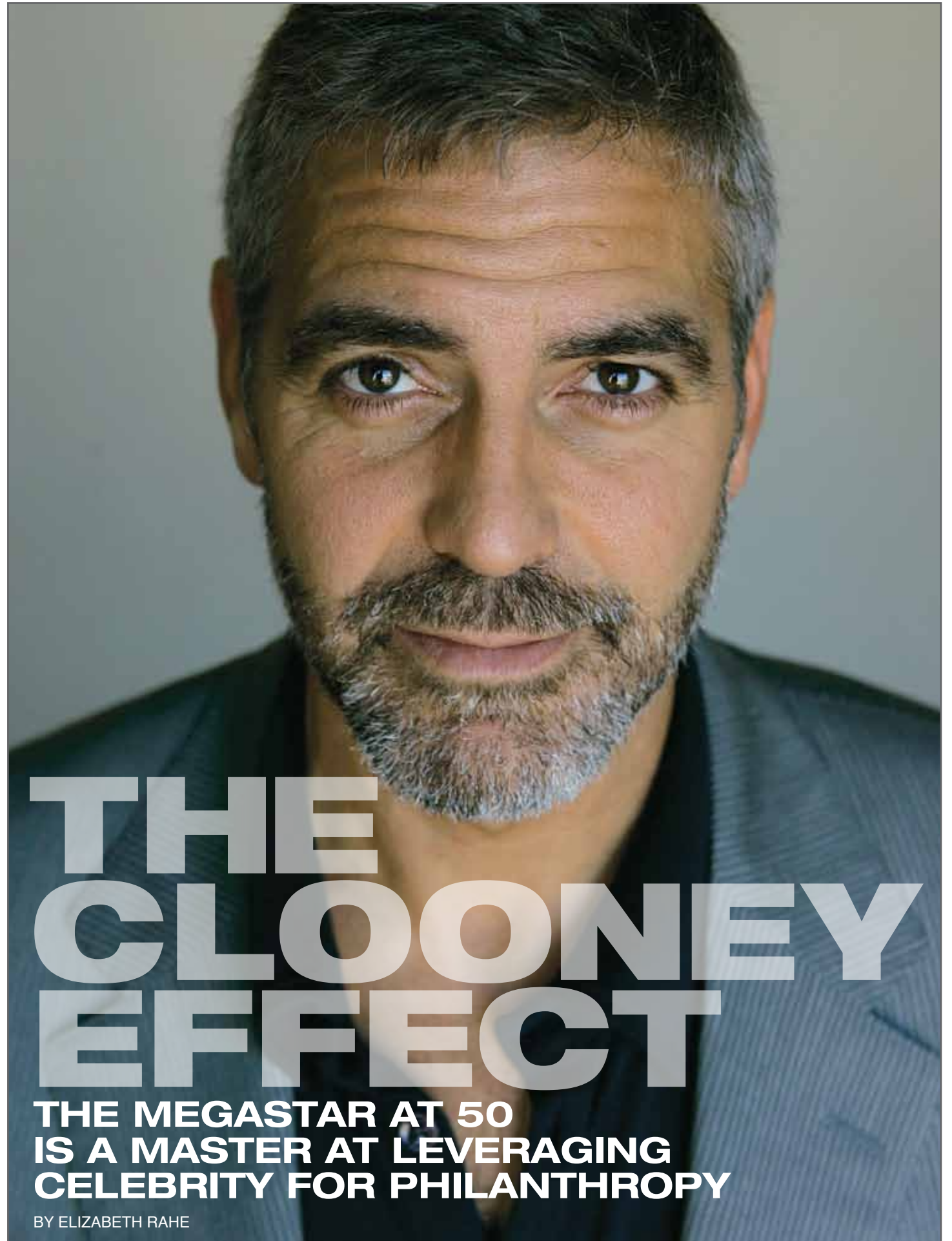


CAROLYN KASTER



# THE CLOONEY EFFECT

**THE MEGASTAR AT 50 IS A MASTER AT LEVERAGING CELEBRITY FOR PHILANTHROPY**

BY ELIZABETH RAHE

**Earthquake in Haiti.** Atrocities in Darfur. Child sex trafficking in America. Homeless basset hound in Miami.

What's the common denominator?

George Clooney.

Or in the case of the hound, just Clooney. The 3- to 4-year old tri-colored basset advertised by Paws 4 You Rescue in Miami is now in his new home. Did his name – likely selected by Miami-Dade Animal Services for its celebrity appeal – help attract his adoptive family? Maybe. It probably didn't hurt that Clooney has such an adorable mug – the dog, that is, but his namesake as well, needless to say.

The name George Clooney certainly represents a captivating brand, and it draws attention wherever it turns up. Clooney's career in television and movies has spanned more than three decades – remember his mullet-haired handyman on *Facts of Life?* – and earned him four Academy Award nominations and an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor (*Syriana*, 2006). He often chooses projects that appeal to his left-leaning sensibilities, such as his current film, *The Ides of March*, a story about dirty politics on the presidential campaign trail. He exercises his many talents in his films – he has writer, director, producer and starring credits on *Ides*, due out in October.

Cameras follow his every move, as when he was photographed clubbing with some South Beach beauties in 2009 during the Miami shooting of *Up in the Air*. Clooney, who celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday on May 6, takes full advantage of that attention to shed the reflected light on causes he champions.

Granted, philanthropy is a component of any celebrity's public image strategy, but Clooney consistently has gone beyond shelling out money and providing photo ops. The international star who seems to have it all – looks, brains, talent, humor, charm, money, influence, gorgeous Italian girlfriend and stunning Italian villa – also has put his own boots on the ground in his attempts to make a difference.

Sometimes he lends his name – and the clout it carries – to a project, as he did for *The Playground*, a film that examines childhood sex trafficking in the United States. Other times he uses it to enlist fellow celebrities to join him in a cause, such as the star-studded telethons he helped organize for victims of the Sept. 11 attack, the South Asia tsunami and the Haiti earthquake.

And then there's the refugee crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan, in which his commitment arguably crosses into the realm of crusade. He has been named to *Time* magazine's list of the World's Most Influential People several times, and he's on the ballot this year for his work advocating for the people of Darfur and Southern Sudan. His efforts have earned him the designation of United Nations Messenger of Peace – as well as a couple of bouts of malaria.

He clearly understands his role as beacon: "Our job is trying to keep this on the front burner of the news," Clooney told the Associated Press regarding the issues in Sudan. "I'm the son of a newsman. I understand how hard it is to keep stories on the front of news, and sometimes entertainment and news can be meshed together if you do it properly."

George Clooney won an Academy Award for his role as CIA Agent Bob Barnes in *Syriana*, a 2005 geopolitical thriller about the influence of the oil industry. He also was executive producer of the film.



WARNER BROS.

SAUL McSWEEN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES MARK DAVIS



## HARNESSING THE COOL FACTOR

**Miami writer and budding activist** Serena Dyer says George Clooney's executive production credit on *The Playground* helped attract 50 donors – at \$500 each – to a January benefit she hosted for the Nest Foundation, dedicated to raising awareness about the commercial sexual exploitation of American children via the film and an educational campaign. The topic is a tough sell, she says. "But when people hear that George Clooney is involved in the project, they think it's a little more cool...and they take it more seriously." Dyer knows a thing or two about the power of name recognition. Her father is motivational author Dr. Wayne Dyer, who spoke at the sold-out event.

*Playground* filmmaker Libby Spears has no doubt about the Clooney Effect. When she was seeking support for her project, a series of connections led her to Clooney and his producing partner, Grant Heslov. "At first I thought, no way. This was prior to George Clooney's incredible work in Darfur, and since he didn't have children, I didn't know if it was something he would respond to," Spears says from her Los Angeles office. However, Clooney and Heslov signed on as executive producers of the documentary, which helped give the project credibility as she sought financial support. ("Our very first check came from Stone Gossard [of Pearl Jam]," she adds. "The project never would have made it off the ground without this initial seed money.")

The Clooney association continues to draw people to screenings, says Spears, who plans a 13-city tour with the film and education program this fall, including a stop in Miami. "There have been countless occasions in which young men have approached me after seeing the film and said they would never have come if Clooney's name wasn't on it – though they have always been grateful that they did."

Clooney, above, talks with Mark Wahlberg and Jack Nicholson at the Hope for Haiti Now telethon on Jan. 22, 2010, which Clooney helped organize. Below, the Academy Award-winning actor is joined by his father, Nick Clooney, at a rally for Darfur on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., April 30, 2006.





## SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT ON DARFUR

Say the word **Darfur** and, for many, George Clooney springs to mind, although he is not the only celebrity to take up the cause. The region in northwest Sudan has been wracked by government-backed ethnic violence, civil war and massive refugee displacement since 2003. Clooney made his first trip to Sudan and Chad in 2006 to visit refugee camps with his father, former news anchorman Nick Clooney, and produced the TV documentary *A Journey to Darfur*, to draw attention to the situation.

In 2007 Clooney, along with *Ocean's Thirteen* cohorts Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Don Cheadle and Jerry Weintraub and human rights attorney David Pressman, formed the Not on Our Watch Project. Clooney has said they initially created the organization to raise money for humanitarian aid for Darfur at the Cannes International Film Festival, but its purpose has since expanded to support efforts aimed at ending mass atrocities. Pressman now serves as the first-ever Director for War Crimes and Atrocities on the National Security Council at the White House. Cheadle has co-authored two books on Darfur, and he and Clooney received the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates' Peace Summit Award in 2007 for their work on behalf of the people of Darfur.

Clooney also has remained deeply engaged in the cause, meeting with top-level government leaders, including President Barack Obama, the United Nations Security Council and senior officials from Egypt and China, Sudan's largest trading partners. He has worked with activist John Prendergast, co-founder of the non-profit Enough Project, subtitled "the project to end genocide and crimes against humanity." The two have appeared in dusty Darfur refugee camps, before Congress and on college campuses, and they have written multiple opinion articles together.

Clooney, who had been named United Nations Messenger of Peace, listens to a question from the media about his recent trip to Darfur at United Nations headquarters on Jan. 31, 2008.

## Brief history of the Darfur conflict

Although Sudan has a long history of territorial strife, the modern conflict in the northwest region of Darfur began in 2003. Rebel groups claiming economic inequity and marginalization launched a rebellion against the Sudanese government. According to the United Nations and human rights groups, the government responded by using military force and arming largely Arab nomadic tribesmen, who had been struggling due to the growing desertification of the region, to put down the rebellion. Called the Janjaweed, their methods have included killing civilians, raping women and destroying villages inhabited by tribal farmers, who are largely non-Arab. (Both factions are Muslim.)

In 2004 Secretary of State Colin Powell used the word genocide to describe the crisis. In March 2009 the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. Al-Bashir denied the charges and told the ICC – which Sudan does not recognize – to "eat" the warrant. In July 2010 the court ruled there was sufficient evidence for charges of genocide and issued a second warrant listing three counts of genocide.

Concurrent with the Darfur struggle, there has been an ongoing conflict between Sudan's more developed north and the oil- and mineral-rich south. In January the south voted to secede from the north on July 9. Various factions have made shaky peace agreements, but the situation remains volatile. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees office estimates that as of Jan. 2011, more than 4 million Sudanese are classified as refugees or internally displaced persons.

AP PHOTO/SETH WENIG

SHARON FARMER/WHITE HOUSE/MCT



AP PHOTO/KEVORK DJANSEZIAN



*Ocean's Thirteen* co-stars Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon and Don Cheadle brought celebrity power to the formation of the non-profit Not on Our Watch Project. Clooney has met with world leaders seeking an end to the violence in Darfur, including Vice President Joe Biden, seen here on Feb. 23, 2009, at the White House.

Prendergast, too, knows how to take advantage of the star's media magnetism.

Clooney also served as the narrator and co-executive producer of *Sand and Sorrow* and appeared in *Darfur Now*, both 2007 documentaries about the conflict. It was seeing *Darfur Now* that prompted Marc Furmanski, a document imaging services salesman from Aventura, to co-found the Miami chapter of Save Darfur Now in 2009. He says the group has raised nearly \$400,000 for non-profit organizations providing relief in the region. Although Furmanski had lived in the capital city, Khartoum, as a child and was evacuated with his parents when Omar al-Bashir came to power in 1989, he was not aware of the

atrocities until he saw the film in late 2008.

"No one spoke about Darfur, even in school. After I saw the film, I couldn't speak for an hour," he says, adding that he and artist Diani Safdeye of Miami started the organization a month later.

## FOCUSING AN UNBLINKING EYE ON SUDAN

Despite increased awareness and eight years of effort, the situation in Darfur remains dire. Last September Clooney told Britain's *The Sun*, "I've been honored to be able to lend my celebrity to help wherever I can, especially on behalf of the United Nations. But in the case of Darfur, it's been the greatest failure of my life."

In January, Southern Sudan voted to secede from Northern Sudan, with the split set for July 9. Clooney undertook an advocacy campaign last fall, meeting with Obama and foreign policy officials and keeping media attention on the situation. Although the election process was peaceful, the atmosphere is volatile. Violence between Sudanese

government and rebel factions continues to drive residents from their villages, according to a March report from a United Nations expert. Conditions in the camps, estimated to contain more than 4 million people, could reach “catastrophic levels” without immediate action to address issues of justice and accountability, the report stated.

The latest idea attributed to Clooney – using satellite imagery to monitor the situation in Sudan – is intended to address accountability. The Satellite Sentinel Project ([www.satsentinel.org](http://www.satsentinel.org)) debuted Dec. 30 with \$750,000 in seed funds from Not on Our Watch. Although satellite monitoring is nothing new, Clooney’s involvement has once again focused attention on Sudan. According to the project website, imagery analysis since late February has shown the destruction of several villages and the movement of troops in Abyei, an oil-producing area near the border of North and South Sudan.

The project takes a page from Clooney’s own experience with the glare of the media spotlight.

“We are the anti-genocide paparazzi,” he told *Time* magazine. “We want them to enjoy the level of celebrity attention that I usually get. If you know your actions are going to be covered, you tend to behave much differently than when you operate in a vacuum.”

Although the monitoring program has been praised by some analysts, critics have charged that the images are too imprecise and that misinterpretations could make the situation worse.

Clooney responded strongly to the criticism in a January interview for Canada’s *The Globe and Mail*. “I’m sick of it. If your cynicism means you stand on the sidelines and throw stones, I’m fine, I can take it. I could give a damn what you think. We’re trying to save some lives. If you’re cynical enough not to understand that, then get off your ass and do something. If you’re angry at me, go do it yourself. Find another cause – I don’t care. We’re working, and we’re going forward.”

He made his fourth trip to the region in January to support Southern Sudan’s independence vote, and he experienced his second bout with malaria. Asked by CNN host Piers Morgan about the illness and, in the same breath, the glory of being George Clooney, he responded with typical self-referential humor: “Even with malaria, it’s just good fun.”

One could almost see the glint of a tiny starburst on his perfect white teeth.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Miami Help Darfur

is a chapter of Help Darfur Now, dedicated to assisting the victims in Darfur by raising public awareness of the atrocities in the region and providing financial aid to the refugees. Facebook: Miami Help Darfur, [miamihelpdarfurnow@gmail.com](mailto:miamihelpdarfurnow@gmail.com), [www.helpdarfurnow.org](http://www.helpdarfurnow.org).

### Nest Foundation

works to raise public awareness of the commercial sexual exploitation of American children through the documentary film, *The Playground*, and an educational campaign. [sdyer@nestfoundation.org](mailto:sdyer@nestfoundation.org), 323-461-3662, [www.playgroundproject.com](http://www.playgroundproject.com).

### Not On Our Watch

is committed to international advocacy and humanitarian assistance, developing advocacy campaigns that bring global attention to international crises and give voice to their victims. [www.notonourwatchproject.org](http://www.notonourwatchproject.org).

### Paws 4 You Rescue

works to save animals from euthanasia at Miami-Dade Animal Services. 786-242-RESQ (7377), [www.paws4you.org](http://www.paws4you.org).



Clooney meets with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul-Gheit in Cairo, Egypt, on Dec. 13, 2006, to lobby for the protection of victims in the Darfur conflict.